Everybody Can Serve

Keeping the spirit of Dr. King alive all year round

The Donor Honor Roll

Winter 2018
The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration Steering Committee and the University of South Carolina Aiken Inclusion Advisory Committee recognized the winners of the poster and written essay contests at the fifth-annual Community Celebration in January (see page 8 for more on the celebration).

Kindergarten through fifth grade students in Aiken County participated in the creative visual poster contest. Their original designs had to represent what the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., holiday means to them.

**ON THE COVER:** the artwork of Takiyah Anthony who attends Mosy Creek Elementary in North Augusta, SC.
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FROM THE EDITOR

USC Aiken has so many stories to tell. The challenge is deciding which ones to tell and when. Part of my responsibility as editor of USC Aiken magazine is looking for a theme — a common thread that runs through the various features.

Another responsibility is managing the University’s resources responsibly. We made an important decision to fold in our Donor Honor Roll with this issue of the magazine, rather than produce another major publication.

The central theme was nagging at me until I attended the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Celebration presented by the University with Aiken Technical College (page 8). The theme of the celebration came from Dr. King himself: “Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve.” It was during that special day, that I realized I had the theme for the magazine.

Nearly every story in this issue celebrates the many ways we can and do give — to our University community, our families, the county and state, and beyond. The University is very grateful to our many generous donors who give so freely in support of our mission. We also want to acknowledge those who give generously of their time and talents.

The other inherent theme of this issue is diversity. USC Aiken values diversity by acknowledging that the differences between people is a valued asset.

Finally, I want to point out our feature story on siblings at USC Aiken (“A Family Affair” page 24). We’d like to begin to showcase legacy students on a regular basis, so if you attended USC Aiken and have a family member attending, we would love to hear from you.

James R. Raby

Please Welcome

Brittney Alls is leading the preparation of the University’s Five-year Strategic Plan, and co-chairing the Chancellor’s Task Force on Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging and reviewing campus contracts.

An Aiken native, Alls is a graduate of Florida State University and the University of Georgia School of Law. An accomplished lawyer, Alls also has extensive experience in secondary and higher education administration, conflict resolution and non-profit organizations serving youth and families.

Taifha Baker is the new assistant director of student life for diversity initiatives.

In this position, Baker will oversee the University’s diversity programs and coordinate the first-year mentoring program.

“My overarching goal is to foster a campus environment that is competent, respectful and inclusive of marginalized groups,” Baker said.

Originally from New York, Baker is a graduate of the Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, D.C.

Brittney Alls
Coordinator of Special Initiatives
Office of the Chancellor

Taifha Baker
Assistant Director of Student Life Diversity Initiatives
Simply the Best

USC Aiken once again earned recognition from *U.S. News and World Report* for its academic excellence and unparalleled service to veteran and military students.

For the 13th time, USC Aiken is the #1 Public Regional College in the South in the annual “America’s Best Colleges” guide. This marks USC Aiken’s 20th consecutive ranking among the top three in this category.

“I am thrilled to learn that once again USC Aiken is recognized nationally for our excellent academic programs, committed faculty and staff, small class sizes and dynamic educational experiences,” said Chancellor Jordan.

“There are 12 states included in the Southern region by U.S. News & World Report, and hundreds of universities compete for these rankings, so this achievement is significant.”

In addition, our Veteran and Military Student Success Center earned U.S. News and World Report’s #1 spot as the Best for Vets Regional College in the South. “Ensuring our veteran and military students continue to succeed in the pursuit of their educational and personal goals is one of our top priorities,” Jordan said.

“I am thankful for these students’ service, and I am proud of the commitment our faculty and staff have made to serve them by providing customized, personal and holistic support.”

Approximately 11 percent of the student body is made up of veterans or military students.

Pacers in the Heart of Downtown

USC Aiken officially opened its new office and meeting space in The Alley in downtown Aiken this fall as part of its annual Family Day activities.

The City of Aiken has leased the location to the USC Aiken, offering the University more exposure to downtown patrons and guests and giving downtown merchants more opportunities to interface with members of the campus community.

The University will utilize the new space (informally referred to as “Pacer Alley”) for classes, student and faculty meetings, special events, and as a gathering spot for members of the student body.

*At right: Chancellor Jordan, SGA President Jacob Yarborough, and Aiken City Councilman Reginald “Reggie” Ebner*
Generous Donors Help the Next Generation of Health Care Pros

PEO Scholarship

Nursing student Christian Little received a $3,000 scholarship from Aiken’s Chapter B of the P.E.O., a Philanthropic Educational Organization in December. PEO Chapter B has awarded 15 scholarships with a cumulative total of $30,000 to USC Aiken students over the past 10 years. The P.E.O. scholarship is a need-based grant given to a deserving non-traditional student and may be used for books, tuition, child care while in class or studying, or other school-related expenses. Little, a junior, plans to pursue a career in psychiatric mental health.

Simulation Labs Dedicated

The adult health simulation lab was dedicated in honor of Coach and Patty Abshire, who have made several generous gifts to help students achieve their educational goals. The nursing lab in their name simulates situations nursing students can expect to encounter in a real-world medical facility.

The women’s and children’s health lab was posthumously dedicated in memory of Dr. Harry and Hailare Inder. The Inders’ generosity has been invested in creating life-like scenarios involving women’s and children’s health-related issues. Before retiring and moving to Aiken, Dr. Inder was an OB/GYN.

Mended Hearts Gift

Dr. Thayer McGahee, dean of the SON, received a gift of $9,500 from Mended Hearts, Aiken Chapter 294, which will help fund the purchase of a Student Auscultation Manikin.

Mended Hearts has contributed approximately $80,000 to the university since 2004.
WES MOORE
Reaching Your Full Potential

The Best-selling Author, Decorated Army Combat Veteran and CEO of The Robin Hood Foundation returns to USC Aiken

Acclaimed author Wes Moore energizes audiences with his remarkable personal story of overcoming adversity through education, embracing personal responsibility and emerging as an inspirational leader.

The author of four books including the New York Times bestseller The Work: My Search for a Life that Matters, he is a contributor to the Huffington Post, The Times and NBC News. His moving life journey from wayward inner city youth to decorated veteran, Rhodes Scholar, White House fellow and business leader is the subject of his New York Times bestseller, The Other Wes Moore.

Through unforgettable storytelling, he inspires all of us to see solutions instead of problems, overcome challenges, reach higher, lift up others and find the power and purpose to achieve any goal.

Tuesday, February 27 at 6:30 p.m.
USC Aiken, The Etherredge Center
Admission is free and open to the public

471 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY
Don’t allow the "no factor" to deter you. Instead, turn "no’s" into the "know factor," encouraged Senator Mia McLeod on Sunday, Jan. 21 during the fifth annual Community Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration, presented by Aiken Technical College (ATC) and USC Aiken (USCA).

McLeod represents District 22 (Richland and Kershaw counties) in the South Carolina legislature and was the event’s keynote speaker.

Speaking to more than 800 gathered at the USC Aiken Convocation Center, she shared how she turned "no’s" and discouragement into “know’s” and motivation. She challenged the audience to do the same.

"Know that you are already enough… Dr. King already told us that all we need is a heart full of grace and a soul generated by love."

In addition to the "know factor," McLeod encouraged attendees to "empower yourself with knowledge" by reading everything they can, getting passionate about something, thinking outside the box, and becoming or seeking a mentor.

This year’s program included the inaugural Human & Civil Rights Champion Awards.

The champion awards were created to recognize those "who have made an impact on their campus or in the community, have strived to promote diversity, and are considered to be great role models," said Stephanie Franklin, chair of the event’s planning committee.

One student from Aiken Technical College and one from USC Aiken were honored along with a community member.

Victoria Shekastehband received the ATC Human & Civil Rights Champion Award.

