

An impressionistic painting of a rural landscape. In the foreground on the left, a red barn with a dark roof and a small window is visible. The middle ground features rolling green hills. The background consists of soft, hazy mountains under a sky with visible brushstrokes in shades of blue, green, and white. The overall style is textured and expressive.

UConn

MAGAZINE

FALL 2019

The Shape of Storrs

Pg. 18

SNAP!

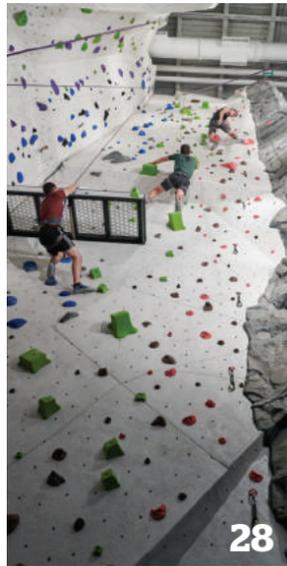
Huskies Come Home

At a press conference on June 27 in Madison Square Garden many Huskies got the news they'd been waiting for: UConn is back in the Big East. A founding member of the conference 40 years ago, UConn won 80 conference championships in its 34 years there. Rivalries renewed include Georgetown, Marquette, Providence College, Seton Hall, St. John's, and Villanova.





18



28



34



38

SECTIONS

FEATURES

1 UCONN NOW
The Class of 2023 by the numbers; a drug that could combat sickle cell; soccer in a new stadium; engineering a UConn undergraduate career; the Keet sisters return to Storrs; the UConn alum behind the Impossible Whopper; and more.

44 UCONN NATION
Alums who are restoring wooden ships, training women to run for political office, selling sneakers in the big leagues, designing mini golf courses, and finding the secret to minimizing stress. Plus Class Notes, Tom's Trivia, and more.

18 THE SHAPE OF STORRS
This geology professor believes that Storrs is Storrs and UConn is UConn because Horsebarn Hill is Horsebarn Hill. *By Robert Thorson*

24 I. AM. OUTRAGED.
Why fake news catches fire and spreads so quickly on social media. An excerpt from the newly published "Know-It-All Society." *By Michael Patrick Lynch*

28 IF YOU BUILD IT . . .
A peek inside the newly opened Student Rec Center. *By Lisa Stiepock*

34 THE WAIT IS OVER
Bongi Magubane '76 (CLAS) is determined to fix the Connecticut DMV. *By Rand Richards Cooper*

38 TINY
The Lilliputian Landscapes of Judy (Hall) Robinson-Cox '71 (SFA) shine a spotlight on small. *By Catherine Newman*



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Cover painting by Blanche Serban
Snap! photo by Peter Morenus
Table of Contents: Serban; Morenus (2); Judy (Hall) Robinson-Cox '71 (SFA)
From the Editor Peter Morenus
Tom's Trivia Bettman/Getty Images

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FROM THE EDITOR



“OUR STONEHENGE”

If you spend any time on Horsebarn Hill — and who doesn't? — you've likely seen our cover artist Blanche Serban. She is out there every day creating “a pictorial calendar” of 365 HBH paintings.

The plein air piece is vital to the project, says Serban. “Being outside, you get ideas, watching the light.” Like right now, she says, she is painting against the light. “The sun is exactly where it shouldn't be if you're playing by the rules. But it makes for an interesting subject this way.”

Serban came to the U.S. from Bucharest, Romania, in 1996 to get her graduate degree — in psychology — at Syracuse. That's where she met her husband Blair Johnson, now a UConn Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor of Psychology. He stuck with psychology and she turned her lifetime passion for painting into her profession. They have two daughters, the youngest of whom is a senior in high school. Typically, both mom and dad travel a lot to professional workshops and the like. But, says Serban, “I made the decision not to travel this year, until her graduation.” So the idea to paint Horsebarn Hill in person 365 days popped into her head.

There are a lot of things that attract her to this particular subject. One is “the sky. You really get to see the sky. It's like our Stonehenge. You get to see the sunrise and sunset and the eclipses.” She remembers bringing her kids here when they were little for solar and lunar eclipses. And exploring one place opens up possibilities for an artist, she says. “The constraint forces you to get out of a groove and see the same subject with new eyes, in a new light.” Will it get old? “No, I'm an artist. I can always see something new.”

So far Serban has painted lots of Hill landscapes, as well as a huge fox that wandered into the frame one morning (“at first I thought someone had left their golden retriever”), a couple walking the path, deer leaping through the valley (“so high they could have jumped over me”), even a selfie. “A couple of days ago I was in the new parking area at the Dairy Bar and I painted my reflection on a car.”

People see her out here and tell her they can't believe how much she paints. “This is nothing,” she tells me. “I do this and then I go home and do studio work for eight hours. It's a discipline that takes practice and work — like any other job.”

Lisa Stiepock



LETTERS

Greeks came out in full force to welcome UConn's newest president. We're talking, of course, about the nation and not the nation of fraternities. Many readers were captivated by Thomas Katsouleas's Greek origins and tales of summers spent swimming off those coasts. These days @PrezTomKat, as he's known on Twitter, can be found swimming laps at the just-opened Student Rec Center (see page 28 for more on that topic). And please:

Get in touch! Email me at lisa.stiepock@uconn.edu or post on our website at magazine.uconn.edu.

The Next Wave

➤ I received my masters in chemical engineering from UConn and we both are Greek citizens, so I look forward to meeting President Katsouleas. Juan Nicolaidis '75 MS, Judibana, Venezuela, South America, via e-mail and web

➤ Tell the new boss he's about an hour and a half away from Matunuck, Rhode Island, home of the best reef break on the East Coast. I'll keep an eye peeled for the guy with the upside-down Jonathan logo on his fin. Go Huskies! Lee Fontaine '88 MBA, Wakefield, R.I., via e-mail

100 and Counting

➤ It was great catching up with Col. Morton Katz in the summer issue. I joined the 411th Civil Affairs in June of 1962, after receiving my commission

through ROTC. Col. Katz was one of the best commanders I served under in my 27-plus years. May he have many more years! Alan Glaubinger '62 (BUS) Louisville, Kentucky, via e-mail

➤ Thank you Loretta for this great story of a truly great American! Mr. Katz is a genuine role model, particularly for our four sons, all of whom attended UConn — two are still there and our eldest is in medical school. Mike McGlone, Weston, Conn., via our website

Tom's Trivia

➤ I did not think the answer to # 3 could have been C (that in the late '50s UConn Storrs would be used as the state capital in the event of a nuclear attack). Although the Wilbur Cross Highway was in place in 1958, the Route 195 connector between Route 32

and (then) U.S. 44-A had not been built. The logistics alone of moving everything from Hartford to Storrs would have been quite an undertaking. Then again, strange schemes by our state government didn't start in the 21st century. I always look forward to the trivia questions even though (like most) I was only on campus for a few years. Keep 'em coming. Carl Robbins '72 (CLAS), Hamden, Conn., via our website

The Fortunate Ones?

➤ I belong to an organization called Friends of Pleasant Bay on Cape Cod, and we have sponsored research about, and harvesting of, horseshoe crabs. Although I have followed those studies, I learned a great deal from this article. Thanks for a great magazine. Roy Terwilliger '58 (MS), Harwich, Mass., via e-mail



INSTAGRAM



A team of UConn students traveled to Africa to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro this summer with Choose A Challenge USA after raising \$65,000 for Make-A-Wish CT 📷 @UConn



Were you one of almost 1,100 (!!) students to attend the annual Sunset Yoga on Horsebarn Hill event last week? 📷 @miltonlevin



Just moved in the second of-fish-al mascot of #UConnNation. Everyone, meet Charlie the Fish, our newest resident of Towers. 📷 @preztomkat

OFF CAMPUS

Forward Yamilee Eveillard '21 from Valley Stream, New York, sends the ball flying on the way to a 3-1 rout of Boston University in early September at Dillon Stadium in Hartford's South End. UConn men's and women's soccer teams are temporarily playing at the newly renovated multipurpose facility, which is home to the Hartford Athletic of the United Soccer League, while they await completion of Joseph J. Morrone Stadium at the Rizza Family Soccer Complex in Storrs. Play is slated to pick up there for the 2020 season.

Photo by Peter Morenus



CHECKING IN WITH...

MIDTOWN FUNK

From a European tour to Madison Square Garden, the Funky Dawgz Brass Band is on a serious roll. And it all started as a one-credit class at UConn.

"I traveled with the pep band to New Orleans for the women's basketball championship in 2004 and saw these brass bands on the street," says **Marvin McNeill '97 MM**, then assistant director for the UConn marching band. "I was inspired. Maybe one day we could start that up here." No wonder he felt optimistic — UConn defeated Tennessee for the title that week.

"Only years later did we have the right group of students in the marching band that I thought could pull it off. I sent them an email, described the idea for the brass band, and sent links to some YouTube videos," says McNeill, now trombonist for the Funky Dawgz and the only member outside the Millennial generation. "Plus, I came up with the name," he adds, "even the z."

The Dawgz started practicing weekly, as a one-credit class. Tenor saxophonist **Tommy Weeks '13 (SFA)** remembers their first show at von der Mehden recital hall on campus. The crowd loved it, jumping out of their seats and dancing. "Our first show off campus was at the Arch Street Tavern in Hartford," says Weeks. "Soon after that, we played Pub 32 and the place was so packed they couldn't let people in." That was when they knew they had something special.

Tracking

Then things really started to escalate: Two videos went semi-viral: a February 2014 cover of Beyoncé's "Crazy in Love" and "Get Lucky" by Daft Punk and Pharrell Williams and an April 2015 cover of "Uptown Funk!" by Bruno Mars. Between those, a

debut album "No. 1" came out in August 2014. Then the band backed Dispatch during a sold-out July 2015 concert at Madison Square Garden. "That was the single most memorable experience of my life," says Weeks, "not just with the band."

In March 2017, Funky Dawgz played Florida's Okeechobee Music and Arts Festival, which attracted such major acts that year as Usher and The Roots. Their sophomore album "Place 2 Be" was released in September 2017. And a 2018 European tour took them to England, Ireland, and Spain.

Through all the upward momentum, they never became set in their ways — including when it came to membership.

When trombone and sousaphone player **Mike Marsters '16 (SFA)** saw the Dawgz at an ice cream social on campus, he approached McNeill and asked to join. "Absolutely," said the frontman.

"I was only a freshman at the time," says Marsters, "performing with all these juniors, seniors, and even a professor. People would ask how I joined the band — because I asked!"

"Band instruments can be cool! You don't have to play the traditional music. It's a way to take what we've learned and inspire other students to pick up instruments, younger students who are just starting out." —Colin Walters '14 (SFA)

The band topped out at 10 members, but is down to a core of six or seven since the student members all graduated around the mid-2010s. The biggest challenge now is coordinating rehearsals with members in every corner of Connecticut instead of all on campus.

Hometown heroes

They get together for more than just practices. Funky Dawgz Brass Band Camp, created with the nonprofit Spread Music Now, is an after-school and summer program that provides instruments and music instruction for Hartford elementary and high school students who might not otherwise be able to afford them.

"Band instruments can be cool! You don't necessarily have to play the

traditional music," says alto saxophonist **Colin Walters '14 (SFA)**. "It's a way to take what we've learned and inspire other students to pick up instruments."

It all culminates with a public performance, usually at the Hartford Public Library event space's concert series. Recent songs at their public performances have included the Mardi Gras staples "Iko Iko" and "When the Saints Go Marching In," but also "Havana" by Camila Cabello, last year's #1-charting song that features Caribbean-style brass. "We've also helped the kids write their own songs," says McNeill. "One's called 'Charter Oak Groove' and another is called 'Go Bananas.'"

Anne D'Alleva, dean of UConn's School of Fine Arts, greenlit a plan to expand the program with the Univer-

sity's help in 2016. UConn Marching Band members give Hartford students in-school tutoring, and free meals are sent down from UConn Storrs.

McNeill talks about giving one student a trombone. "He said the program really sparked his interest to continue playing. Now he's the top trombone player at his school and was invited to the Litchfield Jazz Camp."

Next up

Where do they go from here?

"The end goal is to become full-time professional touring musicians," says drummer **Jon Singngam '13 (CLAS)**, noting they each hold day jobs at the moment. "There's a big bus somewhere with our name on the side."

"After college, most college bands grow apart," says Marsters, but since UConn, "we've only grown closer."

—JESSE RIFKIN '14 (CLAS)

At Hartford Jazzfest this summer left to right: Jeremy Baouche '19 (ENG), Aaron Eaddy '14 (ENG), Singngam, Walters, Marsters, and McNeill.

UCONN TALKS

On marijuana and the munchies:

“18 months of data shows that after recreational marijuana was legalized in Colorado, Oregon, and Washington, sales of ice cream rose by 3.1%, sales of cookies increased by 4.1%, and sales of crisps jumped by 5.3%.”

Michele Baggio, professor of economics, *The Economist*, Aug. 16, 2019

On temperature predictions for Tokyo next year:

“It’ll be the hottest Summer Olympics in history.”

Doug Casa, head of UConn’s Korey Stringer Institute, *The Washington Post*, July 15, 2019

On research that says global tree restoration could erase 100 years of carbon emissions:

“If we don’t make fundamental changes, conditions for humanity will only get worse. Reforestation can solve a lot of problems.”

Robin Chazdon, professor of ecology and evolutionary biology, *National Geographic*, July 4, 2019

On why vaccines should become a policy issue:

“There are so many other things in society that could be a personal decision, but for the good of society we make them a legal decision: like wearing a seatbelt.”

