The Next Generation of Farming

Young, sustainability-minded, tech-savvy college grads are finding “it” jobs in agriculture.
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.
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

18 COACH PENDERS ’94 (CLAS) ’98 MA
Baseball is in the blood of Huskies’ longtime coach — not just figuratively but also, one may argue, literally.
By Julie (Stagis) Bartucca ’10 (BUS, CLAS)

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A Connecticut startup company’s journey in the land of innovation. By Colin Poitras ’95 (CLAS)

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More and more, sustainability-minded, tech-savvy college graduates are finding “off” careers in agriculture. By Sheila Foran ’93 (BGS), ’96 Ph.D.

SECTIONS

1 UCONN NOW
Leaping over buildings (aka the sport known as parkour), building a better South Street Seaport; challenging the economy of charter schools; the toxicity of tattoos; why black bears prefer the suburbs; mac & cheese please; and more.

44 UCONN NATION
Alums give back together across the country; hosting ESPN’s “First Take”, designing and caring for America’s gardens (the Smithsonian); training Iraqis; Plus Class Notes, Tom’s Trivia, and more.

WEB EXCLUSIVES

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. uconn.edu/tattoos

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

FROM THE EDITOR:
Confession: I enjoy watching many sports and playing far fewer, but I must admit to some unattractive internal squirming 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 felt 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 relentlessness at finally being a deserving center of attention. Gabbby’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 poke-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 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 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 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 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 puke-bucket-to-triples-bucket ratio?

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UConn Magazine is produced three times a year (Spring, Summer, and Fall) by University Communications, University of Connecticut. Email: uconnmagazine@uconn.edu. Letters to the editor and other comments are welcome. Send address changes to The University of Connecticut Foundation, Records Department, Unit 3206, 2390 Alumni Drive, Storrs, CT 06269.
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 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 ——-

**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

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 (SPA)

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.

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**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 Wassell Hughes ’78. And I was a home court education major.

Linda LaFrance Garvey ’79 (ED)

Groton, Massachusetts

“Hey, I know that lady!” Baby-Q reading up on his memo in #uconnmagazine. Caitlin Oswald ’09 (ENG) /caitlin.owaid

**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

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**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.

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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.

“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 I-A football.” By senior year, he was head coach of the women’s ice hockey club team as it transitioned to Division I-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 I-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.”

After graduation, Schwartz landed a position with the Howard Hughes Corporation, a national real estate development company. Since August 2015, Schwartz has been senior vice president of Strategic Partnerships 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.”
On pot & peppers:
“...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 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 Tabatabai, Pat and Jim Calhoun Cardiology Center at UConn Health, Health News Digest, Feb. 9, 2017

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

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

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 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

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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 20 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 ThCy2Si2-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.
CHEMICALS AND HEALTH

“Everything is toxic,” says Grant, who loves hitting his students with surprising facts. “It’s not just that I’m annoyed when people bring up questions during the break or ask someone next to them — you have to consider that 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 their hand, they are likely to answer in class. “I’ve done some research, and several professors who support the idea that people are distracted by multitasking,” Grant believes there’s been a benefit in taking notes on a handheld, “because you cannot simply type every thing the instructor is saying — you have to summarize, which helps you learn. It’s been scientifically shown.”

That’s not just that I’m annoyed when students are paying attention to something else,” he says. “I’ve done some research, and several professors who support the idea that people are distracted by multitasking.” Grant believes there’s been a benefit in taking notes on a handheld, “because you cannot simply type every thing the instructor is saying — you have to summarize, which helps you learn. It’s been scientifically shown.”

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feedback from student focus groups, food data, on- and off-campus culinary trends, and his team factor in sales and meal planing process that is equal parts art and large campus community is a never-end-diverse palates and dietary needs of such a Coming up with dishes that appeal to the country in terms of meals served. 5.8 million meals in Storrs alone, making serve well over 200,000 meals a week. including eight cafés, a food court, a food halls and assorted campus food venues, amounts to a small city of about 30,000 services enjoys his job — and it’s a big one.ing Vegan Crab Cakes

In a windowless kitchen on the third floor UCOnn oversees the feeding of what students go through, including eight cafés, a food court, a food truck, and Chuck & Angie’s restaurant, serve well over 206,000 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-end- ing 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 pos-sible, 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. But crepes and Cubanos also made the list. The days of cafeteria menus featuring liver and onions, tuna casse-role, 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 Restau-rant 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).