“In a field that has only 4 percent female representation, this welding student has used it as an opportunity to encourage fellow female students to consider a technical career, and she serves as a role model for all in her program of study-regardless of gender,” stated Franklin, who presented the awards.

Shekastehbandt, who is the president of the ATC Student Chapter of the American Welding Society and the ATC Campus Ambassador, has many service interests including the repair of homes damaged
from age and storms in the Bahamas; assisting with food pantry activities with Area Churches Together Serving; assisting with caring for and the adoption of animals with the Friends of the Animal Shelter; and participating in Operation 5000, which included shopping for adopted families in need.

Travis Hardee was the recipient of the USC Aiken Human & Civil Rights Champion Award.

Hardee serves as the Student Government Association Senator for the University’s College of Humanities and has used his platform to serve others, noted Franklin.

"The nominator wrote: ‘His innate warmth and empathy for others, as well as his ability to make all people feel comfortable serves him well as a leader. He is mature beyond his years and is well respected by all on campus. I find him to be one of the most thoughtful student leaders I have ever worked with,’ she said before presenting the award to Hardee.

He encourages all students to have a voice and advocates for students to make sure their voices are heard. He actively engages students, the dean and faculty members within his college division to initiate conversations, inquire about needs and issues, and seeks ways to help identify solutions.

Hardee has also been very involved in the University’s diversity-related activities including diversity roundtable discussions that help increase awareness of diversity-related topics.

Attorney Everett Chandler, owner of Chandler Law Firm in Aiken, was honored as the community Human & Civil Rights Champion Award recipient.

His many activities include being a life member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. and undergraduate advisor for the chapter at USCA; silver life member of the NAACP; past president of the Royal Aikenites; and deacon and Bible Student Instructor at Calidonia Missionary Baptist Church in Monetta, SC.

Chandler also serves on the board of the USC Aiken Partnership Board, Helping Hands, American Red Cross, Aiken Barnwell Head Start Policy Council and the Black Historical Committee.

"His motto is ‘to whom much is given, much is required,’ and that is evident in the many community organizations and efforts he is involved in,” said Franklin.
Before DACA existed, she escaped deportation at 15. Now, USC Aiken alum tells how she did it.

By Bristow Marchant
This story first ran in The State on January 26, 2018. Reprinted with permission.

Griselda Lopez Negrete was a normal 15-year-old growing up in Aiken, until a trip with her aunt nearly changed her life.

A question from a stranger forced the Silver Bluff High School student to confront — for the first time — that she had been living in the United States without proper documentation. Griselda would spend the next four years fighting to avoid being sent back to Mexico, the country she doesn’t remember living in.

Earlier this month, the federal government shut down in part because of a fight over the legal status of young people in Griselda’s situation. Now, those young people are protected by the soon-to-expire Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals — or DACA — program. That program shields from being deported young people who were brought into the United States illegally as children, many so young that they never have known another country.

But Griselda’s story played out more than 10 years ago, when so-called “dreamers” first were entering the conversation about immigration in the United States.

Ten years later, Negrete Mendez, as Griselda now is known since her marriage, is a legal U.S. resident on the verge of giving birth to her second American child, still living and working in the only community she ever has called home.

All it took was the support of her friends and neighbors, some good legal work, an act of kindness from her U.S. citizen-uncle and an intervention from U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham.

And some good timing.

“What am I going to say?”

In 2004, Griselda’s aunt Rosa Negrete had a routine appointment at the immigration office in Charleston. To make the meeting easier, she asked her fluent English-speaking niece to come with her as a translator.

“They had background on her, obviously, but they started asking questions about me,” Negrete Mendez said. “And what am I going to say? I just told them I don’t have any legal status at that point.”

That admission got the then-teenaged Griselda detained for more questioning, then sent home with notification she would have to appear soon in immigration court.

“It’s not like I was in handcuffs or anything,” she said. “They just put me off in a little room. I was able to come right back (to Aiken), but (I had) it in mind that things were going to get very different.”

It was a shock to the young honors student, who never really had considered her legal status before. She had grown up in Aiken with her father, her late mother, siblings and extended family. She was successful and popular in school. She never had been asked her citizenship status before — she had not even applied for a learner’s permit to drive a car.

“The only thing that I knew was that I had family that would go back and forth (to Mexico) every year to visit, and I couldn’t do that,” she said. “But to try to figure that out at 13 or 14 years old, I couldn’t quite understand exactly why.

“I just kind of accepted it.”

“You wouldn’t know”

Negrete Mendez was born in a small village in the Mexican state of Michoacán. Not that she remembers it.

Her mother, Rosa Lopez, brought her to Aiken in 1990 when she was just 2 years old.

“She physically brought me across the border, carrying me and two of my sisters,” Negrete Mendez remembers, sitting in the kitchen of her rural Aiken County home.
“My biological dad was already here on a visa, and she just decided, ‘I’m going to go find him.’”

Aiken had attracted members of the Negrete family – along with other Mexican workers – for years.

Griselda’s grandfather came to work on an Aiken horse farm in the early 1980s. He made the Midlands sound so great to family members in Michoacán that Negrete Mendez’s father Javier and uncle Pedro soon followed, working as grooms in local stables by the time Javier’s young family followed.

The now 29-year-old Negrete Mendez still lives in horse country with her husband Joaquin Mendez and 2-year-old daughter Isabel. She has worked in the human resources department at Aiken Regional Medical Center since she graduated from USC Aiken with a business degree in 2010.

“If you meet her here, until she tells you her story, you wouldn’t know it,” said Carissa Smith, Negrete Mendez’s childhood friend.

“She’s just like an everyday citizen.”

A ‘private’ bill in the U.S. Congress

In 2004, however, Griselda and her family began waking up at the crack of dawn so they could be in Atlanta in time for a regular 9 a.m. court appearance every couple of months. Often taking up the entire day, the court appearances mainly were to check in with officials as the teenager’s case moved through the legal system.

“Every time I went, I was nervous because I knew this could be the day they said, ‘Nope, you gotta go,’ ” Negrete Mendez said. “There were several people there they would tell, ‘This is it. We’ll give you so many days to get your stuff together, and then you have to leave.’”

The regular visits were a disruption to her schooling as well as her relatives’ work schedules, but Griselda kept up her studies.

Smith, her high school classmate, remembers the two of them going to a student entrepreneurship conference in Texas.

“I’m sure it was on her mind, but I think it motivated her to prove her point of why she needed to be here,” Smith said.

The group Catholic Charities connected Griselda with Columbia immigration attorney Glenda Bunce. Bunce now admits she thought, “Griselda really didn’t have a case.”

But the teen’s story garnered media attention, and a national immigration group brought her to Washington, D.C., to lobby for the original DREAM Act.


Graham was so touched by her story that he introduced an unusual private bill saying the teen – and Griselda alone – was to be “considered to have been lawfully admitted to the United States for permanent residence.”

The measure passed the Senate but, ultimately, stalled in the U.S. House.

Nevertheless, the motion put a halt to the deportation proceeding against Griselda.

“It was really, really difficult to get that passed,” Bunce said. “But it threw a monkey wrench into the case.”

And the Negretes soon stopped making those early morning drives to Atlanta.

New family

But Griselda’s family still knew they needed a permanent solution.

“That was when my aunt and uncle stepped in and said, ‘You know, we need to have a backup plan,’ ” she recalled.

Pedro Negrete, Rosa’s husband, long ago had secured his U.S. citizenship. He realized he could protect his niece by legally adopting her before she turned 16 – though he gives credit for the idea to a family friend from the stables.

“He actually wanted to adopt her, but she would not qualify” in time because the adoption process would take too long with a stranger, said Pedro Negrete, now a landscaper in Aiken. “It would have to be a close relative.”

Griselda lived nearby and regularly saw her three cousins, so Pedro Negrete knew her life wouldn’t be changed by the adoption – unlike if she was sent back to Mexico.