Jeannette Y. Wick, professor of pharmacy, *Pharmacy Times*, July 4, 2019

On discovering that walnuts could help ward off ulcerative colitis:

“We are hoping that we’ll be able to determine the active compounds – nutrients, phytochemicals – in walnuts that cause protection.”

Daniel Rosenberg, professor of genetics and genome sciences, *Consumer Affairs*, Aug. 13, 2019

On abandoning the term “high-functioning autism”:

“We should call people what they want to be called.”

Inge-Marie Eigsti, professor of clinical psychology and brain and cognitive sciences, *Spectrum*, July 3, 2019

On seeing a wreckfish eat a shark off the coast of South Carolina:

“This rare and startling event leaves us with more questions than answers, but such is the nature of scientific exploration.”

Peter Auster, research professor emeritus, Fox News, July 8, 2019

On her study showing that regular aerobic exercise lowers blood pressure an average of five to seven points:

“Imagine if an individual with overweight/obesity lost five to seven pounds after a single bout of exercise?”

Amanda Zaleski, postdoctoral fellow in kinesiology, *Medicine News Line*, July 1, 2019



MONIKERS

NORTH CAMPUS

For decades at UConn, if you asked directions to the North Campus dormitories, you would most likely be met with a puzzled expression. If you asked where the Jungle was, though, chances are your interlocutor would have no trouble steering you in the right direction.

That this has changed is unthinkable to some Huskies who graduated before the early 2000s, when the place’s reputation began to change. The Jungle was made alcohol-free in 2002, a decision so at odds with its reputation that it prompted a story in *The New York Times*.

“I was a freshman in Northwest in ’05 and we definitely just called it ‘North,’ but the story of it being called ‘The Jungle’ was very well known,” says Sean Rose ’09 (CLAS).

The legends of the Jungle are many, from mass snowball fights between the “jungle rats” and the residents of South Campus to requisitioning dining hall trays to serve as surfboards down the muddy slope of the hill where the dorms stand. Perhaps no story of mayhem is as familiar as the one about returning veterans who were students on the GI Bill – in some tales, from World War II; in others, it’s the Vietnam War – who rode motorcycles through the hallways.

The motorcycles may be apocryphal, but the history of North Campus is bound up with returning veterans. After the Allied victory in Europe and Asia, U.S. universities experienced a surge of enrollment that lasted well into the subsequent decade. UConn was no exception, and faced with

a serious housing shortage in the late 1940s, the University built the 11 dormitories of North Campus in time for the arrival of students in the fall of 1950.

The standard assumption is that North became known as the Jungle because of the rowdy behavior of the vets, a claim made by, among others, Evan Hill, former head of the journalism department, in an unpublished history of the University. In the early 1950s, there was indeed plenty of rowdy behavior coming from North Campus. In October 1954, for instance, there was a mass march on South Campus for a water fight with the female students living there, followed a week later by a “military-type” explosive being detonated outside New London Hall. But surprisingly, the Jungle was not yet the Jungle.

“The day will come,” vowed North Campus judiciary board member Gordon Leibowitz to the *Connecticut Campus*, “when North Campus will no longer be called ‘The Den of Animals’ or ‘The Catacombs.’” He was right, although he might not have been thrilled to know that “The Den” spent decades as “The Jungle” before becoming known as North Campus.

Of course, whether you call it North, the Jungle, the Den of Animals, or something else (for the first 70 years of our history, before residence halls were built there, students knew it as Cemetery Hill), what’s indisputable is that it’s been a home away from home for generations of Huskies who will cherish their memories of it for as long as they live.

Just remember to park your motorcycle outside. —TOM BREEN ’00 (CLAS)



Gilson at the Graduate Business Learning Center at UConn Hartford.

Peter Morenus

COVETED CLASS

FNCE 4306: FINANCIAL SERVICES

The Instructor:

Associate professor-in-residence in finance, Paul Gilson grew up in the Thames River town of Gravesend, 20 miles east of London, and earned a degree in mathematics from Bristol University. His plan was always to go on to a Ph.D. “But first,” he says, “I needed a job.” So he went to work in London for KPMG, the global accounting giant. His first day at the office, stock markets around the world collapsed in the Black Monday crash of 1987, still the greatest one-day loss by percentage in Dow history. During the long recovery that followed, KPMG was kept very busy, and Gilson gained extensive experience in mergers and acquisitions, a specialty of his department. “The late 1980s in London,” he says. “It was an exciting time.”

By 1990 he was ready for a change and transferred to KPMG’s Atlanta office for an 18-month assignment. Three years and many IPOs later, he decided to complete his own long-postponed doctorate — in finance instead of math. By then Gilson’s wife Lucy, now associate dean of UConn’s business school, was deep into graduate stud-

ies at Georgia Institute of Technology. Gilson looked at “all the fun she was having” and enrolled at Georgia Tech. For his dissertation, he applied game theory to the interactions between entrepreneurs and the venture capitalists who fund them.

“If I’m an investor in Apple, I’m one of millions,” he explains. “It’s very diffuse. But in a start-up business, the shareholder structure is lumpy. You’ve got a founder who has a different opinion than an investor. Coalitions become important. I use game theory to understand those relationships and convert lumpiness to relative strength.”

Gilson is the academic director of the undergraduate finance major and serves as the department’s honors advisor. Since 2016 he also has been a faculty mentor to the Student Managed Fund, the nearly \$6 million invest-

ment portfolio directed by teams of undergraduate and graduate students. “The SMF,” he proudly notes, “usually outperforms the market.”

Class Description:

A popular undergraduate business school elective, FNCE 4306 examines the roles played by financial institutions in the global economy. In addition to traditional banks and insurance companies, the class looks at the shadow banking system of private capital, such as hedge funds and private equity. Students expand their knowledge of capital markets beyond the stock market, learn the role of money in the economy, and are introduced to new types of investments, such as credit derivatives. These ideas are seen in the context of financial institutions, with a focus on risk measurement and management.

“Students get their hands dirty with real data,” Gilson says. “They find what’s going on in the world outside the classroom, what’s going on in the markets, what the yield curve is telling us, what the Federal Reserve is doing. Each class begins with a discussion on some current topic on the Bloomberg screen.”

In group projects, students might act as bond traders who are specifically not investing for the long term, or they might put together portfolios of cryptocurrencies and then use up-to-the-minute data to estimate how much risk the portfolio contains. “What is market risk?” Gilson asks. “Market risk is how much money you lose if tomorrow’s a bad day, and things go pear shaped. That’s market risk.”

Gilson’s Teaching Style:

“I don’t like textbooks,” he says. “I tend not to use them.” Instead, he pulls together readings from sources that students will actually use when they go to work — financial industry newsletters, *Barron’s*, *Bloomberg*. He also regularly surveys former students for feedback on what they do in their jobs. “I ask them, What skills are useful? What do they wish they had known? And I try to incorporate those insights

into my classes. The material is always updating, because we are in a dynamic world.”

The real-world approach, he believes, resonates with the many students who take Financial Services right around the time they’re going into their job searches. “The skills they learn are applicable to many different institutions and jobs in the financial services industry.”

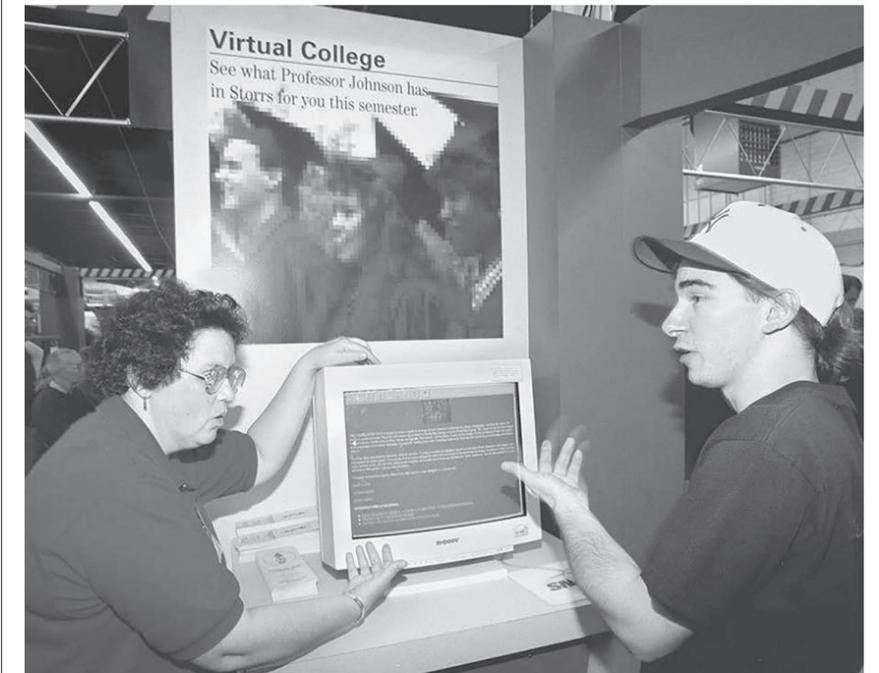
Another classroom winner: funny stories about money. “Students love those,” Gilson says. Like the time he tried to play defense against market turmoil by acquiring options on Intel, then losing track of the expiration date. He wound up with a big chunk of stock he never intended to buy and a nice letter from the SEC saying, “Don’t ever do that again.”

Why We Want to Take It Ourselves:

Home ownership, educational opportunity, and retirement are all affected by monetary policy enacted by the Federal Reserve through the banking system. Understanding how the system operates is as fundamental as knowing the ingredients in our groceries or heeding the warning labels on our medicines.

“What does it mean that right now the yield curve is low across its whole section and is fairly flat?” Gilson asks. “What is that saying about future interest rates? Is there a recession coming? Red lights are flashing. But there’s so much cash around. Fifteen trillion dollars in negative-interest-rate debt. We are in a mad world.”

One way to make some sense of it is to learn the numbers. —KEVIN MARKEY



REMEMBER THIS?

THE WORLD WIDE WEB

When this photograph was taken in 1995, the “world wide web” was still in its early days, and UConn students like the one pictured here had plenty of questions about it. Today, the University is blanketed with Wi-Fi service that brings the internet to faculty, staff, students, and visitors — and they don’t even need to find a telephone jack. —TOM BREEN '00 (CLAS)

ON CAMPUS

THE CLASS OF 2023

1/3

members of Learning Communities including 580 in the Honors Program

176

valedictorians and salutatorians

41%

students of color

From 35 countries

3,650 incoming freshmen at Storrs

39,000 total applications for UConn Class of 2023 – 3 times as many as 10 years ago

1,296 average SAT score





These four Keet sisters were UConn undergrads in 1969; they gathered at Mirror Lake this summer, 50 years later, so the magazine could re-create this historic photo (in both pics it's Nancy in the driver's seat, then, clockwise, Mary Lou, Eileen, and Christine).

ON CAMPUS

UConn MAG MEETS THE KEETS

Meet the Keet sisters. When the oldest, **Mary Lou (Keet) Erardi '69 (CLAS)**, '71 MA, chose to attend UConn she not only found the perfect spot for herself, she started something of a family affair. **Nancy (Keet) Welsh '70 (CLAS)**, **Eileen (Keet) Baukus '71 (ED)**, '76 MA, and **Christine Keet '72 (HE)** followed in short order. The fact that the four siblings graduated in consecutive years — and were enrolled at the same time during the 1968-69 academic year — was a first for UConn.

As it turns out, the sisters ended up enrolled for two consecutive years as Mary Lou started studying for her master's degree in 1969. And nearly a



decade later, a fifth sister started her UConn career, **Betty Anne (Keet) Morrow '81 (CLAS)**.

"One year our mother put almost 50,000 miles on the car, most of it from driving us back and forth from campus to our home in Waterbury or to our family's cottage in Rhode Island," says Christine. "We loved UConn and we also loved being with our family."

They reminisce about their parents treating them to dinner at the former Altnaveigh on Route 195 for special occasions and of going to Kathy John's at the

Four Corners where Cumberland Farms is now, for casual suppers. And, of course, the Dairy Bar figures prominently in their stories.

Many of their memories are personal and reflect their close relationship. Christine says she still has the gold Husky charm her sisters gave her when she turned 18 in October of her freshman year, and Mary Lou remembers the opal earrings given to her by Nancy when they were the only sisters on campus. "She bought them in a little store that no longer exists — probably where Storrs Center is now — but I remember loving them," she says.

In addition to the quality family time, they all made good use of their time in UConn's classrooms as well.

Mary Lou majored in French and went on to a 35-year career as a French teacher at Avon High School. Eileen taught in elementary schools in Franklin and Hebron, and also had a home daycare business. Nancy majored in geography and became the executive director of the USDA's New Haven–Middlesex County Farm Service Agency, and Christine used her degree in clothing, textiles and related arts (then in the School of Home Economics) to work in retail interior design services.

The four remain devoted followers of UConn sports. Mary Lou, Christine, and Eileen all claim women's basketball star **Jen Rizzotti '96 (CLAS)** as their favorite athlete of all time. For Nancy, it's **Wes Bialosuknia**, who was a star on the men's basketball team from 1964 to 1967.

"I met my future husband on a blind date and we went to a men's basketball game. We married the summer I graduated from UConn, and we're still married and still fans of UConn sports," she says.

Mary Lou's family reignited the academic tradition with son **Scott Erardi '95 (CLAS)**, '97 MA, who teaches as an adjunct in communications at UConn Hartford.

It's all in the (Husky) family. —SHEILA FORAN '83 (BGS), '96 PH.D



INFLUENCER

WHERE'S THE BEEF?

Burger King's Impossible Whopper isn't aimed at the demographic you think it is, says **Christopher Finazzo '04 (CLAS)**, who this year became president of Burger King Corporation, Americas, just as the company was poised to roll out this meatless patty.