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 contours of the honorable and brave, not diminish them.”

**UCONN’S TOP CHEF**

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

**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 Angie’s
5. Trumbull Smoked Turkey Sandwich, Dining Cafes
6. Crepe Station, North
7. Chicken Apple Chipotle Burgers, One Plate, Two Plates
8. Garlic Cheesy Pull-Apart Bread, The Boonery
9. Cuban Sandwich, Gelfenbien
10. “Not So Crabby” Vegan Crab Cakes, Putnam

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**MORE TO EXPLORE**

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

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**MORE TO EXPLORE**

For more of this story and a link to the source paper, go to s.uconn.edu/charter.
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. It was hard when I was learning by myself; finding a community helped me get more serious about it. 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!

Do you feel like UConn supported you in pursuing this?

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.

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.

This finance student from Trumbull, Connecticut, by way of India, lives his life in leaps and bounds.
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 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 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 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 students Marisa Kaplita and Macario Rodrigues pose “American Gothic” style at UConn’s Spring Valley Farm.

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.

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 your office attire for blue jeans, and Googling “how to start a farm,” you might want to have a talk with Jiff Martin and her colleagues at UConn Extension.

Finding land is one of the biggest hurdles is securing suitable farmland. For those wanting to grow vegetables, it’s difficult to find land not filled with rocks or overgrown 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 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.”
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 huddles 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 braving 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 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 Service with lettuce and herbs year-round. DeRosa, who had already decided to 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 Diversity, tell them what we were working on, find their strengths and weaknesses, and put them to work in the greenhouse. That was the most rewarding experience, ever.”

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.”

Laskos ’15 (BHSA) 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 Rattray’s Holsk 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.

It is not often that we think of 11-year-olds as having epiphanies, but that’s more or less what happened to Brandon, 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 EcoHouse, 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.”

As a younger 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 some day 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 got everything we needed for our family without benefit of electricity or anything remotely modern. It was simply wasteful. If you 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.”
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 new business — called Shoreline Biome — but also leads to a proposal for more research, a new funding, 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 $850 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 2022.

“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.
Weinstock not only agreed; he became enthused, had just arrived at JAX. They reached one of their customers at 454 Life Sciences, a fledgling bioscience company like Shoreline Biome. Driscoll and Jarvie remember the moment vividly as the expansion of UConn's 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 clearly early days when company “meetings” took place at a local Starbucks, their official address and warehouse was Driscoll’s shed, and they didn’t even have a lab. But they have a vision of what Shoreline Biome could be. They knew that what they were doing was the world’s foremost expertise 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 a lab at 454 Life Sciences 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 graduat-ed. 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 enterprises; and a $500,000 equity investment from the Connecticut Biosci-ence 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 business 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 incubator where CBIF members can discuss areas of interest, present results of the various state agencies and research departments at UConn that might be able to help them. “We channeled [former Secretary of De-velopment] 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 the unknown unknowns are and start to address them.”

Outside investors also are invited to visit with startups and learn about the startups. The fact that CBIF had other scientists and business professionals screen and support Shoreline Biome’s new tech-nology 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 Storrie Cell. “We need certain types of equipment to process our samples, and they have one of those up the hall,” Driscoll says. “If you 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 it 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 bacteria from a complex 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 culture to identify different bacteria strains. But many bacteria species are hard to grow in the lab, making identification difficult. Even when scientists can confirm the presence of a bacteria such as salmonella in a patient’s stool, UConn isn’t set up to diagnose and identify even a single spore floating around. You can set up a situation where you are likely to succeed by bringing in JAX, opening up a small lab and setting up funding. But to try to get permission to move forward, you need to have Tom and me, two scientists who are more definitive. They would say you have a hoseraw, a timberwolf, and a mouse. Or you can try to make your own luck.”