“You go off to a place you don’t know,” he said. “It’s like if I go to Russia to visit or you go to Iraq. Even if you can get a good job, you don’t want to go.”

I’M NOT HERE TO TAKE ANYTHING AWAY FROM ANYONE, AND I DON’T THINK ANY OF THESE KIDS ON THE DACA PROGRAM ARE HERE TO TAKE ANYTHING AWAY FROM ANYONE. WE’RE HERE TO CREATE OUR OWN OPPORTUNITIES. WE’RE HERE TO HELP THE COUNTRY. THIS IS A GROUP OF KIDS WHO WANT TO DO WELL.

— Griselda Lopez Negrete Mendez
Pedro Negrete also remembered how hard it was for him to come to the United States three decades earlier.

“It took me three years to get over being homesick,” he said. “You just have to be tough for a while.

“You have to start your life over again.”

‘I got it’

After four years struggling with immigration authorities, Griselda traveled back to Mexico in 2008 for the first time as an adult to apply for a permanent green card at the massive U.S. consulate in Ciudad Juarez, the entry point for most Mexicans trying to get into the United States legally.

She came armed with a thorough waiver application prepared by Bunce, and ready to spend months there with her uncle-legal father as they awaited a final decision.

By then in college, “I had to sit down with my professors and kind of explain what was going on, and let them know, ‘I’m not 100 percent sure when I’m going to be back,’ ” she recalled.

But on her third day in the city, Griselda had a brief interview with an immigration official about her situation and, unexpectedly, was cleared for re-entry to the United States legally.

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“She went ahead and told me, ‘OK, you’re fine,’ ” Negrete Mendez said. “I was still thinking, ‘I have to come back tomorrow. I have to present my waiver,’ and she was like, ‘No, it’s fine. You can go ahead to the next line, and they’ll go ahead and give you your visa, and you’ll be able to get back.’ ”

Even Uncle Pedro was confused when she came out of the meeting waving her new visa, shouting “I got it!”

“It was like total stress completely off my shoulders,” she said. “It was the best feeling.”

American dream

Now an adult, Negrete Mendez is appreciative of the life she leads in the United States.

In Mexico, she doesn’t think she could have gone to college, bought a house or her own car, especially without the support of her family.

“Just having to go through the whole thing, kind of in the public eye, made it stressful and difficult, especially at such a young age,” she said. “But looking back on it, I wouldn’t have it any other way. I’m glad it went the way that it did.

“It definitely has made me a much more appreciative person, especially to be able to still be here in this country.”

In Aiken, Negrete Mendez has remained a visible member of a population that often remains invisible.

“She went ahead and told me, ‘OK, you’re fine,’ ” Negrete Mendez said. “I was still thinking, ‘I have to come back tomorrow. I have to present my waiver,’ and she was like, ‘No, it’s fine. You can go ahead to the next line, and they’ll go ahead and give you your visa, and you’ll be able to get back.’ ”

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she said. “We’re here to create our own opportunities. We’re here to help the country. This is a group of kids who want to do well.”

Looking at her life now, she’s especially thankful when she thinks about her daughter and other child on the way.

“They have so many more opportunities than even I had,” she said. “There will be a lot of things they don’t have to struggle through that my husband and I struggled through. When we got here, we couldn’t even speak English.

“But I will share my struggles with them because I want them to be appreciative of what this country has to offer them.”

The Deferred Action for Children Arrivals program allows immigrants to live, work and study in the U.S. if they entered the country illegally as children, have remained in the country and don’t have a criminal record.

800,000 U.S. residents who have DACA status nationwide

6,400 live in South Carolina

Key dates

June 15, 2012: Then-President Barack Obama announces the DACA program

Sept. 5, 2017: Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who reports to new President Donald Trump, says DACA will be rescinded within six months, barring action by Congress.

Jan. 20-22: The federal government briefly shuts down as a bill to pay for government operations is held up by Democrats who want a permanent DACA fix. Eventually, they vote with Republicans to reopen the government for three weeks as negotiations continue.

March 5: When the DACA program will end without a congressional fix.
Kelley Cornish ’89 (business administration) delivered the convocation address at the December 14 commencement. She currently serves as TD Bank’s Senior Vice President, Head of U.S. Diversity and Inclusion. In this role, Cornish works closely with the Diversity Leadership Team to define and enable TD Bank’s diversity strategy. She has more than 25 years of diversity and inclusion leadership and human resources experience. Prior to joining TD, Cornish led the Diversity and Inclusion initiative at AmeriHealth Caritas, where she shaped the vision and developed workforce initiatives programming.

She co-authored *It’s Work! How Will You Show Up?* with Myron Rolle. In it, she offers professional and personal tips to help ensure success in the workplace.

The USC Aiken alumna led the board of directors for the Philadelphia chapter of The Society of Human Resource Management and managed human resource strategic planning for the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia. She was recognized as a 2017 Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Award winner by Pierce College for the City of Philadelphia.

“From this moment on, pursue your passion, be resilient, and strive for meaning in all that you do” she told the degree candidates.

Chancellor Sandra Jordan encouraged the Pacers to continue to embody the university’s core values, particularly engaged citizenship.

"Knowledge is of little value unless you put it into practice for the benefit of the greater good. Your talents, knowledge and abilities can be beneficial not just to you but to your friends, family, colleagues, community — and in many cases, your country," Jordan said.

"I have absolutely no doubt that you will represent your alma mater well and your professors, your mentors and your colleagues here at USC Aiken will continue to follow your accomplishments with tremendous pride.”
I Know a Fine Way to Treat a Steinway*

*And as Irving Berlin’s lyrics suggest, USC Aiken is proud to provide a new home to a Steinway specially selected for the Etheredge Center.
For more than 160 years, Steinway & Sons have crafted impeccable instruments that manage to convey both style and substance.

In December, USC Aiken took receipt of a brand new Steinway 9’ D grand piano. The magnificent instrument settled into its new home on the Etheredge Center Main Stage and made its public debut at the annual Winter Nocturne concert on January 25.

“The arrival of the Main Stage Steinway is the first step in USC Aiken becoming an all-Steinway School,” said Judith Goodwin, Development Officer at USC Aiken who is heading up this campaign. Goodwin called Steinway pianos the “gold standard” and said becoming an all-Steinway campus would mean students would be instructed exclusively on Steinways from the practice room to the classroom to the stage.

“By becoming an all-Steinway school, USC Aiken will join an elite category to which few universities belong, enhancing our ability to recruit talented students and faculty,” Goodwin said. “Currently, there are only two schools in South Carolina (Converse and North Greenville University) classified as all-Steinway schools, and neither of them are state schools.”

She credits generous donors—including Winter Nocturne benefactor, Ben Cox—for making the Steinway effort possible.

“Thanks to the generosity of Ben Cox, Beth Newburn and several others, we have accomplished the hard part: raising more than $161,000 for the grand piano for the stage,” Goodwin said.

The university now lacks a little more than $100,000 to reach all-Steinway status. Through additional gifts, USC Aiken can achieve that status and lift the university above all others in the region and the system.

“With USC Aiken’s ‘donate-a-key’ fundraiser, parents and/or grandparents have a wonderful opportunity to honor their children and grandchildren who perhaps are piano students or even a student who is actively making music another way,” said
Newburn who co-chairs the USC Aiken Steinway Campaign with Cox.

That donate-a-key effort is known as the 88 Keys to Success Campaign. (usca. steinwayfund.com)

In November, Steinway artist, Edvinas Minkstimas, who performed for the 2014 Winter Nocturne, went to the Steinway factory in New York to help the University select the piano specifically for the Etheredge Center Main Stage. Minkstimas spent hours playing five Steinways before recommending one to the USC Aiken contingent.

“This beautiful instrument will benefit students of music, our community and all who enjoy live music through groups such as Masterworks Chorale, Joye in Aiken, Aiken Symphony Orchestra and Aiken Civic Orchestra, among others,” Goodwin said.