"While the burger is plant-based, it's not just for vegetarians," he says. "It appeals to what are called flexitarians — around 90% of people who eat plant-based burgers also eat meat." And the financials were real, he says, citing the plant-based market holding a \$4 billion-plus marketshare.

Still, messing with beloved products can be risky. Remember New Coke? Unless Burger King wanted late night TV hosts to have a field day with the Impossible, they had to feel success wasn't exactly that, says Finazzo.

"We did a routine market test back in April of this year, and the market test alone generated around 10 billion total media impressions and it was actually one of the most talked about moments on Twitter for us as a brand that we've ever had," he says.

For a longtime marketer like Finazzo, launching the Impossible Burger is like getting to play in the World Series. Which reminds us of another sporting event earlier this year where BK got in the game by creating a Super Bowl ad with nothing but footage of Andy Warhol eating a Whopper.

"Core to our DNA is being a bold challenger brand," says Finazzo, who's held six other positions at BK since coming to the company from Macy's, where he was manager, customer strategy and intelligence.

Finazzo says his marketing passion was ignited at UConn, citing becoming president of the American Marketing Association chapter here as a watershed moment. "Up until that point I'd never been in any leadership roles," he says. "Tasked with being the president of the association meant having to organize an agenda, think about how we wanted to run it, and ultimately what we wanted to accomplish. That was one of the first times I had been put in that position. I think that really feeds who I am and how I think about building a business and an organization today."

An even larger key to him is the network the school provided. In fact, when he was thinking about making the Home of the Whopper his own home, it was the input of an old Husky floormate, **Ryan Krieger '05 (BUS)**, that was influential in his decision to join.

So far, so good on the new whopper. But will this even be their last big marketing play of the year as winter beckons?

Says Finazzo, nothing's impossible. —ERIC BUTTERMAN

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

BERK ALPAY '21 (ENG, CLAS)

When Berk Alpay '21 (ENG, CLAS) mentions the future, he's not talking about what he's going to have for dinner (Hint: Chang's Garden on Route 195 has been a favorite since he was a kid.) or what courses he'd like to take next semester. Not even what his plans are for after he graduates with a dual degree in computer science and math, although he briefly mentions a Ph.D. and a career in research.

No, when Alpay talks about the future, he's talking about the role of artificial intelligence (AI) and how our lives may change in the coming decades.

For some of us, AI may sound like a scary proposition. Not so much for Alpay. He's intrigued by the possibilities while urging us to take precautions in developing new AI systems.

"Right now in its current form, AI is pretty docile. But I do think that if some key steps occur, they will have a huge impact. I don't know exactly what they could be. But for instance, if someone found a way to increase a machine's intelligence and whenever the machine takes a step it gets more intelligent — and this could go on indefinitely — there will be no stopping it, and everything will change."

He makes this statement in a matter of fact way that piques our curiosity, rather than scaring us silly.

This South Windsor native is a 2019 Goldwater Scholar — the nation's premier scholarship for undergraduates studying math, natural sciences, and engineering. He was also a Holster Scholar in 2018. This is a highly selective enrichment opportunity for first-year Honors Program students that promotes independent research during the summer following a student's freshman year. Alpay's project was Thunderstorm Outage Prediction Using Deep Learning, an effort supported by Eversource Energy and UConn's partnership to help predict — and



Courtesy of Berk Alpay

Berk Alpay during his internship this summer with the Fritz Haber Institute of the Max Planck Society in Berlin, Germany.

counter — the paths of storm damage. Alpay continues to do research at the Eversource Energy Center, working under Professor Emmanouil Anagnostou. He also has recently begun research in bioinformatics with Derek Aguiar, a professor in the Department of Computer Science and Engineering.

And this past summer he had an internship at the Fritz Haber Institute of the Max Planck Society in Berlin, Germany, where he focused on data-driven prediction of crystal structure properties in binary and inorganic compounds.

What exactly does that mean? We

asked him, along with a few other questions.

You spent time on the UConn Storrs campus before enrolling here because your father S. Pamir Alpay is a professor of materials science and the associate dean of engineering. Did anything surprise you when you actually started as a freshman?

Everything! I lived in honors housing and I was so surprised at how smart everyone was. Some people were just brilliant. I was impressed by everyone's thirst for knowledge and interest in research, even as freshmen.

Your parents came to the United States from Turkey. In Turkish, the name Alpay means "stouthearted, brave, chivalrous, daredevil, and gallant." Berk means "solid, strong." That's a lot to live up to! On a scale of 1 to 5 — with 1 being "not so much" and 5 being "exactly right" — where would you place yourself? Were your parents accurate in choosing your name?

(Laughing) I'm not sure I want to give myself a rank, but I think of myself as someone with a strong character. I'm a firm believer in human kindness and compassion, and I try to bring this perspective to my everyday life.

What about academics? Favorite courses? Favorite teachers?

I loved Big Data Analytics with Professor Raj [Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor and department head of computer science and engineering Sanguthevar Rajasekaran].

And at South Windsor High School, it was Mrs. Devassy in AP calculus. Until I took that class, I really didn't like math — but after calculus, I loved it. She was such a great teacher, and that class changed my way of thinking. Now I'm a math major with a statistics minor.

When you're not studying or working, what do you do in your spare time?

I like to read and I've always been into

science fiction. I like weird authors! Heinlein, Clarke, and Asimov (Robert, Arthur, and Isaac) and I also like Kurt Vonnegut even though he isn't strictly speaking a science fiction writer. I grew up reading about ideas, thinking about the future — the dangers — what could go right or wrong.

What would surprise people to learn about you?

I love music. I played the viola in high school and now I play guitar and piano. I like Muse and ABBA a lot and, thanks to my father's influence, I'm getting into John Mayer's music.

Okay, so what is the point of predicting crystal structure properties in compounds? The short answer!

Once these properties are established, we can infer how a material composed of a compound behaves and, therefore, whether the material would suit a given application in industry, such as for turbine blades or semiconductors in electronics.

We decided to track down Alpay's calculus teacher at South Windsor High, Mariamma Devassy-Schwob '90 (CLAS), to see how she remembers him:

"First, I'm so happy to hear Berk is doing so well. I knew he'd be a superstar! It made me laugh when you said he enjoyed our class, as his was the rowdiest AP calc class I have ever had in 26 years of teaching. It was quite fun though.

"As far as what kind of student Berk was or what I remember most about him, it was his reaction after asking a question. He would very calmly ask a high-level question, and after I would give him my best theoretical answer I could almost see the wheels turning in that amazing brain of his. He would ponder my answer and then fully understand and respond with a confident nod. He was not only so smart but an amazing teacher to other students in the class too. He is a memorable student of mine for all good reasons!"

—SHEILA FORAN '83 (BGS), '96 PH.D.

THIS JUST IN

SICKLE CELL DRUG SHOWS PROMISE

An investigational drug for the treatment of sickle cell disease is showing early promise in clinical trials for impacting biomarkers of the disease in patients, reported UConn School of Medicine researchers at the European Hematology Association Congress in Amsterdam this summer.

The drug IMR-687 was shown to reduce both the sickling of red blood cells and blood vessel blockages, the two major culprits that lead to sickle cell disease's debilitating pain, organ damage, and early mortality of patients — who have an average life expectancy of 40.

After 13 weeks of testing in its current clinical trial, the orally administered, once-a-day phosphodiesterase 9 (PDE9) inhibitor in adult patients with sickle cell disease is demonstrating tolerability and the ability to impact both red and white blood cell biomarkers of the disease, says Biree Andemariam, lead investigator for the clinical trial, associate professor of medicine at UConn School of Medicine, and director of the New England Sickle Cell Institute at UConn Health.

"These initial Phase 2a data demonstrate the potential of IMR-687 to significantly impact key biomarkers associated with the pathology of this serious disease," she says. More clinical data is expected to be shared later this year.

"We are so proud of the efforts of the clinical and research staff at UConn Health who have been vital to the success of this clinical trial so far, always putting first the high-quality care and future health of sickle cell patients," says Andemariam.

For more on how this study was conducted and what's next, visit s.uconn.edu/sicklecell.



The Shape of Storrs

Geology professor Robert Thorson says UConn is UConn because glacial ice slid by 20,000 years ago and shaped the landscape that today includes our iconic Horsebarn Hill

Resting the wooded hill on Highway 195, we began our southerly descent into Storrs. Abruptly, our eastern horizon expanded to reveal the gracefully curved profile of Horsebarn Hill. That smooth silhouette, that whaleback shape, that green ellipse is the single most beautiful thing on the UConn campus.

That's what I decided during my first visit to Storrs, which I made to interview for the professorship I still hold. Within a month, I would be uprooting my Alaskan family to teach at a red-brick university with the most beautiful skyline in New England. During the decades to come, Horsebarn Hill

would become my topographic tonic. When life got rough, its sweeping curve smoothed out my sharp edges. When I felt down, its high profile lifted my mood. When I felt confined, the panoramic view from its summit reminded me that I'm surrounded by a vast expanse of rural woodland beauty.

Today, Horsebarn Hill lies beneath a blanket of atmosphere. My sights and sounds are of clouds, birds, breezes, and cattle making milk for Dairy Bar ice cream. Yet scarcely 20,000 years ago, that same hill lay beneath a blanket of glacial ice sliding southward. My only sight would have been of perpetual darkness. My only sounds would have been mechanical — the grinding, crushing, scraping, and shattering of rock residues being pulverized, and the smearing noises of a landform being shaped by glacial erosion. These cold dark acts of creation gave rise to the rich moist soils and smooth slopes that attracted pioneering farm families of the late 17th century to settle here, and the farm educators of the late 19th century to plant the seeds of UConn Nation.

Horsebarn Hill symbolizes that creation story, making it my candidate for UConn's most essential icon. It overlooked the birthing ceremony of Storrs Agricultural School in 1881

and overlooks our great university today. The gilded cupola of Wilbur Cross (1939) marked our metamorphosis into a liberal arts university, and the silver dome of Gampel Pavilion (1990) marked our emergence as an athletic dynasty. Both are splendid icons. But let's not forget that these architectural achievements came much later and were built on the same stuff from which Horsebarn Hill was made.

Being a teacher, I know that when learning something challenging, it helps to kick-start the process with something simple. So, before I get down to the nitty-gritty of UConn's creation story, I'll offer a parallel example from America's Deep South. During the U.S. presidential elections in 2016, an anomalous swath of blue Democratic counties supporting Hilary Clinton curved through a red sea of Republican counties supporting Donald Trump. Though this anomaly puzzled political scientists sifting through surface data, the geoscientists went down into their earthly cellar to find an answer. This so-called "black belt" of politics was the statistical expression of a demog-

raphy dominated by African American voters, which was a historical legacy of early 19th century chattel slavery, which aligned with a belt of soils perfectly suited to cotton, which developed on a black belt of marine shale deposited about 75 million years ago when sea level was much higher than it is today. Modern American politics traces back — step by step — into deep time.

A similar linkage of historical contingencies took place in Storrs. But instead of a black belt of clay-rich Confederate soil ideal for cotton plantations, we had a rolling gray patch of loamy Yankee soil ideal for the growth of grass, the anchor for New England's agricultural economy. Grass is what livestock graze upon in open pastures; it is the hay cut for winter fodder and the cereal grain we grind to make our daily bread out of corn, rye, wheat, oats, or barley.

UConn's brotherly benefactors Charles and Augustus Storrs donated the farm on which our main campus would

Paintings by Blanche Serban
Photographs from the University Archives

grow. Their bucolic childhood landscape was lovingly described in general terms by the Reverend Timothy Dwight's "Travels in New England and New York" (1820). When reading every page of this three-volume doorstopper 20 years ago, I discovered why such land was so prized:

The hills of this country and of New England at large, are perfectly suited to the production of grass. They are moist to their summits. Water is everywhere found on them at a less depth than in the valleys or on the plains. I attribute the peculiar moisture of these grounds to the stratum lying immediately under the soil, which throughout a great part of this country is what is here called the hardpan.

The hills Dwight refers to are mainly drumlins, a Gaelic word for "rounded hill." They're moist enough to maintain good pasture during drought, fertile enough to sustain demanding crops, and smooth enough to allow easy access in every direction. This smoothness is what makes Horsebarn Hill a popular sledding destination. And for a while there was even downhill skiing. When on field trips, my students interpret its derelict towrope as evidence for climate change.

The earliest aerial and hilltop photos of UConn — some, like the one shown at right, taken from biplanes with cloth wings — reveal that the historic campus lay within a cluster of rounded hills cast from the same mold and aligned in the same direction as Horsebarn Hill. Our first large campus building — the wood-framed Old Main (1890) — was perched on the crest of one of these low, streamlined eminences. Surrounding it were rolling pastures crisscrossed by fieldstone walls. Our first large, red-brick building, Storrs Hall (1906), was aligned with the southeasterly glacial grain, initiating a layout grid for future buildings parallel and perpendicular to the rake of the ice.

UConn's Great Lawn, which sweeps uphill from Highway 195, is the eastern flank of a formerly rounded ridge — its



Above: *White Spirals Build the Air Over the Hill.*
Right: 1925 aerial biplane photograph shows Mirror Lake to the right and Horsebarn Hill to the left.





“During the decades to come, Horsebarn Hill would become my topographic tonic. When life got rough, its sweeping curve smoothed out my sharp edges. When I felt down, its high profile lifted my mood.”

crest was flattened for Beach and Gulley halls and the Family Studies Building. During my pedestrian commute, I walk up and down that hillside between home and office, seldom failing to give thanks to its icy maker.