“Instead of going to Boston or New York they chose to stay in Connecticut, taking advantage of UConn’s CBIF and other innovation programs provided by the state to grow their company, create jobs, and benefit society,” says Analoui. “This provides crucial support to ventures at all stages of development, but it is especially important for startups, says Jeff Stearns, vice president for research at UConn and UConn Health. When asked if they still have those moments of doubt 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.”

“I 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. The company is doing very well. Monitors the milestones with smiles and a fat lump, then turn around and get back to work.
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, has convinced his patients to move with him. His goal? To cure a rare liver disease.

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 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.

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For more than a year after giving birth to her twin boys, Kathy Dahlberg waited for liver transplants that could save them.
Lily, 9, likes to tag along to appointments with Weinstein. “He’s her hero — he saved her sister,” says Gayle. The effects of low blood sugar until they are moments from a seizure, so Gayle stays close around the clock.

“Alyssa tested herself in class, gym, and while playing on the school’s athletic teams. But GSD patients don’t feel shaky or get headaches when their sugar drops — at least not like most people, GSD patients don’t feel it. Unlike most people, GSD patients don’t feel shaky or get headaches when their sugar drops — at least not like most people. Alyssa is 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 bloodstream 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 seizures 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 dying.

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. Alyssa’s parents overslept, they say.

Lily, 9, likes to tag along to appointments with Weinstein. “He’s her hero — he saved her sister,” says Gayle.
moments from having a seizure. “I sat 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 dusted out, Lily Temkin, 9, stood 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. “And then screaming,” recalls Gayle.

Alyssa’s pump had stopped working. The teen 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 die.”

“We’re doing everything right, and the pump regimen you’re on; it could be a bad malfunction,” says Weinstein.

“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,” says Weinstein.

Research = Hope

Weinstein had no intention of dedicating his life to curing GSD. As a young physician at Boston Children’s Hospital specializing in endocrinology 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,” says Weinstein. “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,” says Weinstein. “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.

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 Zacha, 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,’” 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 anywhere else.”

The bulk of Weinstein’s Florida team came to Connecticut with him. His team includes GSD patients and parents, including several who have come from the blue to tell him all they want 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. “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 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 12,” she says. “We’re almost there.”

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.
“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. “It’s warm, true Chicken clucked about New York Times Book Review positively: “It’s warm, true” and evocative” and Lara Vanyar called it “beautiful and tender.” Wally Lamb: “I 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, haunted by 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 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.A. 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 — you ended up making a living from writing. 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 Moominvi Girl, you write this of Kat, “She’s scared of changes... they’re almost never good. They start with this thinly veiled secret — a dismissal, a smile, a cryptic hint — only to explode in your face, breaking your life into bits, sealing 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 were no opportunities in other cities within Russia, so hardly anyone leaves the place where they were born. But I was just 10, my sister was hidden away. 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.

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 away. America, they were visible.

Q: After college, you worked a number of years doing writing classes at night at Cambridge Adult Education and then Grub Street [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 under the pressure is a super-time thing. I thought that maybe, if I got lucky, I could write part-time and do computer work part-time — 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 Bard. How was your experience? Litman: I got incredibly lucky! George Saunders became my thesis advisor, and he was generous with his time and 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 life 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 app- proached 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 choice. I wrote the bulk of the stories for The Last Chicken at Syracuse, and had the manuscript by the time I finished.

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 I 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 eventually got married. How was your impression of America? Why be nice? It’s not like you’ll go to a different store.

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

But of course, corruption set in after perestroika, and eventually that 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 immi grants, 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.
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
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 Baseball Tournament, played together on the Huskies’ 1965 College World Series team.

Penders’ earliest memory is, naturally, of baseball. He was 5 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 brother,” 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 bat boys, the Penders boys would quickly move onto Eagle Field and run around the base path while their father took down the teams.

As the Huskies began their first road trips as head coach. Preparing to play against Ohio State, a Top 25 team, Penders went up to the official lineup card. The runs would have to be accountable. 11 years later, when Penders returned to Storrs as a graduate assistant coach, he found that Penders had handed the umpire the batting order card to the umpire, and the game started.

Penders is a four-time American Athletic Conference title and 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. He also 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.