The Main Stage grand piano made its premiere during the 2018 Winter Nocturne on January 25. South African pianist Petronel Malan presented a program that began with a tribute to Wolfgang Mozart, whose birthday is celebrated January 27 — just two days after the piano’s debut.

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**Steinway Giving Levels**

- $75,000 and above Concerto
- $50,000 - $74,999 Sonata
- $25,000 - $49,999 Etude
- $10,000 - $24,999 Prelude
- $5,000 - $9,999 Fugue
- $2,000 - $4,999 Cadenza
- $1,000 - $1,999 Scherzo

**Piano Naming Opportunities**

- $25,000 Steinway Logo – Fallboard (naming opportunity claimed)
- $25,000 Steinway Logo – Side of Piano (naming opportunity claimed)
- $25,000 Piano Lid
- $25,000 Fallboard
- $15,000 Large Lid Prop
- $10,000 Small Lid Prop
- $10,000 Major Chord (each)
- $10,000 Major Scale (each)
- $10,000 Minor Chord (each)
- $10,000 Minor Scale (each)
- $10,000 Pedals (naming opportunity claimed)
- $5,000 Piano Leg (each)
- $5,000 Bench (naming opportunity claimed)
- $5,000 Music Desk
- $2,000 Intervals (each)
- $1,000 Keys (each)

Contact Judith Goodwin with questions about giving to this fund at 803-641-3417 or judithg@usca.edu
DID YOU KNOW?

1. There are 12,116 individual parts that make up a Steinway grand piano.
2. The action for just 1 key is made up of over 57 individual parts (so for 88 keys that’s ~4,500 parts).
3. There are over 1,600 Steinway Artists worldwide (about 800 in the U.S.). Steinway Artists are not paid to play a Steinway nor do they receive a free Steinway for personal use. Steinway Artists choose to perform on Steinway pianos.
4. The wood used to build Steinway pianos is dried and seasoned for approximately 2 years before ever being used to build a piano.
5. The Steinway Concert Grand Model D has the power and projection to be heard in a 2000-seat concert hall — without the aid of a microphone.
6. To date, Steinway & Sons has been granted over 125 patents.
7. The Steinway Model D Concert Grand piano (8’11”) weighs 990 lbs.
8. Over 300 Craftspeople work in the New York Factory producing around 1,000 grand pianos and 250 upright pianos per year.
9. Over 90% of the pianos produced in the New York factory are ebony.
10. The cast iron plate is often called the “backbone” of the piano; and indeed, it must be in order to withstand over 20 tons of string tension.
For 20 years, the University of South Carolina Aiken has boasted of a strong connection to the ancient Etruscan city of Orvieto, located in central Italy.

This spring, that bond will be celebrated with an exhibition from March 20 to April 26, in the Etherredge Center, featuring the works of Orvieto native Livio Valentini. Additionally, Valentini’s biography, Livio Orazio Valentini: An Artist’s Spiritual Odyssey, written by Chancellor Emeritus Dr. Robert Alexander and Professor Emeritus Dr. John Elliott will be released as part of the S.C. Humanities Festival, on campus, April 12-14. The carefully researched illustrated volume highlights the early years of Valentini’s life; his suffering in a concentration camp; his later residency at USC Aiken; and his lifelong search for spiritual freedom.

On a study tour in Orvieto in the 90’s, Elliott visited Valentini’s gallery on behalf of Partners in Friendship, a local non-profit with a mission of increasing cultural understanding and awareness. Soon after, USC Aiken and PIF, under the leadership of George Custodi, committed to co-sponsor the Maestro’s first U.S. exhibition. As a symbol of the newfound friendship, Valentini gifted his painting Odissea to the University.

“Valentini shared the noble vision of bridging cultures between the old and the new world,” said Alexander.

In 1999, Alexander initiated a three-year artist-in-residence program, during which the university commissioned Valentini to create La Principessa, honoring an aged live oak tree in Hopelands Gardens.

A year later, Alexander commissioned the artist to create a piece to explore “the Universe of the University.” The result was Galassia, which Valentini dedicated to the students of USC Aiken while paying tribute to the victims of 9/11 and all those who suffer the violence of war.

Initially, Galassia was to serve as the centerpiece for the new Convocation Center. During the construction and necessary redesign of the building, it became evident there would be no room for the huge painting. Therefore, Galassia has been on temporary display in the upper gallery of the Etherredge Center. Over the years, the location and condition of Galassia has been monitored closely and in order to safeguard its integrity. Moving it became a priority. On January 18, crews carefully relocated the masterpiece to the wall above the downstairs gallery in the Etherredge Center.

“This unique position allows it to be viewed from both above and below, visually connecting the upper and lower galleries and fulfilling the Maestro’s vision of a great spiritual entity suspended aloft,” stated Dr. Sandra Jordan, USC Aiken chancellor.

The view from the balcony will mirror the original design by Livio and the architectural firm GMK.

“We have always thought it could become a recognizable icon, celebrating the spirit of the liberal arts on our campus,” said Alexander.

Rediscovering Valentini
WRITTEN AND COMPiled BY MICHAEL ST. JOHN
Now, almost two decades later, Aiken will have an opportunity to rediscover Valentini during both a month-long exhibit featuring his works as well as the South Carolina Humanities Festival.

The Etheredge Center will display the largest collection of Valentini works since 1997 as part of the retrospective exhibit, curated by Dr. Jeremy Culler. It will showcase the University's Valentini collection as well as artwork privately owned by many of his Aiken patrons. A reception will follow where the biography can be purchased and signed by the authors. All proceeds will go toward the Valentini-Partners in Friendship Endowed Scholarship Fund for USC Aiken students.

Born in 1920, Valentini lived most of his life in Orvieto. With few financial resources, Valentini became a self-taught artist. At the age of 20, Valentini was drafted into military service during World War II. He was captured by the Germans and held initially at the Buchenwald concentration camp. The experience of hard labor and confinement had a profound impact on Valentini, which was later reflected in his works of art.

Several USC Aiken students have connected with Valentini by participating in archaeological digs in Orvieto and meeting some of his relatives. Additionally some have interned with Vetrya, an Orvieto-based global digital communications corporation.

“These unprecedented opportunities for students who have never traveled abroad began with the unique partnership the university fostered with this famous Italian artist,” said Alexander.
HIGHLIGHTS:

- Guided trolley tours and walking tours of historic Aiken
- Livio Orazio Valentini: “An Artist's Spiritual Odyssey” & special exhibition
- “Hammond and Simms: The Worst of Friends” presentation by the author
- Self-guided tours of some of the oldest churches in Aiken area
- Redcliffe Plantation tour
- “In Their Own Words: Aiken Area Veterans Remember World War II” presentation by the authors
- Poetry Readings
- Grant writing workshop
- “The Tree of Forgetfulness” presentation by the author
- “Edgewood: Stage of Southern History”
- Reception/open house at the Gregg-Graniteville Library Archives
- “Aiken in Fiction”

For more information visit: facebook.com/2018schf
Darlene Smalley retired at the end of the fall semester after 19 years of service to USC Aiken. Smalley began her career at the University as a teacher at the Ruth Patrick Science Education Center (RPSEC). Since 2005 she served as the program director of the Dupont Planetarium. She developed and taught many engaging science and math programs, including original planetarium programs for K-12 students, teachers and the public.

With her degree in geosciences, Smalley was the earth and space science expert at the RPSEC. She shared her passion for nature and science with all her students and enjoyed using models to help people visualize challenging concepts.

As the go-to contact for the Dupont Planetarium at the RPSEC, her duties included management of the daily operation of the planetarium, training and scheduling planetarium presenters, promoting the planetarium, facilitating astronomy-related special events, and maintaining planetarium equipment.

In 2013, Smalley was one of four classified employees at USC Aiken who received the Employee of the Year Award.