Dwight’s hardpan is what we now call till, a Scottish word for a “kind of coarse and obdurate land.” Actually, it’s a special type called lodgment till, a sediment pasted to the land like crunchy peanut butter being smeared on a firm piece of bread. In the glacial case, the material being smeared was a stiff mixture of pulverized rock and uncrushed fragments (the crunchy bits) being lodged to the land surface under great pressure by slowly moving ice. In Connecticut, thick patches of lodgment till are generally restricted to the rounded hills decorating elevated plateaus. Our state’s most extensive patches create especially scenic inland towns like Litchfield and Woodstock.

In 1698, the founding patriarch of UConn Nation, Samuel Storrs, pioneered one of those plateaus on the drainage divide between the Fenton and Willimantic rivers. Having emigrated from Nottinghamshire, England, in 1663 to the dry, sandy, lowland soils of Barnstable, Massachusetts, Sam

eventually picked up and moved to the largest patch of lodgment till in a wilderness that would soon become the town of Mansfield. Generation after generation of his family practiced an agricultural economy that historians call mixed husbandry. I prefer the term *livestock tillage* because it’s gender neutral, free from any suggestions of bigamy, and it emphasizes grass-fed livestock via pasturing and hay-making for cattle, sheep, and horses, and the tillage of grass for cereal grains.

To a garden shovel, lodgment till replies with a firm thud, often accompanied by a clank of stone. Like pottery clay fresh from the package, the till is weak enough to have been molded by passing ice into a smooth mathematical curve but strong enough to withstand thousands of years of gully erosion. Till soils keep pastures verdant, even through the dog days of August. Rain and snowmelt soak easily through the root-stirred topsoil but are blocked from infiltrating down to the water table by hardpan at shallow depth. The soil is loamy enough to retain copious water for plant roots, and highly fertile because it contains billions of crushed mineral grains that release and bind nutrients for plant growth.

When I moved to New England from Alaska, UConn met all three of my geographic job search criteria in ways that other universities and colleges could not. I wanted to live north of the glacial border, accessible to the ocean, and at some distance from the nearest metropolis. Storrs met all three criteria, the last being the most restrictive. Though nearly perfect for livestock tillage, the features of this rolling plateau deterred urbanization: It was too high, too inland, too far from natural transportation corridors, and its streams were too small to power industrial mills.

The result was a rural patch of good grazing surrounded by rougher, rockier, more steeply sloping soils. In 1698, this inland island attracted a pioneering English yeoman and his family. In 1881, their successful descendants created Storrs Agricultural School. In 1893, that school was upgraded with federal funds to become the state’s land grant institution, Storrs Agricultural College. In 1899, that name was broadened to reflect the new statewide mission, becoming Connecticut Agricultural College. By 1939, after four decades of construction and growth, the college’s name was broadened to the University of Connecticut. Since then, its enrollment, mission, and geographic breadth have gone global. That success traces back — step by step — into deep time.

Given the frenetic pace of cultural and environmental change today, it is hard to believe that Horsebarn Hill, less than a century ago, was one of a cluster of streamlined hills on a pasture campus crisscrossed by fieldstone walls. Since then,



Top: 1908 photo shows Jacobson Barn just right of center at the top of the hill. Above: *Light and Shadow Play Their Drama in Stillness (Purple Clouds)*.

the walls have been hauled away into oblivion, and the hills flattened to make room for the masonry buildings, lawns, and paths of our beautiful, historic campus. Yet throughout it all, Horsebarn Hill remained largely untouched. Its graceful skyline curve and its ornament of old fieldstone walls symbolize the creation story of UConn Nation and the almost magical substance from which it was made. ☺

Professor Thorson would like to note that he penned this love letter to Horsebarn Hill in celebration of the new Department of Geosciences in UConn’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Want to dig deeper into the subject? Visit s.uconn.edu/hill

I. Am. Outraged.

Why fake news catches fire and spreads so quickly on social media

by
Michael Patrick Lynch

When we share media stories online we are sharing information we believe and/or endorse, right? Wrong.

First, studies show we *do not* read what we are sharing. Second, they show that we *do* share content that gets people riled up.

Research has found that the best predictor of sharing is strong emotions — both emotions like affection (think posts about cute kittens) and emotions like outrage. One study suggests that morally laden emotions are particularly effective: Every moral sentiment in a tweet increases by 20% its chances of being shared.

And plausibly, social media actually tends to increase our feelings of outrage. Acts that would not elicit as much outrage offline elicit more online. This intensification may be due in part to the fact that the social benefits of expressing outrage online, such as

increased tribal bonding, still exist and are possibly amplified, while the risks of expressing outrage are lessened — on the internet, it is harder for those you are yelling at to strike back with violence. Moreover, outrage can itself simply feel good.

And since our digital platforms are designed to maximize shares and eyeballs on posts — and outrage does that — it is not surprising that the internet is a great mechanism for producing and encouraging the spread of outrage.

As the neuroscientist Molly Crockett puts it, “If moral outrage is like fire, then social media is like gasoline.”

Put together, these points — what we are doing with our shares and what we are not doing — make it difficult to believe that the primary function of our communicative acts of sharing is really either assertion or endorsement, even though that’s what we typically think we are doing.



“If moral outrage is like fire, then social media is like gasoline.”

—Molly Crockett, neuroscientist



We think we are sharing news stories in order to transfer knowledge, but much of the time we aren't really trying to do that at all — whatever we may consciously think. **If we were, we would presumably have read the piece that we're sharing. But most of us don't.** So what *are* we doing?

A plausible hypothesis is that the primary function of our practice of sharing content online is to express our emotional attitudes. In particular, when it comes to political news stories, we often share them both to display our outrage — broadcast it — and to induce outrage in others.

As Crockett has noted, expression of attitudes like moral outrage is one way that tribes are built and social norms enforced. Social media is an outrage factory. And paradoxically, it works because most folks aren't aware, or don't want to be aware, of this point. But it is just this lack of awareness that trolls and other workers in the fake news industrial complex find so useful.

Purveyors of fake news are keenly aware that when we share, we're doing something different from what we think we're doing.

Digital platforms are intentionally designed to convey emotional sentiment — because the designers of those platforms know that such sentiment is what increases reshares and ups the amount of attention a particular post gets. And whatever does that makes money.

I am not saying that we don't endorse and assert facts on social media. Of course we do — just as some of us read what we share. Moreover, it is plausible to take ourselves to be endorsing or asserting that part of a shared post that we typically do read: the headline. Our communicative acts online can do many things at once.

But if you want to understand what I'm calling the primary function of a kind of communicative act, you need to look at the reason that the act continues to be performed. And in the case of sharing online content, that reason is the expression of emotional attitudes — particularly tribal attitudes.

Why? Because expressions of tribal **emotional attitudes like outrage are rewarded by the amount of shares and likes they elicit.**

The expressivist account of online

communication is also compatible with the fact that we do form beliefs and convictions as a result of sharing attitudes.

Compare “team-building” exercises. These kinds of exercises (like falling back into your colleague's waiting arms) are not directly aimed at conveying information or changing your mind. They are aimed at building emotional bonds with your coworkers. But if all goes well, that will have a downstream effect on what you believe. In learning to trust your team members, you will come to believe that this is the team you want to be on.

A similar thing happens during the training of military recruits. Many of the exercises that new soldiers are put through are aimed at building trust and self-confidence. But especially in wartime, they are also aimed at making soldiers hate the enemy. This aim, too, has downstream effects: The soldiers come to believe they are fighting on the right side.

Social media is like boot camp for our convictions. **It bolsters our confidence, increases trust in our cohort, and makes us loathe the enemy. But in doing so, it also makes us more vulnerable to manipulation** and feeds our hardwired penchant for being know-it-alls.

We think we are playing by the rules of rationality — appealing to evidence and data. But in fact, the rules we are playing by are those that govern our self-expressions and social interactions — the rules of the playground, the dating game, and the office watercooler. These rules have more to do with generating and receiving emotional reactions, solidifying tribal membership, and enlarging social status than with what is warranted by the evidence and what isn't.

This emphasis on emotional reactions is perhaps most obvious on Facebook where the stated goal, after all, is emotional connection. Consider how the platform encourages us to

react to posts that we share with one another. It used to be that one could only “like” a post or refrain from liking it. But now Facebook offers the choice of a few different reactions, each corresponding to a basic emotion and represented by easily recognizable emoticons: frowny face, happy face, surprised face, and of course, angry outrage face.

My experience in using these emoticons, which I suspect is widely reflected in others' use as well, is that they have a deep impact on how you think about the pieces being shared. For one thing, the emoticons that other people in your network choose in reacting to a post can strongly affect how you yourself react. That effect is similar to the effects of social pressure offline.

If everyone in your workplace dislikes something someone said or did, it is difficult not to show a similar reaction. Similarly, if your friends express outrage at a news piece, it can feel awkward not to do so yourself. And independently of that factor, the emoticon you choose can help condition how you comment on the post, if you do comment. If you choose the angry emoticon, for example, it is extremely unlikely that you will then comment by saying that the piece in question really made you think.

Now consider a thought experiment.

Imagine that instead of the emoticons, we had **a choice of three buttons that we could use when sharing a news story or other claim to fact: “justified by the evidence,” “not justified by the evidence,” and “need more information.”**

How might having these choices — instead of emoticons aimed at the most basic human emotions — condition how we would engage with what we share and what we don't share?

One thought — no doubt overly hopeful — is that they would make at least some of us more reflective or thoughtful. We might even be less eager to share something we haven't

read — because we would be thinking of people's reactions as being hinged not on their outrage or joy but more on the evidence they perceive the piece to communicate. **It might encourage some of us to be more skeptical, and humbler, ourselves.**

But unless the basic digital economy changed, my hypothesis is that eventually, we would start treating all three buttons emotively. Eventually — as the old expressivists would have predicted — we would start to use the language of evidence to express feelings, not considered opinions.

We could play on the emotions of others to get them to rate as “justified by the evidence” items that nonetheless go unread. And we might engage in spreading fake news and misleading evidence. So, not as much might be gained as we would wish.

Yet even if, in the way of thought experiments, this one is idealized, it highlights a crucial point.

Just changing the surface appearances of our social-media platforms won't help. As long as we ignore the fact that their underlying economy **rewards the expression of strong emotion over reflection**, we will continue to deceive ourselves about the real nature of much of our communication on those platforms.

We will continue to contribute, unwittingly or otherwise, to a corrupted information culture. And we will continue to make ourselves vulnerable to information polluters who revel in that corruption and take advantage of our naïveté — all the while complaining that our critics are peddling fake news. ☹

This article was excerpted from Michael Patrick Lynch's latest book, “Know-It-All Society: Truth and Arrogance in Political Culture,” published in August by Liveright, a division of W. W. Norton & Company. Lynch is a Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor of philosophy and director of UConn Humanities Institute.

>> On August 26 at 6 a.m., the new Student Rec Center opened



Floor 4

- 3-lane, 1/8-mile track looks down at gyms and out at Gampel and Horsebarn Hill

Floor 3

- 3 racquetball courts
- 4 full-size basketball courts
- multiuse gymnasium

Floor 2

- wellness studios
- cycle studio
- functional training
- 2 fitness zones
- mind-body studio with outdoor terrace

Floor 1

- adventure equipment to rent
- 8-lane competition and 3-lane leisure pools
- café
- 2 fitness zones
- locker rooms
- climbing center

The Students Asked For

>> If you build it, they will come. If you build it according to their specifications, they will come in droves: Some 6,000 students a day are spinning the turnstiles at the new Student Rec Center across from Gampel.

They asked for enough gyms to accommodate both intramural play and random, anytime play. In addition to an enormous basketball court that can host four full-length or eight half-court games, there's a multi-use gym engineered so the flip of a switch raises and lowers hoops and nets to allow badminton, volleyball, soccer, field hockey, basketball, or whatever merriment a whim desires.

Beyond the court, no waiting was a big ask — and get — in the form of swimming lanes, exercise equipment including *lots* of ellipticals and free weights, room to climb and keep climbing, places to lay your mat and stretch, skip rope, or train to be the next great Ninja Warrior.

Are there discounted alumni memberships? Yes.

Photos by Peter Morenus

The Students Asked For

Badminton before midnight



Students were tired of waiting for intramural teams to finish playing before they could set up badminton courts and so intensely craved their badminton that they would come to the old gym to play in the middle of the night. A separate multiuse gym means intramurals can play on in the massive basketball court while birdies fly next door. Haowen Yang '23 (ENG), from Wuxi, China, and his friends wasted no time taking advantage.

**The
Students
Asked For**

**Bigger
pools**



**The
Students
Asked For**

Ninja Warrior workouts



Two pools means lap swimmers and leisure swimmers, or polo players and movie watchers (yes, there are floating “Jaws” viewings planned), need not squabble. One floor up Titan/Ninja Warrior wannabes take to the turf for exercise that’s anything but ordinary. Jacob’s ladders, monster tires, and monkey bars answer students’ desire to mix it up. Brian Metro ’22 (CLAS) from Londonderry, New Hampshire, tried the arm-over-arm sled pull.