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 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, stepped up for a 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 as the Ohio State coach sat out to home plate and began to nail. “We got your back, Coach,” they called. “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 card by card in the dugout.”

Penders has turned such hard-won les-
sons into a coaching philosophy his stu-
dent-athletes know as ACE — Attention,
Concentration, 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 slugging 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 we 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 mem-
orable events, such as the one several
former Husky players recall taking place
in Florida during the Big East Conference
tournament. After winning the
Coach of the Year. As the team bus was
heading back to the hotel, the head coach
told the team that he had been given a pair
of socks to wear on the small bridge
they were crossing. He stood in the front
of the bus, holding up the trophy he had
won more games [48] than any other
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.

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

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

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

UCONN NATION    |    MAGAZINE.UCONN.EDU SUMMER 2017

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UConn Nation Gives Back

The first UConn Cares event kicked off this April, with alumni 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, alumni spent a day working on a small urban farm with Urbansead, 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.

CLAS Notes

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.

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 amateur golfer throughout his life, the Normandy invasion and Battle of the Bulge, was awarded posthumously. Both Pisk 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

Getullo P. Carvalho ’71 MA, ’76 PhD, 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 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.

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 set it aside 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 Dominican University.

Carol Milardo Floriani ’68 (NUR) reports that she has “currently—retired” in Kaysel, 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 writes.

Arno Zimmer ’68 (CLAS) of Bridgeport, Conn., has released Return to Parlor Clumsy to the sequel to his first 1950s mystery novel, The Parlor City Boys. The novel follows a master con artist on a scene of his earlier crimes. Zimmer also has written three children’s books and a business textbook.

Arthur Horwitz ’76 (CLAS) was selected in February as board chair of Detroit Public Television, the 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 professor for Wayne State University in Detroit.

Gregory S. Woodward ’77 (SFA) has been named the new president of the University of Hartford. He 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 61.5 miles in a 24-hour footrace called “24 Hours Around the Lake” in Wakefield, Mass.

Chris Gedney ’81 (ED) teaches at the Pennsylvania State University (ASP) after receiving a promotion and work from the University of Utah in May 2017. Gedney was the first woman’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

UConn Nation Notes
most of her career in conservation law enforcement. ❦ Susan Brillhart '84 (NUR), of Holokon, 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. ❦ Former Suzanne Bona ’85 (SFA) was the featured guest performer in a chamber music concert Oct. 15, 2016, at the University of Guam in Mangiolo. 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 Imae ’87 MA, chief 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 Buchtal 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, a youth orchestra and camera that plays throughout the region. The camera performed March 13, 2017, at Children’s as part of the National Youth Concert. ❦ John Thomas Marcoux ’89 (CAHNR) of Sudbury, Mass., a foot and ankle surgeon practicing as program director for pediatric medicine and surgery residency at St. Elizabeth’s Medical Center in Brighton, Mass., received the 2017 American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons’ Distinguish 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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The deadline for the Summer 2017 issue is September 1.

Don Langer ’90 (BUS), the CEO for the UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of Texas, has recently been elected to the board of directors of Special Olympics Texas. ❦ Enric T. Johnson ’84 (NUR), recently published a book, For Park Burger in Conservation Police Officer, which chronicles his career in conservation law enforcement. ❦ Danielle (Beil) Narowicz ’03 (BUS) routine was promoted to Group Vice President of Financial Planning at ManTech, the firm she has been with for more than 10 years. ❦ Rebecca J. Pinzollo-Holloway ’04 JD has been selected as a finalist in the ACFAS Annual Scientific Conference with the award at the ACFAS Annual Scientific Conference in Las Vegas in February 2017.

2016

$78.3M new endowed funds created
$29.6M Program Support
$16.1M Scholarships and Fellowships
$5.3M Faculty Support
$1.7M Research Support
$5.5M Capital Improvement Projects

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

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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 32,000 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 those 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)
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.

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 resumes 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 a 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.”

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 RugGED 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 “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’; Kurds, whom the Iraqis referred to as ‘devil worshippers’; and various other ethnic and religious groups, many of whom had a longstanding 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 Iraqi 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

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MICHAEL ZACCHEA

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

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

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

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

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).