In August, Smalley’s video series about the Total Solar Eclipse of August 21, 2017, proved to be among our most popular posts on social media.

All of us at USC Aiken wish Darlene the very best as she embarks on the next chapter of her life.

Screen captures from Smalley’s video series about the Great American Solar Eclipse were an instant hit on social media. Her excitement and enthusiasm were infectious.
A League of their Own

USC Aiken's Esports (yes, you read that correctly, Esports) team hopes to compete in the Peach Belt Conference's first League of Legends championship, slated to take place in March.

The PBC and Riot Games, the creator of League of Legends, recently announced a partnership to establish the multi-player video game competition that the University hopes, will include a Pacer team. This unique effort marks a first for the NCAA, as the Peach Belt is the first NCAA conference to participate in the College League of Legends season.

The Peach Belt Conference began its Esports Championship program this academic year, with the pre-season taking place in the fall. Once the conference's initial effort was announced in the summer, USC Aiken's Office of Student Life started recruiting members for the Pacer team.

“We knew this was a unique opportunity for our students, many of whom have been playing League of Legends for a long time,” said team advisor Ross Philbeck.

During the pre-season last fall, five members of the USC Aiken team competed against other PBC member institutions and went 2-1.

“We finished strong in the pre-season and look forward to competing in the Peach Belt during the regular season,” Tyrus Carlton said. “We practice every day and hope to qualify for the inaugural Peach Belt championship.”

Carlton, a USC Aiken business major now in his junior year, has played video games for the past 15 years, and League of Legends for at least five. It’s reported that more than 100 million play the game each month. Riot representatives say it is the most-played PC video game in the world.

Currently, there are 10 students on the USC Aiken team, but only five compete at any given time during games. Match winners are determined by the best two out of three games. Each game may last 30 minutes to more than an hour. Carlton’s longest game was 70 minutes.

Pacers began gearing up during the winter break for the PBC’s first regular season competition, which began in January. At the end of the season, eight teams will advance to the Peach Belt League of Legends championship, an in-person tournament in March.

The College League of Legends Season is expected to have more than 300 teams competing in 2018. The Peach Belt Conference champion and runner-up will advance to the College Championship Play-In starting on April 9 where they will face the runners-up from the regional conference playoffs. Those teams will compete for four of eight spots in Riot’s League of Legends College Championship in Los Angeles in June. The other four spots in the finals will go to the regional playoff winners.
A Family Affair: Pacer Siblings
BY MEREDITH GRACE HAWCROFT

Many students proudly think of USC Aiken’s campus body as one big, happy family. The welcoming atmosphere of the University is touted as one of its greatest assets. For some students, however, this comparison is quite literal.

This is the case for freshmen twins Q’Ladrin and Q’May Qourters who made the decision to attend USC Aiken together. “We originally had plans to attend different colleges, but I knew I wouldn’t like the separation,” Q’May said. The sisters, who are both biology majors, are happy with their decision to choose Aiken.

For the Qourters twins, the best part about their college experience is sharing it with each other. Q’Ladrin said, “This is the first time in our lives that we are finishing each other’s sentences. Living together on campus and attending classes together has enhanced our bond. Our twin connection is undeniable.” The sisters have always had a close relationship but feel that college has brought them even closer. Q’Ladrin said, “Having a twin is like having a permanent best friend, but we’re also like parents. We make sure we each stay on track and do the best we can academically. This creates an incredibly strong support system.”

Q’May summarized her thoughts on sharing her college experience with her sister: “College is a place of new experiences. I’m so glad I get to experience every new thing with Q’Ladrin. I know that having the same college degree is something we will hold close to our hearts for the rest of our lives.”

This is a sentiment also shared by the Torres family. Attending USC Aiken has become a family tradition for them. Senior business administration major Cassie Torres is following in the footsteps of her two older siblings, Christen and Matt, who are both alumni of the university. Since Matt and Christen were both heavily involved on campus, Cassie says she felt pressure to uphold the “Torres legacy.” However, she did not let the reputation of her siblings overshadow her own college experience. Cassie said, “When I started to get involved with different organizations on campus that my siblings never touched, I developed my individuality. I think all three of us did a good job at being ourselves and allowing the plentiful opportunities USC Aiken has to offer to turn us into the leaders we are today.”

Cassie’s brother Matt, a 2011 graduate with a degree in exercise and sports science, was the first in the family to attend USC Aiken. He fell in love with the campus and wanted to share it with his sisters. Matt felt relieved when each of his sisters made the decision to carry on the legacy he began. Matt said,
“We as siblings are so close it just seemed fitting that it worked out like this.”

Christen Torres Rafanan, the middle Torres sibling and 2014 graduate from USC Aiken’s Communication Department, also acknowledges the uniting power of attending the same college as her siblings. Christen said, “We were already very close before college, but I think USC Aiken really has bonded us together in a way that may have been different had we not all three attended there.”

Christen said, “I think by all of us going to USC Aiken, and being involved in some of the same activities together I gained a very healthy respect for my siblings and their talents as adults. I was always trying to keep up with my brother, but whenever he would hear that I was trying something new at USC Aiken or had earned a new leadership position on campus, he was always one of the first to say how proud of me he was. That was just one of the many awesome things about going to the same school; we knew what those accomplishments meant to each other.”

Respect and growth have also characterized the relationship between the Curiel siblings since they started attending the University together. Since Rosario Curiel-Torres transferred to USC Aiken in 2014, she has felt at home in the Biology Department. Now as a senior, she feels increasingly connected to the University because she shares it with her younger brother Adán Curiel who is a freshman pre-vet, biology major, Rosario said. “Finding out that my little brother was going to attend USC Aiken was very exciting. I was overwhelmed with joy because I knew the start of him fulfilling his dreams and future at USC Aiken was going to give me the opportunity to be there for every step of his journey.”

Rosario considers her brother’s company on campus to be a blessing and said “Getting to watch him grow and become such a hardworking and smart young man is all I could ever ask for.” The small, everyday actions are what mean the most to Rosario. She said, “There have been multiple times where I have called Adán for help, and he dropped everything and came to my rescue, from lending me school supplies to walking me to my car late at night.

Rosario said, “Having Adán on campus has definitely enhanced my perception of it. I have been close to my classmates and some of my professors; they feel like my second family, but having my brother here is really the icing on the cake.”

For these three families, USC Aiken has been more than an educational institution; it is an extension of the home and a powerful bonding opportunity.
#18 Julia Forster  
Class of 2018  
Hometown: Long Island, NY  
Major: Nursing  
- President's List (2016)  
- Dean's List (2015)  
- Peach Belt Conference Presidential Honor Roll 2016, Gold Scholar*

#23 Emily Teelon  
Class of 2018  
Hometown: Aiken, SC  
Major: Nursing  
- President's List (2016)  
- Peach Belt Conference Presidential Honor Roll 2016, Gold Scholar*

Scholar Athletes  
Volleyball
#9 Lauren Howard
Class of 2018
Hometown: Aiken, SC
Major: Business Administration - Marketing
- Student Advisory Board President
- President, Beta Gamma Sigma
- President's List (2015)
- Stewart Entrepreneur Scholar, 2015
- Peach Belt Conference Presidential Honor Roll 2016, Gold Scholar*
- Member, National Honors Society of Leadership and Success

#8 Alicia Hines
Class of 2018
Hometown: Roswell, GA
Major: Sociology
- Chancellor Ambassador, 2017-18
- Dean's List (2015, 2016)
- President's List (2017)
- Peach Belt Conference Presidential Honor Roll 2016, Gold Scholar*
- Member, University Judicial Board
- Sociology Scholarship winner

*PBC Gold Scholars must maintain a grade point average between 3.75 and 4.0.
Jack Benjamin:
A LIFE IN THE THEATER
BY CHRIS QUIRK

The British theater critic Kenneth Tynan said that a novel is a static thing that one moves through, and that a play is a dynamic thing that moves past one. In this sense, theater does not just emulate life, it embodies the flow and vicissitudes of life more faithfully than its sister arts.