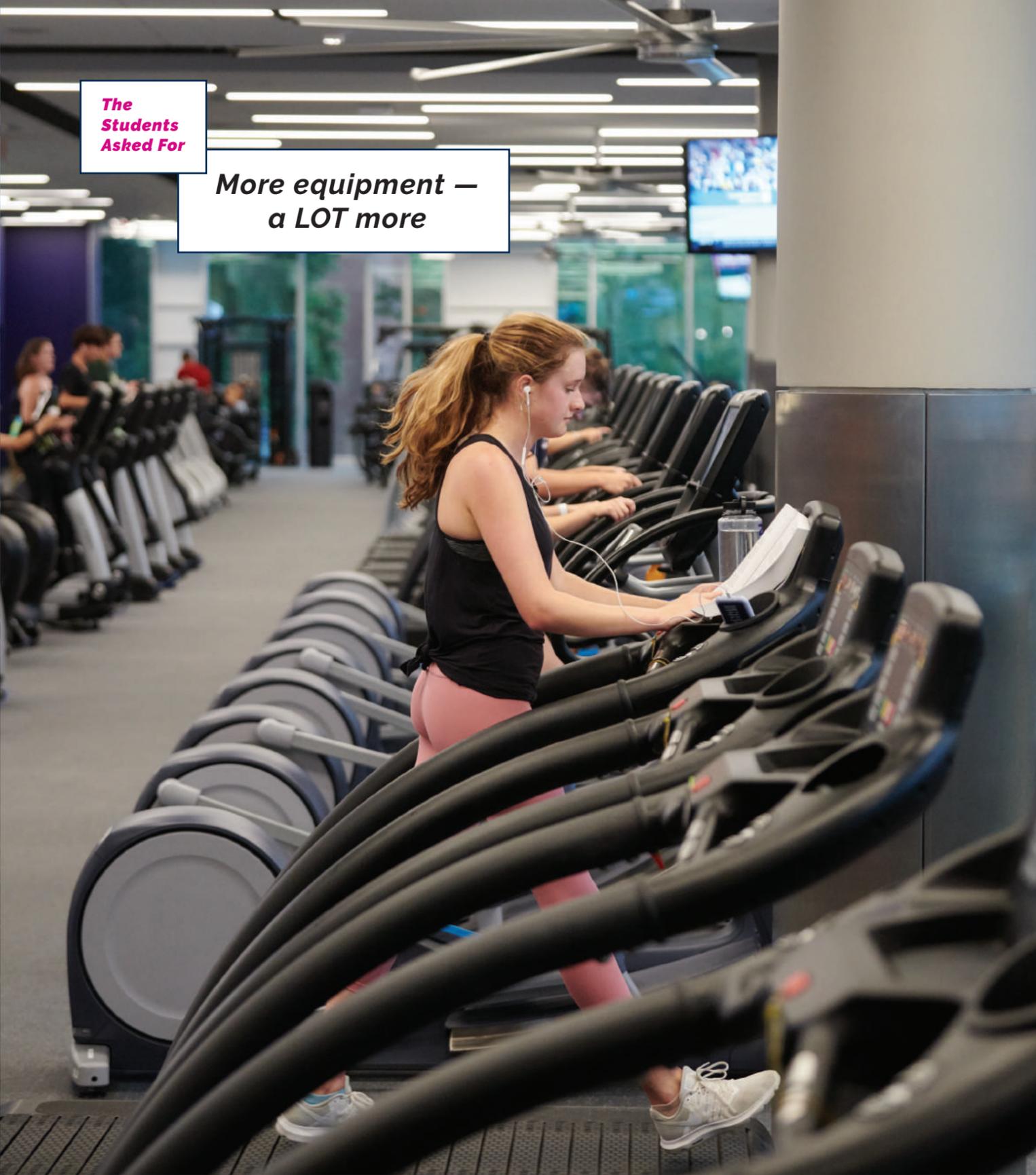


The Students Asked For

A really, really tall climbing wall

The Students Asked For

More equipment — a LOT more



Walk through the tallest collegiate rock wall in New England (56 feet tall) to get to the bouldering features on the flip side. “It’s incredible — there’s something for all levels,” said New Haven’s Elie Azoff-Slifstein ’20 (ENG) — in the green shirt. You want way more machines? How’s 200? “This place is off the charts,” said Ellie Willis ’22 (CLAS), from Storrs, who was flexing her time management skills by simultaneously studying and working out. ©



THE WAIT IS OVER

**Bongi Magubane '76
Is Determined to Fix
the Connecticut DMV**

By Rand Richards Cooper
Photos by Peter Morenus

Apart from the IRS, is there any government agency as universally dreaded as the Department of Motor Vehicles?

In Connecticut, things at the DMV hit a notorious low point in 2015, when the department shut down for a week to install a new computer system, and snafus in the reboot triggered days of six- and seven-hourlong wait lines.

Such is the challenge facing the department's new commissioner, former Aetna IT specialist and UConn alum **Sibongile Magubane '76 (CLAS)**.

The DMV's massive brick headquarters sits amid stately houses in Old Wethersfield, south of Hartford. Magubane, who goes by the resonant nickname of Bongi, greeted me in her office, a large room with walls bereft of decoration. She hadn't had time, she said — from day one, on April 1, she'd been working nonstop.

I noted that April Fools' Day might not be the most auspicious date to begin running this state agency, and asked Magubane if she agreed that her new department is the one Connecticut residents spend the most time hating on.

"Absolutely," she said. "And it doesn't have to be like that. It is due to circumstances that are fixable."

If anyone can fix it . . .

Magubane knows something about difficult circumstances. She was born in South Africa during the apartheid era. Forget about registering a vehicle, Magubane had no birth certificate — black babies weren't issued them. She lived in a two-family house in a township outside Durban, with no electricity and 12 family members crowded into three rooms. Her father was a university student active in the anti-apartheid movement. "My grandmother washed laundry for white people," Magubane recalled, then chuckled. "Rumor has it that she also brewed beer."

Her family's destiny swerved unexpectedly when her father, through a connection in the anti-apartheid movement, got offered a scholarship — to UCLA. And so in 1964, at age nine, Magubane boarded a plane to the United States.

"I left South Africa with my English

name, Pelegrine. Africans couldn't use African names when they went to school, so we were baptized with English names." When the family landed in the U.S., they jettisoned the children's English names. "My father, that was his first act of defiance. So when I landed in America, I was Sibongile. I was in a new country with a new name."

Her father, the late Bernard Magubane, went on to get a doctorate in sociology and become a beloved professor at UConn. A celebrated scholar and activist, he was best known for his groundbreaking 1979 book, "The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa."

Bongi spent the second half of her childhood in California and then in Connecticut, adjusting to being American, learning English by watching TV sitcoms like "Leave it to Beaver." Her father encouraged a love of reading.

"On Saturdays he would work all morning, come home at exactly 1 p.m., and pile us all in the car for a family day trip." Bookstores were a frequent destination. "I knew every bookstore between Connecticut and Washington. If he came to my house today, he would see nothing but wall-to-wall books."

In the fall of 1972, Bongi Magubane enrolled as a 17-year-old freshman at UConn, where she majored in math and formed lifelong friendships. One was with **Elease Wright '76 (ED)** who, like Magubane, went on to enjoy a long career at Aetna, where she rose to become chief human resources officer.

"My first impression back then of Bongi was that she was very smart and thoughtful," Wright recalls. "And straightforward. She's not pretentious, and she always tells you the truth. She doesn't sugarcoat."

That trait should serve her well in the administration of a new governor who, when it comes to the DMV, clearly does not want to sugarcoat. Announcing Magubane's appointment, Lamont called the department, with its 674 employees and \$67 million budget, "overly bureaucratic and arduous," and introduced Magubane as "a sharp, solutions-oriented thinker with a strong business acumen" who would innovate,



cut red tape, and make the agency more user-friendly.

“You’re not going to recognize DMV in four years,” the governor promised.

Do the math

When I asked Magubane what she considers the department’s biggest problem, she answered by citing her own experience as a customer. “A few years ago I came for a registration,

and I got here and waited in line, then found out my taxes weren’t paid. And I was like, why couldn’t you have just told me? Tell me what I need to know before I come to you.”

In what other areas of their lives, she asked, do people drive somewhere to transact important business, then fail to accomplish it because they didn’t bring the right piece of paper? She browsed through a sheaf of graphs, charts, and tables.

“This past month we had 119,000 people come through our doors, and 20,000 of them didn’t transact because they didn’t have the right materials.”

Magubane’s IT expertise — “DMV by the numbers,” is how she describes her approach — opens a window on precisely what frustrates people so much about dealing with the agency: information, or the lack of it.

It’s clear that obstacles to better information annoy the commissioner

both personally and professionally. In the corporate world she came from, reducing those long lines would be the top priority. “I don’t think we have done that here,” she said.

She illustrated with a story. Since her first day on the job she has vowed not to use the back door to her office but the main door, where she has to cross the wait lines. One morning she approached a man at the end of a long line and learned he was seeking a motorcycle permit. At the counter, Magubane ascertained that he needed to be directed upstairs to a different office to take a test.

“So I say to our agent, ‘Can you give him a number so he can go upstairs?’ He says, ‘No, he has to wait in line.’ I said, ‘But how do you know that the permit test upstairs is backed up?’ He says, ‘I don’t. But the process is to hold him downstairs.’” Magubane went upstairs and discovered that there was no line at all for testing. Motorcycle guy could have gone straight up.

This is the all-too-typical kind of DMV frustration that Magubane intends to eliminate. “We need to be meeting people at the door and making sure they have the right information — and if they don’t, getting them out of here as quickly as possible. And we can do a better job communicating before they get here, so that we can actually get it right.”

She has launched an initiative, Know Before You Go, to help ensure that people bring exactly what they need, and is setting what she calls “some very aggressive metrics” for first-time success rates. The goal is to be less like a bureaucracy and more like a business. “We need to be more like the Apple Store where, as you enter, somebody finds out: What are you here to do? And then directs you to that place.”

Magubane plans other changes and innovations. Moving more transactions online. Developing kiosk machines for state residents who don’t have credit cards. Simplifying forms. Creating a Net Promoter Score to help the department assess how it is doing. Improving the website. Leveraging relationships with partners such as AAA in order to offer people more transac-

“I should be able to get online and register, then get a text saying, ‘Okay, come on over.’ Restaurants do it — why can’t we?”

tions closer to home. And getting PSAs out to tell about it all.

“We need to be telling people what they need to know. And delivering services 24/7, in the way that people consume them. I should be able to get online and register, then get a text saying, ‘Okay, come on over.’ Restaurants do it — why can’t we? This is all about really meeting people where they are.”

The good stuff

Her ability to move the department in that direction has inspired optimism. Connecticut House Majority Leader **Matt Ritter ’07 JD** believes that technology can solve a lot of the problems at the DMV, and that Magubane is the right person to lead the effort.

“For the first time, we’re turning to someone with extensive private-sector experience in implementing complex technology upgrades,” Ritter says. “Bongi will bring these skills and her tremendous team-building personality to DMV. That is a great recipe for success.”

Elease Wright agrees. She notes that the new commissioner has the rare combination of strategic vision and a grasp of granular details. “I saw this at Aetna, where Bongi helped introduce new financial systems and make significant changes to the HR infrastructure. She’s a problem-solver who always figures out what needs to be done to make a system work more effectively. Bongi also knows how to take a team and hold them to very high expectations, then support them in reaching that goal. She knows how to pull people together.”

The English name that Magubane was baptized with, Pelegrine, means “the traveler,” ironically the name she abandoned when her life’s travels began.

That early childhood in South Africa is more than half a century past, and a world away. But ties remain. Her family still owns the house in the Durban township — an uncle lives there — and Magubane showed me photos on her phone of a small hillside structure at the top of an imposingly steep flight of concrete stairs.

“To this day I have a horrible fear of stairs because of these guys right here,” she said, laughing heartily.

While Magubane likes to say that work isn’t everything, and stresses the importance of the work-life balance for DMV employees, it’s clear that she herself is hard-pressed to get away from her job. But she manages to de-stress. She enjoys hanging with her two Shih Tzu-Chihuahuas, Leo and George. Going to the occasional happy hour with friends. Sharing online articles and jokes with her younger sister, Zine, a sociology professor at Boston College. “I still read a lot,” she told me. “I love really trying to understand what makes people tick.”

The challenge of transforming the DMV promises ample opportunity for that. I asked Magubane what she would like Connecticut residents to be saying about the agency four years from now.

She thought for a long moment. “I’d like them to say that they had a great experience transacting with their government when they needed it the most. My birthday’s tomorrow, my license is expiring, and the DMV was there to say, ‘Hey, here’s your document. And tomorrow you can get into that truck and drive and do your business.’”

The commissioner sighed. “That’s really what we need to be doing here. Give people the information they need to be successful, and get them out of here so they can get on with the rest of their lives.” ☺



44 USA

2010



Robert Motherwell

2010

44 USA



Barnett Newman

tiny.

Look: In one photograph, a crowd of museumgoers marvels at a trio of modern art masterpieces; in another, a swimmer strokes her way through a bubbly blue pool; in a third, a kerchiefed farmer tends her field of golden plants.

Look again: Those paintings are postage stamps; the pool is the inside of an ice cube; the field is the spiraling, floret- and filament-studded inflorescent center of a sunflower — who knew it was so elaborate?

The people are train-set miniatures, perfectly scaled to their Lilliputian landscapes — which is what creator **Judy (Hall) Robinson-Cox '71 (SFA)** has titled this series. And even though she has assembled and photographed more than 100 of these wee scenes, the majesty of tininess continues to amaze her. “When you take a camera and really magnify something, it’s incredible what’s there,” she explains. “It really opens up a sense of awe — of what nature itself is, of the world we live in.”

At UConn, Robinson-Cox concentrated on photography and painting, which she studied with the late Anthony Terenzio. “He made me understand abstract art, which I didn’t know how to relate to at first. He opened my eyes.” Her own paintings and collages were primarily abstract still-lives and landscapes, and her photography was largely experimental, shot with high-contrast film to reduce the images to a gray-free black and white.

She started graduate school here too, working with Clarence R. Calder Jr., an elementary educator and advocate for social justice who studied the impact of shop classes — what we might now call



By Catherine Newman

“When you look closely, the center of a sunflower is actually made up of tiny plants! And there are lots of similarities to the human body, cells, and the universe, the stars. It’s very intriguing . . .”



something like the pedagogy of engineering — and whose book of found-object projects she was illustrating. After a year, though, she describes being lured away by a “band of leather hippies.”

“These weird people had driven up in a bus to hold these leather workshops. And the belts they made were just like my abstract paintings! So I went to live with them in a big old house in Woodstock, New York — like a commune — where we worked for an advertising executive who had quit his job to start this leather craft business.” (“Wow!” I keep saying, and she laughs every time.) Eventually she returned to school, studying graphic design at Philadelphia College of Art, where she met her husband, Tom Robinson-Cox.

The two started working as fine-art photographers and moved to Gloucester, Massachusetts, where they now live and work, creating art of all sizes, which they show and sell at local galleries. Judy’s work includes seaside images of watery reflections, a series of conceptual pieces called “Mindscapes,” and evocative New England collages, among others. But it’s the diminutive series that seems to bring her (and her fans) the most pleasure, and she’s taken to selling the dioramas themselves, in addition to the images of them.

All that small-scale work started with a tiny plastic pig named Percy, whom Robinson-Cox had situated on a bunch of asparagus in order to liven up an image she was creating. Then Percy ended up on a head of broccoli, inside a pepper, and in a cluster of photographs, about which a curator in Boston said, “Why don’t you go all the way with this? Find some little people.” And so she did. (This story is told at greater length with delightful photographs in her Percy book, “Finding Lilliput.”)

“I’m attracted to small things,” Robinson-Cox says. “And I think I’ve never really grown up.” As a child with three brothers, she says she didn’t play with dollhouses but had lots of experience creating little villages for everybody’s train sets. She now has, by her estimation, around 1,000 of the 3/4-inch

A person is swimming inside a large, clear, rectangular block of ice. The person is wearing a black one-piece swimsuit and is surrounded by water and bubbles. The scene is set against a solid blue background. The person's right arm is extended upwards, and their legs are visible, kicking water. The ice block is thick and has a slightly textured surface. The overall composition is centered, with the person's body forming a diagonal line across the frame.

“I started freezing the little people inside ice cubes . . . I had a little egg beater and I was furiously churning up the bubbles in my sink . . . I had to work quickly.”

figures. Her work is inspired by the figures themselves, as well as by whatever theme she's working with in the moment. These have included fruits, vegetables, flowers, books, postage stamps, and sushi, among others.

“Every year I get interested in something,” she explains. “One year it was ice. I started freezing the little people inside ice cubes. And bubbles! I had a little egg beater and I was furiously churning up the bubbles in my sink, putting them around these tiny penguins. I had to work quickly.”

Other scenes require different feats of technological imagination: For a climber in a cavern, “I cut a bell pepper in half, then cut the back off of it. I put a tiny flashlight in the back so it looks like it's glowing.” (See page 2 for a photo of this piece.)

A favorite of hers — a trompe l'oeil beach scene — was created with cornmeal, dried beans, and bulgur wheat, with a puddle of olive oil for the water. An image called “Cabbage Sea” was inspired by the wavy ruffled leaves of a savoy cabbage: “It just looked like water. Then I had to figure out how to make boats.” (Pea pods, naturally.) “My goal in making the pictures is to make people feel good,” she says. “That's really as complicated as it gets.”

“But what's the pleasure of tiny for the viewer?” I ask her. I've read articles suggesting that it's a way for us to experience mastery over a miniature environment or that our love of cuteness evolved from the caretaking of babies. Neither of these quite captures the delight of Robinson-Cox's work — of tininess expanding to fill the frame.

She's not totally sure either, though she jokes it might be because she's 4-foot-11 herself. But really she thinks it has to do with the scale-shifting that comes with macro photography.

“When you look closely, the center of a sunflower is actually made up of tiny plants! And there are lots of similarities to the human body, cells, and the universe, the stars. It's very intriguing, a mystery.” A mystery, yes. And maybe something a little bit like magic. ©



Learn everything Cochran's been up to lately — and hear him sing and play guitar at s.uconn.edu/cochran.

A New Song

Winning UConn QB Casey Cochran '15 (CLAS) '17 MS left the game after suffering his thirteenth concussion. Not long ago, a chance encounter with a group of strangers at what was the venerable John's Café in Mystic set him on a new course. They told him about the restoration of the wooden ship the *Mayflower II*. Boats had never been a part of his life, but he signed on and "found some meaning in boatbuilding." He took to the work, the atmosphere, and the crew. "I learned the steaming process of planking. In that moment it brought me right back to what was good about football: a group of guys all on the same page." —STEVEN SLOSBERG

CLASS NOTES



➔ Proud alum **Roger Shatanof '56 (CLAS)** of Coral Gables, Florida, spreads UConn's fame throughout the state.



➔ After serving as a board director for six years, **Christopher P. Mottern '66 (BUS)** was appointed interim CEO of Farmer Bros. Co. His 40 years in the food and beverage industry include serving as CEO of Peet's Coffee & Tea and Capri Sun, Inc. and as president of The Heublein Wines Group. ➔ **Jacqueline Dembar Greene '67 (ED)** published her 41st YA novel, "Walk Till You Disappear," set in Arizona Territory in 1872. She began her writing career with the encouragement of Francelia Butler, who taught children's literature at UConn. Greene lives in Wayland, Massachusetts, with her husband, **Malcolm R. Greene '65 (CLAS)**.



➔ **Miriam Erick '70 (CLAS)**, of Boston, updated her manual "Take Two Crackers and Call Me in the Morning! A real-life guide for surviving morning sickness." Erick won the

Pyramid Award from the New England chapter of the American Medical Writers' Association in 1994 and an Award in Excellence from the American Dietetics Association Foundation for her work in prenatal nutrition. She covered the high-risk pregnancy unit at Brigham and Women's Hospital for more than 37 years. ➔ **Richard T. Minoff '75 (CLAS)**, an associate professor and director of the Undergraduate Business Program at the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia, received the University's William F. Homiller Award for Teaching Excellence. He is a member of UConn's Charles Lewis Beach Society. ➔ **Carl Labbe '75 (PHAR)** has retired after a long career in pharmacy that began when he hit the road after graduation in a VW Rabbit for a cross-country trip. He ended up in Arizona and stayed there. Initially, he managed Wastchak's Pharmacy and developed a variety of nonprescription products. Eventually, he became manager of the Student Health Center Pharmacy at Arizona State University. Later he became a pharmacy preceptor, adjunct faculty in the school of nursing, and a biology instructor. He also developed a collaborative smoking cessation practice. He and his wife, Kathryn, also a pharmacist, have two grown children. ➔ **Tom Morganti '76 (CAHNR)**, a veterinarian living and working in Avon, Connecticut, published a third YA novel, "In the Shadow of the Sun Dog." ➔ **Tom Jeffrey '76 (ENG)** became a Life Senior Member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers after retiring from a long career in aerospace and defense electrical engineering. He worked for seven years at the GE Aerospace Electronic Systems unit and 33 years at the Raytheon Company's

Integrated Defense Systems (IDS) division. Jeffrey was a systems architect and led a number of defense electronic systems developments. He specialized in radar systems primarily for surveillance and missile defense applications on land, sea, and air platforms for the U.S. Navy, Army, and Air Force. He has written two technical books and two music-related books. ➔ **David Scaccia '76 (CLAS)** was inaugurated as president of the Maine Osteopathic Association during its June 2019 convention in Rockport. Board certified by the American Board of Medical Specialties in occupational medicine and by the American Osteopathic Board of Family Physicians in family medicine, he practices as a private occupational medicine physician consultant in Kittery, Maine. ➔ **John McGrane '78 (ENG)** became a senior consultant for GEI, where he will help expand the company's flood management and municipal engineering practices across the eastern U.S. and elsewhere. McGrane spent more than 20 years in Hartford's Department of Public Works. ➔ **Michael J. Sweeney '79 MBA** is senior vice president, strategic vendor programs for the

Commercial Finance Division of TIAA Bank.



➔ **Marie George '81 (CAHNR, CLAS)** was elected vice president of the medical staff at Southwestern Vermont Medical Center, where she is an infectious disease specialist. ➔ **Isabel (Munat) Cole '82 (CLAS)** was appointed by Gov. Jay Inslee to Washington's Board of Industrial Insurance Appeals, the state agency that hears all workers' compensation claims. Cole spent 22 years as an air traffic controller and, during her last three and a half years, attended law school. After passing the bar, she represented injured workers. ➔ **Jeff Denman '82 MA** just retired from 34 years of teaching world geography and U.S. history in the public schools in Brookline, Massachusetts. He recently published a book "Greene and Cornwallis in the Carolinas: The Pivotal Battle of the American Revolution, 1780-1781." ➔ **Richard Goodwin Sr. '83 MBA** published "Running Life Matters; A Celebration of Running



➔ Naya, a 3-year-old Husky, was the flower girl at the recent wedding of her human companion **Michael Lyon '08 (CLAS)** to Corinna Edwards in Nashville, Tennessee.

and Life Connections,” a book that celebrates the community of runners, particularly lifelong runners. ➔ **Brian Sprague '84 (ENG)** joined MaxLinear Inc. as vice president and general manager for broadband and consumer products. He has worked in a variety of engineering and marketing roles at United Technologies Corp., LSI Logic Inc., and Broadcom Corp. ➔ **Joanne C. Crevoiserat '85 (BUS)** has been named CFO of Tapestry, Inc., a New York-based house of modern luxury accessories and lifestyle brands. She joins Tapestry from Abercrombie & Fitch and previously held senior finance positions with Kohl's Inc., Wal-Mart Stores, and May Department Stores. ➔ **Gary L. McGuirk '85 JD**, a private wealth advisor at Merrill Private Management, was named to *Barron's* Top 1,200 Advisors, *The Financial Times*' Top 400 Financial Advisors, and *Forbes*' Best-in-State Wealth Advisors lists. He joined Merrill in 2002. ➔ **Richard S. Martin '86 (BUS)** has joined RentPath as CFO. He had been CFO of Symphony Health Solutions. ➔ **Susan Cossette '86 (CLAS)**, '92 MA has been

named director of annual giving for the Breck School in Golden Valley, Minnesota. Founded in 1886 and rooted in Episcopal values, Breck is a pre-K to 12 college preparatory day school with more than 1,100 students. Cossette recently published her first collection of poems, “Peggy Sue Messed Up,” and is active in the Minneapolis arts community. ➔ **Stephen W. Aronson '87 JD**, a partner at Robinson & Cole, was awarded Volunteer of the Year by the Pro Bono Partnership. ➔ **Karen Avitabile '88 (CLAS)**, who majored in journalism at UConn, was appointed editor of *The Catholic Transcript*, a 175,000-circulation magazine for the Archdiocese of Hartford, which serves Hartford, New Haven, and Litchfield counties. ➔ **Jeanne Zulick Ferrulo's '88 (CLAS)**, recent children's book “Ruby in the Sky” made *The Washington Post* summer reading list. ➔ **David Waren '89 JD** is the new president and CEO of the Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford. He was vice president of regional operations and advancement for the Anti-Defamation League. ➔ **Ann Marie (Griskauskas) Hoffmaster**

'89 (CLAS) is director of human resources for Hertzbach & Co. She and her husband Brian live in Maryland with their children Meredith and Wyatt. ➔ **Reina Weiner '89 (BGS)** drew on her own experiences for her book “Trust Your Doctor . . . But Not That Much: Be Your Own Best Healthcare Advocate.”



➔ **Michael W. Glynn '91 (CLAS)**, '94 MS was named a partner in the New York City office of Fox Rothschild LLP. His practice centers on trade secret and patent litigation with a strong emphasis on pharmaceutical patents. ➔ **Robert H. Bateman Jr. '91 MBA** was named CFO and treasurer of Amerisure Mutual Insurance Co. He was CFO with Infinity Property & Casualty Corp. and held numerous leadership roles at The Hartford. ➔ **Thomas Huszar '92 (CLAS)** joined The Sullivan Law Firm as a partner in its New York City office. Huszar, who advises public and private businesses and high-net-worth individ-

uals on strategic and operational issues, earned a law degree from Washington University School of Law and an MBA from Washington University's Olin Business School. ➔ **Brian Wolf '92 (ENG)** joined Hatch Mott MacDonald in Holyoke, Massachusetts, as a principal project manager. ➔ **Marci (Castaldi) Hinton '93 (CLAS)**, an educator in the Waterbury public school district for 22 years, was selected as a 2019 Fund for Teachers Fellow. She and two colleagues attended a bespoke educator mindfulness training in Nepal to address student trauma related to a peer's murder and to facilitate emotional regulation and healing within the school community. ➔ **Rabih M. Barakat, '93 (ENG)**, '09 MBA, who works at the Connecticut Department of Transportation, was elected to the Connecticut Society of Civil Engineers. ➔ **Rob Carolla '94 (CLAS)** will head up communications for XFL Dallas after spending nearly 25 years as a sports administrator. He was president of the College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA), the national organization for communicators in college

athletics. During stints at the College Football 150th Anniversary, the Big 12 and Big East conferences, and Conference USA, he worked on national, regional, and local levels. ➔ **David Unger '95 (CAHNR)** is senior vice president responsible for developing renewable natural gas business projects at Foristar, LLC. He was director of renewable energy at Waste Management, where he oversaw the marketing and development of beneficial use landfill gas projects. ➔ **Jasmine Alcantara '95 (BUS)**, '99 MBA opened Jasmine Yoga, a New England-based health and wellness company. By pairing her pre-med degrees with 20 years of health industry experience, she created yoga and meditation programs for corporations, groups, and individuals. ➔ **Maryne Robin '96 MBA** was named vice president of operations for Absolute Logic and CyberGuard360. ➔ **David M. Silver '96 MSW** of West Hartford and his wife Hilary became grandparents to Saul Jonathan Langer, born in June in Washington, D.C., David was executive director of the UConn Hillel Foundation from 1990 to 1993. ➔ **Vincent Pace '98 JD**, '09 ML is assistant general counsel at Eversource Energy. His practice area includes state regulatory proceedings in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire. ➔ **Keith Moskowitz '98 JD** was named a Notable Gen X Leader in the Law by *Crain's Chicago Business*. He is a partner at Dentons law firm. ➔ **Elena S. Trueworthy '99 (BUS)** was named director of the Connecticut Head Start State Collaboration Office, which provides comprehensive early childhood education, health, nutrition, and patient involvement services to low-income children and

their families. ➔ **Robert E. Grady '99 JD** has joined Shipman & Goodwin's real estate practice group as a partner in the Hartford office. He was a founding partner of Logan Grady LLC in Rocky Hill, Connecticut.