For his valedictory production at USC Aiken, theater professor Jack Benjamin chose to direct “Our Town,” a play stripped to the essentials of theater that, in its simplicity, reverberates poignantly with the rhythms of lived experience.

“Our Town,” featuring an expanded cast of students and alumni, was performed at the Etherredge Center in October. In June, Benjamin, who after 41 years of directing theater in colleges and universities — including more than 30 years at USC Aiken — will step down as head of the theater department.

Set in the early 1900s in a quaint, New Hampshire hamlet, “Our Town” is in the minds of many the quintessential American play. For Benjamin, the play is a perennial reminder of the importance of being aware of our gifts and of our lives. In the words of the Stage Manager character that narrates the play, “We all know that something is eternal. And it ain’t houses and it ain’t names, and it ain’t earth, and it ain’t even the stars ... There’s something way down deep that’s eternal about every human being.”

The play offered Benjamin an opportunity to present a world quite different from the current one, but a world that is for Benjamin, eminently worthy of our attention. “We are so busy as human beings now that we really don’t stop and look at each other. We don’t stop and talk to each other. The play is about life and everything that goes into life. It’s about how important that day-to-day communication and existence with other people is. And it really talks about small town America, and Aiken is small town America.”

“Our Town” is more innovative than it often gets credit for now. There is no scenery and the play opens with a bare stage. There’s little indication a play is about to take place until the Stage Manager comes on and speaks. “It’s an actor’s dream because it’s about them and them creating,” said Benjamin.

In a nod to the theme of community in the play, Benjamin invited past graduates of USC Aiken’s theater program to act in the production. “That was another reason I chose the play, to be able to invite current students and folks in the community as well as people I have been able to work with in the past to participate.” The play has a significant number of cast members in it, and several that are smaller roles that can be performed without extensive rehearsal, which were suitable for alumni traveling to Aiken for the show.

Benjamin was born and raised in the Washington,
D.C., area in the 1950s, and trips into town to see theater productions were a regular event. When he got involved in theatrical productions at school, he primarily worked backstage. The family moved to Dallas in 1966, and Benjamin’s interest in theater continued. He worked in musicals and dramatic productions, again remaining in the wings or the control booth. “I've never really been an actor,” Benjamin said. “I've done it just to make myself an honest director.”

After earning both his bachelor’s and master’s degree from East Texas State University in Commerce, Texas (now a branch of Texas A&M University), Benjamin began his teaching career at Brookhaven College in the Dallas County Community Colleges District, where he stayed for eight years. He also did professional theater productions on the side before coming to Aiken in 1986. “I thought I was going to enjoy working in professional theater until I did the same show for seven months, and you know, it became a job. When you work in education, you’re going to get to do more than one show a year.”

During his time at USC Aiken, the theater department has done 169 different productions, with Benjamin directing 63 of them. Benjamin’s selection of plays has tended, for reasons both practical and pedagogical, to the American theater and musicals from the breadbasket of the 20th century. “I’m a strong believer that today’s student needs to appreciate scripts that were written in the ‘30s or the ‘60s, simply because I think they are getting lost. It’s a kind of history, and I’m trying to keep those things alive as much as anything.”

On the practical side, performing a play by Shakespeare poses what can be daunting hurdles of language and technique for actors in the early stages in the development of their craft. “We will do Shakespeare here when we can do it well. We’re always aware of where our acting students are in their process. We recently did a Shakespeare production, but it was after we had a significant number of students who had gone through the three levels of acting as well as voice for theater and were ready to tackle it.”

But Benjamin has not shied from difficult or controversial productions over the years. In 2003, he directed the Pulitzer Prize-winning “How I Learned to Drive,” by playwright Paula Vogel. “The play is about a teenaged girl who is sexually abused by her uncle, which the girl retells using the metaphor of how he taught her to drive a car,” said Dewey Scott-Wiley, associate professor of theater, and Benjamin’s colleague for more than 20 years. “It is a deeply moving play, and the way Jack staged it in the small theater was incredibly moving — I was just mesmerized. Jack has always been brave enough to do contemporary plays that start conversations about things, and he has encouraged me to do them as well.” Wes Chick’s “Hotline,” which Benjamin directed in 1992, was another edgy production, one that went to the regionals of the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival, the nation’s premier competition for collegiate theater productions.

As a teacher, Benjamin focuses on authenticity for his actors, a complete buy-in to the character to build a personality that is understood as honest by the audience. To do this, he works to eliminate frills and fripperies from performance — the kind of catchy surface effects that grab attention but often end up undermining the character’s integrity. “There are some actors that do things, what we call mechanically, and it just doesn’t work, in my opinion,” Benjamin said. “You have to feel it.”

Instead, Benjamin insists his actors do the homework, and inhabit their character from within, mining their own experience, intelligence and emotion to create their roles from the ground up. “That’s a little more Stanislavski than
maybe a lot of people believe,” Benjamin explained, referring to the Russian dramaturg who first created the system that ordained that actors should live their part in preparation and in performance. “We don’t watch a lot of videos or things like that because I’ve always worried that, with young actors, they would see other performances and then try and emulate them. That’s just creating somebody else’s work. You need to create your own. It’s fine to get some ideas, but you can’t allow that to drive you and your presentation.”

For Benjamin, a play is made meaningful to the audience in proportion to how successful the actors are in delivering their characters and, vitally, how they respond to each other on stage. “I tend to believe that theater is there to remind us, to show us, and to ask us questions,” Benjamin said. “We’re not here to preach. We’re here to ask you the questions and let you make the decisions. Theater and communication are just cause and effect. I say something to you, and you respond, and we keep going back and forth. Making that work in a scene means a lot of rehearsal time. Intense rehearsal time.”

One of the signal moments Benjamin recounts from “Our Town,” was when the young actor who played Emily clicked in her role during rehearsals. “It was a thrill to watch her experience that, to see her think ‘Oh, man, I understand this now.’ There is nothing better,” Benjamin said. The “eureka” moments are not limited to the stage. “When I would work with students on lighting designs or whatever, earlier in my career, and watch them figure things out, ‘Wow. You mean I can make a light do that and make an emotion, make the audience respond in that way just because of what I’m doing with lights?’ That’s just cool stuff. Yeah, you go through all the trials and tribulations and all the frustrations that they have, and all the times that they want to quit. Sometimes you hear, ‘Oh, my gosh, this is too hard, too much hard work. This is supposed to be fun.’ And then they realize, by putting that time in, that it does become fun. Then watching them experience an audience for the first time with that particular play, is really very cool.”

Miranda Spurgeon Lund ’01 recalled working with Benjamin in rehearsal. “He had his hand over his mouth in this pensive way, pacing back and forth in the audience. It was like you could see his brain working. Then his hand would shoot up and he’d shout ‘Stop! Stop! Stop! Stop!’ You’d have this feeling of ‘Oh gosh, we’ve got to get this right.’”

“Jack does not demand respect for person or a work, he commands it,” said Scott-Wiley. “He himself has such respect for the work and for the work that everyone in the theater is doing, and he treats them with respect. That is the gateway into encouraging others to take ownership of a play or a part. He is able to instill a sense of pride and a work ethic that college kids today don’t always walk in the door with.”

Benjamin’s methods and pedagogy are geared not just to educate, but to infuse the habits and lay the groundwork for a successful career in theater for his students. Creating a foundation in the fundamentals of technique and knowledge of the American canon has been Benjamin’s way of giving his students a better chance for a sustainable career in a highly competitive field. As a freshman, Casey Hendershot ’93 was new to theater and was cast as Dr. Gibbs by Benjamin in a previous production of “Our Town” at USC Aiken, a role he landed almost by accident. “I just came out to watch the auditions for extra credit and thought, ‘Hell, I could do that.’ So I went up and did a monologue, not thinking anything of it,” Hendershot recalled. “The next day my friends came up and started congratulating me on getting the part and I thought, ‘Uh-oh.’”