➔ **Chris Calio '00 JD**, '00 MBA will be president of the Pratt & Whitney division of United Technologies, effective early 2020. He has served as president of Pratt & Whitney's commercial engines business since 2017. ➔ **Michael A. Rueda '01 (BUS)**, who heads up the U.S. sports and entertainment team at Withers international law firm, was just made partner. Rueda, who lives in Stamford, advises athletes and entertainment clients. ➔ **Lisa Holloway '02 MSW** is vice president of health services for The Kendal Corp., a senior living organization in Philadelphia. She had been vice president/administrator of health services at Duncaster, a retirement community in Bloomfield, Connecticut. ➔ **Stephen Davis '02 (BUS)** of Burlington, Massachusetts, is principal in the healthcare practice at executive search firm WittKieffer. ➔ **Joseph R. Sowin '02 (BUS)** is co-chief investment officer of Highland Capital Management LP, where he oversees investment activities for the firm's multi-billion-dollar alternative investment platform. ➔ **Shawn M. Bowman '02 (BUS)** is president of the Wound Care Division of Sanara MedTech in Fort Worth, Texas. He has spent 18 years in the medical device, biologics, and pharmaceutical industries. ➔ **Alexander Hanna '03 (BUS)** is assistant principal of Cloonan Middle School in



TRAJECTORY

A Million Miles in His Shoes

When Javier Macias '05 (CLAS) graduated with a journalism degree the job market was bleak. Though the Torrington, Connecticut, native aspired to be a sportswriter, he found himself in marketing, handing out Zippo lighters in loud bars to patrons willing to give him their email addresses. It wasn't what he pictured for himself, but it was a job.

Within months, he was promoted. Two years later he had landed at the hotshot, global public relations agency Golin, in Chicago. There Macias worked with famous athletes like international soccer pro Clint Dempsey and went to the men's World Cup in South Africa. When the agency signed on Adidas, Macias led a marketing campaign for the sportswear giant's Derrick Rose basketball line.

In 2015 Macias said goodbye to Chicago to join Adidas in Germany in global public relations roles that took him to six of the seven continents, including to the track and field world championships in Beijing. This March, after five-plus years in Germany, Macias packed up all his Adidas gear and moved to Portland, Oregon, to become the company's director of U.S. public relations. He won't travel nearly as much in his new post, which he says he will miss, but he's ready for a new challenge — a big one, he says. —AMY SUTHERLAND

Stamford. ➔ **Mohan Nair Manoj Kumar '04 MS**, '06 Ph.D. is senior staff scientist at LexaGene Holding Inc., a biotech company that develops instrumentation for pathogen detection. He was at Beckman Coulter Molecular Diagnostics and at Roche Molecular Systems. ➔ **D. Zachary Champ '05 (CLAS)** is chief of staff of the Federal Communications

Commission's Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau. Zac was vice president of government affairs at the Wireless Infrastructure Association. He and his wife Jane live in Washington, D.C., ➔ **Phillip Yu '05 MS** received the 3M Lean Six Sigma Green Belt Excellence Award and the Espirit Team Award for 2018. He was responsible for

MAKING GOOD

Jess Kelly Wants Women to Run

The first class Jess Kelly '08 (CLAS) took at UConn was women's studies. And now, as the centennial of the 19th Amendment approaches, she is chief of staff at Running Start, a Washington, D.C., nonprofit that has trained more than 15,000 young women to run for public office — and 90% of those who have run, have won. “I feel very strongly about inclusion and making sure that everybody has a voice and feels welcome at the table,” says Kelly, who has trained women in 21 states, Mexico, and Jamaica. She works with high school and college women running for student government and young women seeking all levels of public office. At UConn she trained Molly Rockett '15 (CLAS) who, as a 20-year-old student in 2013, won a school board seat in her hometown of Somers, Connecticut. —TOM KERTSCHER



Photos courtesy of Jess Kelly (left); courtesy of Javier Macias (above)



Courtesy of Future City

MAKING GOOD

BUILDING FUTURES

At a small school in central Pennsylvania, Michael Smith '08 MS has built a national powerhouse. Eight regional titles in thirteen years. Six top-15 finishes in the national rankings. The 2019 national championship.

Football? Basketball? Try engineering.

A gifted support teacher at Lancaster County's Warwick Middle School, Smith guides a crew of seventh and eighth graders in the annual Future City competition, which challenges students to conceive, research, design, and build scale models of sustainable communities. For this year's timely theme, Powering our Future, kids had to come up with power grids capable of withstanding natural disasters.

Competition is fierce, with some 40,000 children representing 1,500 schools from around the U.S., as well as teams from Canada and China. Fewer than 50 make it to the finals in Washington, D.C., each February. Science academies and STEM magnet schools are disproportionately represented.

"That's what we're up against," says Smith. "I'm just so proud of my kids

and their achievement." He attributes Warwick's remarkable success in part to the training he received while getting his master's degree in gifted education at UConn's Neag School of Education.

"I have never had an engineering class in my life," says Smith, who began his career as a social studies teacher. "I learned how to think, how to compete, and how to win an engineering competition thanks to UConn."

In his own classroom, Smith constantly looks for ways to make learning dynamic for his students. Future City is one. The cross-curricular nature of the competition provides an ideal platform for collaboration. Applied math and science, public speaking, project management, effective technical writing, and blue-sky idea generation all come into play as students design, build, and present their models.

"You need your artists, you need your electrical technicians, you need your computer programmers, you need your presenters who will explain the project to the judges," he says. "No one person can do this. Everyone has to draw on their creativity and critical

The Warwick Middle School team after winning the 2019 Future City competition in Washington, D.C., with teacher Michael Smith '08 MS (back row, second from left).

thinking and problem-solving abilities as they work together. It's like a perfect compendium of essential 21st-century skills."

For the 2019 Future City campaign, the 25-member-strong Warwick team had to learn as much as it could about modern energy infrastructure. The students' research led them to the chief resiliency officer of Toyama, a flood-prone coastal city on Japan's main island of Honshu. During a Skype session with the class, he explained some of the ways Toyama protects its power grid from natural disasters. The kids then imagined what sorts of carbon-neutral technologies the city might employ 100 years from now.

"We would all sit down around a table and just throw out ideas and bounce things off each other," says Grace Kegel, a seventh-grader who was one of Warwick's three presenters in Washington. "I'd be lying if I said that these table talks didn't often end in small arguments that had to be settled."

Among the solutions the team came up with were solar roadways, hybrid hydroelectric-nuclear fusion power generation, and embedded power lines. They then built an elaborate 50-by-25-inch model to showcase their ideas.

Constructed over the course of hundreds of hours on mornings, afternoons, and weekends throughout the fall, the final product was a thing of beauty. Along with lovingly detailed, snowcapped mountains and flowering cherry trees, the students incorporated a magnetic transportation system and a sophisticated LED display that illustrated the complex power grid they'd designed. The pièce de résistance was a fast-flowing river whose floodwaters, discharged by a pump hidden in the model's base, were diverted into underground collection tanks.

"We would talk about the design, draw it, and work on it, cutting, drilling,

and soldering," says eighth-grader Xavier Flaiz. Part of the team responsible for designing the model's moving parts, he loved how the project rewarded creative problem-solving. "It was like a puzzle," he says, "but more hands-on and very fun."

Smith has seen plenty of models over the years, and he knew his team had outdone itself with Toyama. After breezing through the central Pennsylvania regional, Warwick arrived in Washington for the four-day national competition feeling hopeful. Still, Smith advised the crew to try to relax and not get ahead of themselves. Against a deep and talented field studied with five past winners, including the defending national champion, there could be no guarantees. Which made it that much sweeter when Warwick was called to receive the victor's trophy.

"When we won it felt like proof that the future is going to be okay," says Grace. "We took a city and we made it better. We had the chance to design the city of our dreams, a place that everyone would love to live in and that could withstand all and any obstacles that it was faced with."

"The kids are already meeting on Sundays to plan for next year," Smith reports. "And we don't even know what the theme is yet!" —KEVIN MARKEY

UPDATE



Ken Classen

Sarah Thomas Sets Another World Record

We told you about Sarah Thomas '04 (CLAS) in our Summer 2018 issue after the former UConn swimmer's many marathon swims and world records resulted in her induction into the International Marathon Swimming Hall of Fame. She told us then that her next feat would be to attempt an 84-mile, four-way crossing of the English Channel, something that had never been done before. Well, it's been done now. On September 17, Thomas, a breast cancer survivor, became the first person to swim across the Channel four times without stopping. It took 54 hours. Congrats, Sarah!

Find more online at s.uconn.edu/swim.

VHB tapes and primers as senior product engineer in the Industrial Adhesives and Tapes Division. ➔ **David Agrawal '05 (CLAS)** is associate professor with tenure in the Martin School of Public Policy and the Department of Economics at the University of Kentucky. ➔ **Matthew Fitzsimmons '05 JD** has joined the law firm of Shipman & Goodwin as a partner. He will be a part of the state attorneys general and data privacy and protection practice groups. He was U.S. privacy officer and lead cybersecurity counsel at Cigna Corp. ➔ **Matthew Biron '06**

(CAHNR) and **Caitlyn Willox-Biron '06 (CLAS)** welcomed their daughter Ruby in October 2018. ➔ **Natalie Wagner '06 JD** was named interim director of the Connecticut Bar Foundation, a non-profit that provides grants to legal agencies who work for communities that could not otherwise afford it. She was counsel to former Connecticut Gov. Dannel Malloy and counsel at the Shipman & Goodwin law firm. ➔ **Liliana Alexandra Carlson '06 (NURS)** graduated from Quinnipiac University in May with a Doctor of Nursing Practice

degree. She works at Yale-New Haven Hospital and lives in Derby, Connecticut, with her husband Matt, their children Nathan and Lily, and their dog Bailey. ➔ **William A. Powers '06 JD** has joined Nossaman LLP in Washington, D.C., as a partner in the firm's public policy practice group focused on political law and campaign finance issues. ➔ **Kristina Allen Reliford '07 (BUS)** joined Bradley Arant Boult Cummings as an associate in the litigation practice group in Nashville, Tennessee. Her practice includes complex contract disputes, fraud, trade secret

misappropriation, and securities and government investigation matters. She was a senior associate at Kelley Drye & Warran LLP in New York. ➔ As president of Omni Food Sales in New York, **Zak Romanoff '07 (CLAS)** found he was getting a lot of requests to talk to media outlets about the food industry. So he started the podcast "The Brand Advocate." ➔ **Dawit Zeweldi '08 MS, '10 Ph.D.** joined Freese and Nichols Inc. as a stormwater engineer in Dallas. Zeweldi, who has 20 years experience in water resources planning, design,

LIFE LESSONS

**STRESSED?
BE STOIC**

Some people when stressed ask: What would Jesus do? or What would Luke Skywalker do? Massimo Pigliucci '94 Ph.D. asks: What would Epictetus do?

Pigliucci believes the teachings of ancient Stoic philosophers like Epictetus can help us temper our response to the everyday tensions of life. In "A Handbook for New Stoics: How to Thrive in a World Out of Your Control," he provides 52 weekly lessons applying the teachings to modern life.

Although he credits stoicism with alleviating the daily stressors of his personal, public, and social life, Pigliucci hasn't always been a Stoic — or even a philosopher. After getting his doctorate under Carl Schlichting, head of the Ecology and Evolutionary Biology (EEB) Department at UConn, he became an assistant professor in EEB at the University of Tennessee, where he made significant contributions to the field and even won the Theodosius Dobzhansky Prize for outstanding young evolutionary biologist.

Then "I had a midlife crisis of sorts," he says. "The year I turned 40, I got divorced and my father died. So I started feeling that, professionally, I needed to do something else." Hence, graduate school for philosophy — which he considers one of the best decisions of his life.

But that's not what brought him to Stoicism. Twitter did. He saw a "Help us celebrate Stoic Week!" tweet, decided to try it out, and was so impressed that he wrote "How to Be a Stoic" about his experience while on sabbatical in Italy.

So how can Epictetus and company help us today? When his own world turns stressful, Pigliucci often turns to one of the fundamental principles of stoicism: Some things are up to us, and some things aren't. Epictetus says that a good life is one in which you focus on the first category and ignore the second



The key to personal modern happiness, says Pigliucci, just might be found in the ancient Greco-Roman philosophy of Stoicism — which he discovered on Twitter.

one — or at least try to develop as much of an attitude of equanimity toward the second as is humanly possible.

For Pigliucci, a recent test involved his friends and family in Italy. "There is a northern Italian separatist movement called Lega that's essentially a xenophobic group of people. It pains me to see Italy in that situation and it pains me even more because some of my own relatives are on board." The Stoics believed that nobody does evil on purpose; they're simply misguided. Pigliucci realized that engaging in discussions with family on Facebook, for example, was futile. "I tried several

"Some things are up to us, and some things aren't."

times, and it wasn't going anywhere," he says. "But these are good people, they're just mistaken, so why would I want to ruin my relationship with them?"

Pigliucci realizes most people accept

the first Stoic principle of focusing on the things within our control as opposed to those beyond our control, even if they find it difficult in practice — after all, it shares the basic premise of the famous Serenity Prayer penned by the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." Pigliucci also realizes that not everyone will agree with the Stoic idea that a friend or family member posting bigoted ideas is simply a misguided person whom they must bear with magnanimity — and he's okay with that.

"Stoicism is simply one of a number of options that are available," Pigliucci says, "and which one clicks with you depends on a number of things, like your predispositions, how you grew up, your culture. It may even depend on your stage in life. I don't think that Stoicism is the only answer, but it certainly is a good answer."

Spoken like a true philosopher. And Stoic. —STEVE NEUMANN

Cultivate Your Legacy

When you make a planned gift to the University of Connecticut, you help guide UConn's future and build your own personal legacy.

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Pete Sepe '76 MS and his wife, Carol Sepe '78 MA, retired teachers and owners of Sepe Farm in Sandy Hook, Connecticut, have made a planned gift to ensure that UConn's Teacher Preparation in Agriculture Education program thrives and grows well into the future. The program trains prospective agriculture education teachers, who will serve in schools across Connecticut, the Northeast, and other states to inspire future generations of students to pursue careers in agriculture, food, and the environment.



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Submissions may be edited for clarity or length.

and implementation, earned his bachelor's in irrigation engineering from Arba Minch Water Technology Institute in Ethiopia prior to coming to UConn.

➔ **Salay Stannard '09 (ENG), '13 MS** is materials engineering manager at Joining Technologies, Inc., an innovator in industrial laser applications. ➔ **Michael Cohen '09 Ph.D.** is senior vice president and chief data science and analytics officer at Marketing Evolution, a provider of marketing measurement and optimization solutions. He was at Oath: Data Products and on the faculty at New York University's Stern School of Business.

➔ **Ryan DiLeo '09 (BUS), '10 MS** married Meghan Willen in May. They live in Orlando, where they tell us they are starting a family.



➔ **Noelle Lara Horelik '10 (CLAS)**, a TV writer for Dreamworks, is working on a kids' animated comedy set for Netflix this fall. For

two seasons she was host of Amazon Prime/Science Channel's "Science Works," an educational series showcasing how science, technology, engineering, and math are applied to real-life careers. ➔ **Maya (Merson) Shagas '10 (BUS)** published "Numbers Game: The Practical Guide to Getting the Job You Deserve," a book on recruiting, hiring, interviewing, and entering the workforce. ➔ **Emily Kozak '10 (BUS)** and **Chris Halloran '10 (CLAS)** tied the knot in May in Charleston, South Carolina. They met sophomore year at Hilltop Suites, where they lived on opposite sides of the same floor. They reconnected after college and, after living in Manhattan and Brooklyn, relocated to Charlotte, North Carolina. Among the Huskies at the wedding were **Ariel Grossman Winkley '10 (BUS)**, **Rebecca Levine Hadfield '11 (BUS)**, **Lisa Mutnick '10 (CLAS)**, **Ilana Eides '11 (BUS)**, **Lyndsey Sonkin '10 (NURS)**, **Jennifer Pagano '10 (CLAS)**, **Matt Bahr '10 (CLAS)**, **Pat Swidler '10 (CLAS)**, **Mike McManus '10 (CLAS)**, **Michael Dealy '10 (BUS)**, **Blake O'Brien '09 (CLAS)**, **Lukasz Dec '11 (CLAS)**, **Kate Halloran '07 (CLAS)**, and **Adam Porter-Price '06 (CLAS)**. They certainly bleed blue! ➔ **Emmanuel Omokaro '11 (ED)** was named ESPN's Volunteer of the Year. As team leader for BuildOn he helped raise nearly \$40,000 to build a school in Senegal, and went to Senegal to oversee the construction. In Chad he and friends built water pumps to get clean water to

people. He was also involved in hurricane relief efforts in Houston and in the U.S. Virgin Islands and will be heading to Guatemala later this year for another school build. ➔ **Michael Chase '11 JD** published "How to Become a Federal Criminal," illustrating bizarre and outdated federal laws, most rarely or never enforced. He is an associate at Shipman & Goodwin LLP in Hartford and owner of the @CrimeADay Twitter account. ➔ **Kyle Campbell '12 (CLAS)** is director of game day entertainment with the New Orleans Saints. He says the football team was ranked #1 in game day entertainment and overall game day satisfaction in the NFL for the 2018 season. He oversees all entertainment in the Mercedes Benz Superdome, including the national anthem singers, color guard, halftime entertainment, player introductions, music, and PA announcements. ➔ **Samantha (D'Angelo) Wiegel '12 (SFA, ED)** received an MA in teaching in May from Sacred Heart University, where she won the 2019 Outstanding Master's Degree Award. ➔ **Ryan V. Powell '13 (CLAS), '18 JD** is an associate in the workers' compensation practice group at Goldberg Segalla's Hartford office. ➔ **Salman H. Al-Zayani '15 Ph.D.** won the Medical Award for Excellence in Community Medicine 2018 from the Venus International Foundation in Chennai, India. ➔ **Elizabeth Crowley '13 (CLAS)** and **Kevin Scheller '13 (CLAS)** married on Dec. 15, 2018, in Mystic, Connecticut, six years after meeting at *The Daily Campus*. The wedding party

was packed with Huskies, including **Lindsay Kovacic Schaffer '13 (BUS)** and **Will Schaffer '12 (BUS)**, **Kimberly Wilson Fillion '14 (CLAS)**, **Shreena Desai '13 (ENG)**, **Jacob Orbach-Smith '16 (CLAS)**, and **Caroline Dunn**. They moved to Sacramento, where Elizabeth is digital strategist for Toni Atkins, California state senate president pro tem. ➔ **Igers Vangjeli '15, LLM, '17 JD** was hired by Cordell & Cordell, a litigation firm that represents men in family law cases, in their Independence, Missouri, office. He says he is drawn to family law because it lets him help families through a difficult time. ➔ **Juanita Austin '16 (SFA)** launched Cultured AF, an arts and culture lifestyle brand. She also opened Cultured Studios, an arts and social lounge that features visual and performing arts, in New London. ➔ **Leo S. Lo '17 MA** is associate dean for learning, undergraduate services, and Commonwealth Campus Libraries at Penn State. ➔ **Joseph P. Mortelliti '17 JD** joined Kahan Kerensky Capossela LLP as an associate in the firm's real estate, litigation, and land use departments. ➔ **Emily Forauer '18 (CAHNR, CLAS)** was named the first David Theno Food Safety Fellow by Stop Foodborne Illness during the annual conference of the International Association for Food Protection. The fellowship honors Theno's work by promoting food safety education and by helping students pursuing careers in food safety. She will be working with Stop Foodborne Illness in Chicago.

Peter Morenus



JOB ENVY

Swiss Miss

If you happen to be driving through the junction of Routes 44 and 202 in Canton, Connecticut, between April and November, you might want to tap the brakes and give a yodel or two as you pass the Matterhorn Mini Golf Course. Better still, pull in and say hi to **Autumn (Backman) Sutherland '91 (CLAS)**. She owns the place, and if you tell her you're a UConn grad, she might even introduce you to her dog, a Coton de Tulear named Mulligan, while she shares some secrets about the course she designed. A former world-traveling "governess and accidental actress," Sutherland ended up creating a Swiss-themed mini-golf course when the site it's on, an iconic property then in disrepair, went up for sale in her hometown. Why mini-golf and why the Swiss theme? "I can never explain exactly where my ideas come from," says Sutherland, "but our culture tends to put people on superhighways and the focus is almost always on staying on track toward a single goal. I prefer to take the byways, to keep all my options open, and to go where my brain tells me to go." The family attraction she lovingly created and tends has received glowing reviews since its 2015 opening. It was named one of the top ten miniature golf courses in America by *USA Today* in 2016, the 100th anniversary of the founding of miniature golf, and one of *Yankee Magazine's* Editor's Choices for Connecticut attractions in 2017. With a sense of whimsy and attention to every detail, the Matterhorn's tricky yet fun holes are accompanied by informational signs covering everything from the history of Swiss banking to the number of cows in the country (1.5 million). There's even one named "Atom Blaster" designed to evoke images of the Hadron Collider — the research facility where physicists test their theories of particle physics. And at the end of your 18 holes? There's Swiss Swirl ice cream to top off your visit. — *SHEILA FORAN '83 (BGS), '96 PH.D.*

➔ To see more of the course and hear how Sutherland gets her ideas, go to s.uconn.edu/minigolf.

IN MEMORIAM

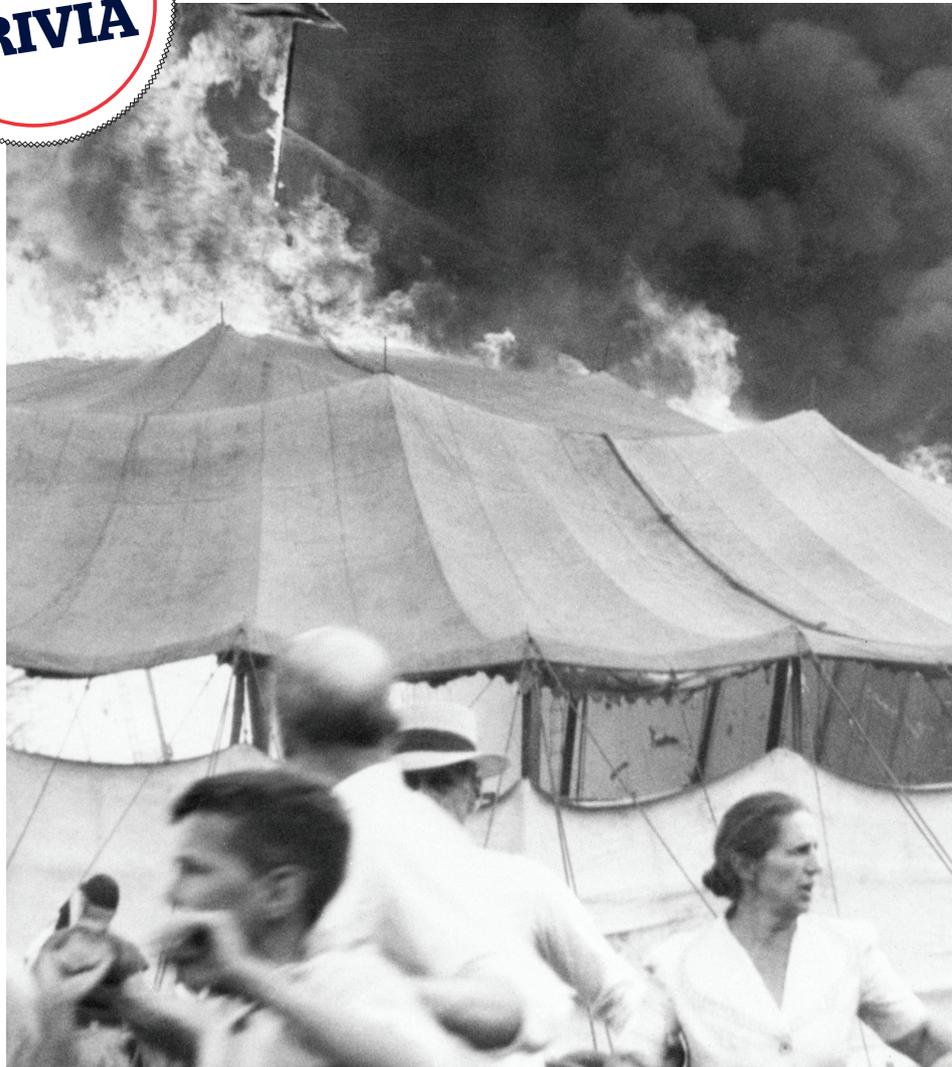
Please visit s.uconn.edu/octobits2019 to find obituaries for alumni and faculty. And please share news of alumni deaths and obituaries with *UConn Magazine* by sending an email to alumni-news@uconnalumni.com or writing to Alumni News & Notes, UConn Foundation, 2384 Alumni Drive Unit 3053, Storrs, CT 06269.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF TO TOM'S TRIVIA!

Go to s.uconn.edu/fall19trivia to see if you know as much as King of UConn Trivia Tom Breen '00 (CLAS).

TOM'S TRIVIA

1. Until 1985, when Connecticut raised the drinking age to 21, UConn operated an on-campus bar in the Student Union that was a focal point of social activity. What was its name?
A: The Trumbull Pub
B: The Thirsty Husky
C: The Anonymous Pub
D: The Blue and White Tavern
2. In UConn's history, plenty of bars, coffee houses, and restaurants have sprung up near campus to cater to students. Which of these was *not* among those establishments?
A: The Nine-Foot Drop
B: Wizard's
C: Blood & Bones
D: Schmedley's
3. In 1984, author Stephen King visited Storrs, not to terrify students but to campaign on behalf of a presidential candidate. Who was it?
A: Ronald Reagan
B: Gary Hart
C: Walter Mondale
D: Jesse Jackson
4. During the deadly Hartford circus fire of 1944, a 13-year-old boy cut a slit in the tent canvas, allowing scores of people to escape. UConn rewarded him with what honor?
A: A scholarship named in his honor
B: A plaque near Gulley Hall
C: A full undergraduate scholarship for him
D: both A and C



After 75 years, the legacy of Hartford's deadly circus fire is still felt at UConn in many ways. Read all about it at uconn.edu/fire.