Over the next several years, Hendershot studied intensively with Benjamin. “Jack really grounded me in the basics and that made it easier for me to go into the real world and make a living in theater and film,” Hendershot has had a successful career, in part acting but also as a trusted assistant to Burt Reynolds, and, notably, as a stuntman. “Stunts are great, but I’m 47 and you can’t do them forever,” said the 6’6” Hendershot, who once executed a 25-foot blind fall out of a window. “I love acting and prefer it to stunts, and not just because it doesn’t hurt.”

Teaching directors presents a different set of challenges. Directors must excel at everything from logistics to psychology to make their vision manifest for the audience. Lund worked as co-director with Benjamin in her final semester on a production of “The Fantasticks.” “There are so many aspects of a play that people don’t often think about when watching a show: costumes and costume changes, light, sound, props, makeup, hair,” Lund said. “My notebook when I was directing
this play with Jack was four inches thick because I had layouts and drawings and all these other things. But Jack wasn’t like that. He had this thin little binder with the script and a few notes. It felt like he could see everything, and he was able to bring that incredible vision to the stage for his audience. I learned so much from him, and got a whole new respect for what it takes bring a play to fruition.”

Engendering trust is perhaps the most important aspect of educating directors, said Benjamin. “When you’re working with students who are learning to be directors, you have to help them understand that they can’t make all the choices for their actors. It’s like working with kids, you have to let them make mistakes, and let them learn from those mistakes, let them create within themselves. Don’t be a puppeteer.” The global outlook on the stage and production is equally critical. “Pay attention to what’s going on away from the focal point. Look at what’s happening on the other side of the stage, for instance. As audience members, we get bored and may look over on the stage right side while the guy on the stage left side is talking. What are they doing over there? Are they still on the play? Are they still in the world?”

Resilience is another useful trait in the theater business. Theater productions that complete a run without a lighting bank crashing down, a lead actor contracting a norovirus, or similar calamities are rare. “Any time there is a crisis Jack jumps in and gets things done,” said Scott-Wiley. “One time our tech director had emergency surgery on his appendix right before a show opened. Jack just put on jeans and sneakers and said ‘I guess we’ll be staying up really late tonight hanging lights because it’s Wednesday and we’ve sold tickets for Friday.’ He has created an atmosphere where we all just roll up our sleeves and help each other get things done, and that is a lovely thing to be a part of in university theater. I have colleagues in university theater departments around the country, and a lot of them do not have such a supportive and collaborative environment to work in.”

Over his four decades of teaching, Benjamin has accumulated numerous accolades. In 2002, he won the John F. Kennedy Center Medallion for his work in educational theater, and in 2004 he was given the Founders Award, the highest honor bestowed by the South Carolina Theatre Association. In 2006, Benjamin received the Suzanne Davis Memorial Award for Distinguished service from the Southeastern Theatre Conference, the largest professional theatre organization in the country, and a group he served for many years, including four terms as president.

One of the highlights of Benjamin’s career came in 2001, when his production of Kathy Doss’ short play “Clouds” was selected as the regional entry for the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival’s Ten-Minute Play Award. “I was as nervous as a cat,” Benjamin recalled. Having visited the Kennedy Center since his youth, it had a hallowed place in Benjamin’s heart. “I’ve walked those halls in the lobby area since the building was built. But to be able to go backstage, and to walk through all the various different theaters backstage, and all the places that the visiting public never gets to see, that was amazing to me. I’ll never, never forget it; it was just phenomenal,” he said.

“My career has been centered around educational theater and the enjoyment of it,” Benjamin continued. “Working in theaters has been like nothing you can imagine. It’s just so rewarding to watch students and I’ve been blessed in that opportunity to work with a lot of really amazingly talented individuals here. Being here in Aiken, well, it’s a very special University.”

In November, Benjamin was inducted into the South Carolina Theatre Hall of Fame at their annual convention held in the Etherredge Center and in academic buildings across the University campus.
Bruce H. and Betsy H. Stafford Endowment

BY MEREDITH GRACE HAWCROFT

Through the generosity of alumnae Karen Brown, the Bruce H. and Betsy H. Stafford Endowment was recently established to benefit the students in USC Aiken’s psychology master’s degree program. The endowment, which was created in honor of Brown’s parents, will provide student support in a myriad of ways, including scholarships, travel aid, new lab equipment and supplies, textbooks, and assistance with other program needs.

For Karen Brown, investing in the lives of students feels like a natural decision. Her family has a longstanding legacy in education, which is now memorialized through this gift to the University. Brown said, “As I was growing up, education was always stressed in our household. It was of upmost importance.” Her father Bruce grew up in a small town in western Nebraska where he attended a one-room schoolhouse before graduating and earning an electrical engineering degree from the University of Nebraska. He later earned his master’s degree as well and experienced the incredible opportunities that can be earned through higher education.

Brown’s mother, Betsy Stafford, was also committed to the educational sphere, serving as a schoolteacher for many years just as her mother before her had done. Brown said, “My mother was an excellent teacher. She continued to teach even after having children, which was still rare during that time. She was committed to making a difference.” Like her husband, Betsy Stafford also possesses a master’s degree. This is a fact that makes Karen Brown especially proud. “I saw how their advanced degrees were able to open doors in life, and I hope this endowment similarly helps open doors for the master’s students at USCA,” Brown said.

After Bruce Stafford passed away in 2017, Brown decided to make a gift to USCA in his memory and as a way to honor both of her parents, for whom the Bruce H. and Betsy H. Stafford Endowment is named. Brown discussed the idea of an endowment with her father before he passed away. She said, “He absolutely loved the idea and supported it completely. He would be proud that it came to fruition.” Brown’s mother is still living and is now ninety-five years old. Brown believes Betsy would be proud of what this endowment will be able to accomplish.

Brown said the decision to donate to education was clear from the start. She was specifically drawn to USCA’s Psychology Department after hearing about the research that her daughter Dr. Meredith Elzy was doing with master’s students in the department through her position as an associate professor of clinical psychology and as the chair of master’s theses. Brown said, “Meredith absolutely loves her job, especially doing research with her students. Through conversations with her, it became clear that there was a great need to help students reach their research goals through additional funding that might make their lives and research just a little bit easier.”

According to Brown, “The intention behind this endowment was to create more opportunities for the psychology students, so they can reach their fullest potential.”

This significant gift by Karen Brown and her family is indicative of why USC Aiken continues to be ranked #1 in its division. Thanks to the support of invested alumni as well as caring faculty and staff, USCA students have priceless opportunities to pursue their passion for research under the guidance of expert professors in their field, all from the comfort of a campus that focuses on creating individualized learning experiences. Through the Bruce H. and Betsy H. Stafford Endowment, the next generation of students in the psychology master’s program will have the chance to take advantage of such opportunities on their higher education journey.
CLASS NOTES:

1988
Jill Allison Shade (psychology) returned to Aiken after 28 years. She has worked in social services in one capacity or another throughout her career and was hired as resident service coordinator for Windham House, a facility for independent seniors, in May 2017. “I am enjoying being back in Aiken and starting this new chapter of my life,” Shade said.

1994
Tammy (Ott) Alt (psychology) was promoted to Director of College Counseling at Greensboro Day School in Greensboro, NC.

Scott Saul (business administration -- finance) is now the Director of Sales at Disston Tools

2000
Bettie Williams (English and communication) is employed as a Project Coordinator at Augusta University where she manages large-scale projects and serves as Chief of Staff to the Vice President for Academic Planning and Strategic Initiatives. Williams is currently working towards her Master in Public Administration Degree and plans one day to be Chief of Staff to a university president. In her spare time, she is an award-winning romance novelist who has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Her first published novel, The Rake’s Tale, came out last year. She has been a member of the South Carolina Writers’ Association since 2010 and served as President of the Aiken Chapter for three years. She is also a member of the Project Management Institute.

2007
Devon (Eschman) Andrews completed the graduate program in Library and Information Science at USC, earning her MLIS in 2008. Devon is currently the Children’s Services Manager at the Hurd/St. Andrews Library, part of the Charleston County Public Library system. Her favorite part of her job is singing and dancing with toddlers. She and her husband Michael welcomed their first child around Thanksgiving.

They have lived in Charleston since 2010 and are currently the proud owners of two very curious beagles.

2010
Mrs. Ashley (Boatwright) Fort (early childhood education), a teacher at Lexington County School District Three, was selected as one of 52 PBS Digital Innovators. Over the next year, Fort will be among a prestigious group of top educators who will work with each other, with PBS, and with local PBS stations to grow professionally and share ideas for creating change in America’s classrooms. The PBS Digital Innovator program is a professional development opportunity for highly engaged, PreK-12 educators who will work with each other, with PBS, and with local PBS stations to grow professionally and share ideas for creating change in America’s classrooms. The PBS Digital Innovator program is a professional development opportunity for highly engaged, PreK-12 educators who will work with each other, with PBS, and with local PBS stations to grow professionally and share ideas for creating change in America’s classrooms.

George Lock (English) has earned several Cyber Security certifications and is working on the EC Council’s Certified Ethical Hacker certification. He currently works at Citrix in Raleigh, NC providing technical support for a CRM and project management program called Podio and a cloud storage program called ShareFile. Lock says that his degree in English has been invaluable when it comes to explaining technical details and instructions to customers in a way that makes it easy for them to understand. Lock says, “In April 2016 I got married in Jamaica to an amazing woman. We spend our free time going to various concerts and plays, enjoying many of the local restaurants and breweries, and walking our Weimaraner, with a concentration in Instructional Technology and Digital Learning from Liberty University. She is a Common Sense Education Ambassador and EdTech Mentor, a Seesaw Ambassador, and an Osmo Ambassador. Additionally, at Lexington School District Three, she is a Technology Teacher Leader and STEAM Teacher Leader.
Annabelle, through the numerous parks in the Raleigh-Durham area.

2012

Darius Adams (communication) is now a flight attendant and student pilot.

Samantha (Hodges) Houston, is the Food & Feed Safety Plan Reviewer and Outreach Liaison for the State of South Carolina Department of Agriculture in Columbia, SC. She was married to Jonathan Houston (2011, accounting) in May 2016.

2013

Kiamesha (Halsey) Caughman (business administration – accounting) was married on August 26, 2017 to Taji Caughman, a fellow USC Aiken Alumni. Taji graduated in May 2013 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Chemistry.

2015

Marissa Collins (business administration) has returned to her alma mater to take a position in the Alumni/Advancement Office.

Lindsey Jones (history) is the Assistant Softball Coach at Lenoir-Rhyne University.

Andrew Quirk, (history) interned with the Aiken County Government Risk Management Office and worked part-time with the USC Aiken Athletics Department. In March 2016, he was hired full-time as a paralegal with Connor & Connor, LLC, a law firm in Aiken that focuses on nursing home negligence cases. At Connor & Connor, Quirk used the research, writing, and communication skills he acquired as a history major to draft memos, court documents, and meeting summaries. In August 2016, he began his Masters Degree program in City and Regional Planning at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, specializing in Land Use and Environmental Planning. Quirk says, “I intend to bring together my interests in history, politics, and the environment with the business development skills I learned at Matson Consulting to learn how cities can continue to grow in ways that benefit businesses while also promoting conservation efforts.”

2016

Dylan Timmerman (history) began working full-time as a researcher and writer at the agricultural firm Matson Consulting, which grew out of an internship in his senior year. At Matson, Timmerman developed his business writing skills through working on grant applications, business plans, and feasibility studies for small farmers and other agricultural businesses. This fall he began a Masters Degree program in City and Regional Planning at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, specializing in Land Use and Environmental Planning. Timmerman says, “I intend to bring together my interests in history, politics, and the environment with the business development skills I learned at Matson Consulting to learn how cities can continue to grow in ways that benefit businesses while also promoting conservation efforts.”

2017

Brittani Danielle Gladden (early childhood education) accepted her first-year teaching position as a third grade teacher in the Lexington 1 school.

Faith Hornsby (nursing) is a Staff RN on the Hematology/Oncology unit at Augusta University Medical Center.

April Parnell (business administration-marketing) is a Client Support Specialist at ADP in Augusta.

D’Aundria Driver, (history) is an academic advisor for a Historically Black College and University in Atlanta.
USC Aiken gratefully acknowledges all gifts received by the University during Fiscal Year 2017 (July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017). Every attempt is made to accurately reflect your gift. If, however, you find an error, please report it to a member of the University Advancement team.
The Power of a Pacer

Now entering my sixth year as Chancellor of USC Aiken, I have met many students, faculty and staff, alumni, parents, and friends of the University. You have shared countless stories of how a USC Aiken education has changed not only a student’s life, but sometimes has transformed a whole family’s life.

That is the power of a USC Aiken education! Its impact is felt in Aiken County, in the state of South Carolina, across the U.S., and internationally. For the 13th time, U.S. News & World Report has ranked the #1 public regional university in the South! Our Veteran and Military Student Success program has garnered us five additional awards for the outstanding services and support to the veterans, military family members, and current service members in their educational and career pursuits.

It is my sincere privilege to share with you the 2016-2017 Honor Roll of Donors. This distinguished list includes donors who have given from July 1, 2016, to June 30, 2017. I want to personally thank everyone for their outpouring of support, and I hope this tradition of giving will continue.

The “Power of a Pacer” is evident through your generous support. Each and every gift given to USC Aiken secures the current and future mission of the University. I am proud to work alongside each of you in service to our students.

Sincerely,

Sandra J. Jordan
Chancellor
University Advancement
Giving Levels

Effective July 1, 2017

**Pacesetters ($1-$499):** Pacesetters are leaders and initiators. Pacesetter donors proudly give to our Pacer Nation so that others will follow in their footsteps.

**Penland Partners ($500-$999):** Penland Partners represent all the founders who gave willingly of their time, talent and treasure to our ever-growing University. Penland Partners give to continue the honor and tradition of USC Aiken’s forefathers.

**Pacer Spirit Society ($1,000 – $2,499):** Spirit Society donors promote the Pacer spirit embodied by the “Spirit” horse, which stands proudly at the front of campus.

**Stetson Society ($2,500 - $4,999):** All institutions have leaders who have been innovative and forward moving. The Stetson Society applauds those leaders whose shoulders we now stand on – making USC Aiken a more progressive University.

**Gregg-Graniteville Circle ($5,000 - $9,999):** Celebrating the legacy of The Gregg-Graniteville Company and its historic emphasis on education, this leadership society recognizes donors who support the advancement of higher education at USC Aiken.

**Banksia Founders Society ($10,000 - $24,999):** Commemorating the early graduates of USC Aiken, Banksia (now the Aiken County Historical Museum) Founders recognizes those who give at levels that significantly promote programs, facilities and/or scholarship.

**Chancellor’s Cabinet ($25,000 - $99,999):** The Chancellor’s Cabinet recognizes donors whose gifts build upon the University’s tradition of excellence and innovation.

**Pickens-Salley Circle ($100,000+):** This highest level of recognition, the Pickens-Salley Circle honors those donors whose generous gifts are transformative for USC Aiken, our students, faculty, and – by extension – our community.

**The 1961 Society ($1,961):** Reflecting the year of USC Aiken’s founding, this special society of donors understands the significance of USC Aiken’s origins and heritage. Gifts to the 1961 Society are unrestricted in their use.
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