

# UConn

MAGAZINE

SUMMER 2021

## FINALLY!

They commenced.  
The classes of 2020  
*and* 2021 gathered at  
The Rent and made  
UConn history.



### In This Issue:

FEEDING THE WORLD  
AND WINNING THE  
NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

TURNING YOUR  
CHILDHOOD OBSESSION  
INTO A HIT PODCAST

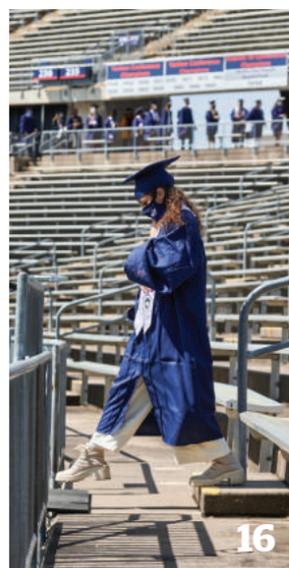
BECOMING THE FIRST  
BLACK AMERICAN TO CLIMB  
THE SEVEN SUMMITS



**SNAP!**

### **Husky Home Base**

The new Husky Athletic Village and Rizza Performance Center includes from right: Elliot Ballpark, home of UConn baseball; Joseph J. Morrone Stadium, home of UConn soccer and lacrosse; Burrill Family Field, home of UConn softball; and shared practice fields. All were in good use this spring, along with indoor facilities, as pandemic rescheduling meant that all 18 UConn sports were actively practicing at the same time.



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The alum who's the longtime girlfriend of The Grouch on "Sesame Street;" an alum whose photos adorn new postage stamps; and so many nurses to thank and admire. Plus Class Notes, Tom's Trivia, and much more.



UConn Magazine  
VOL. 22 NO. 2

UConn Magazine is produced three times a year (Spring, Summer, and Fall) by University Communications, University of Connecticut.

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**Correction** In the Spring 2021 issue we stated that Miguel Cardona '01 MA, '04 6th Year, '11 Ed.D., '12 ELP was the first UConn alum to hold a Cabinet-level position in the White House. He is the first Secretary of Education, but the second Cabinet member.

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**Table of Contents** Peter Morenus (2); Courtesy of American Girls podcast; WFP Media; Aliza Eliazarov '95 (CAHNR)  
**From the Editor** Courtesy of Christa Yung and Julie Bartucca '10 (BUS, CLAS), '19 MBA

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FROM THE EDITOR



UConn Magazine's art director Christa Yung with her Kirsten doll, circa 2000 (left), and writer Julie Bartucca with her Samantha doll, circa 2021.

ALL DOLLED UP

The pictures above are testament to the truth behind the answer art director Christa Yung gave me when I asked her why she was so excited to work with writer, colleague, and friend Julie Bartucca '10 (BUS, CLAS), '19 MBA on the American Girls podcast story that begins on page 26. "I know she has a deep nostalgic connection to American Girl dolls like I do — and Julie and I are similar in that we're not embarrassed of our dorky pasts and our continued interest



in history. To me, American Girl dolls have always been about the historical backstory, not just the doll." Yung particularly loved her Kirsten doll for the Western frontier backstory that played out in corresponding Kirsten books about American pioneer life. Bartucca remembers reading about the women's suffrage movement in books about Samantha, the early 1900's-era doll she recalls getting for Christmas at age 8 or 9. "Reading these books, playing with the dolls, looking at the catalog time after time and circling what I hoped to get, finding patterns for doll clothes that my Grammie could make for me, and consuming the other tangential American Girl stuff was a big part of my childhood," says Bartucca. As it turns out, her aunt Patrice (McCarthy) Attolino '87 (SFS) had saved Samantha from tag sale oblivion, knowing her niece might want to pass the doll on to the next generation. And none too soon. As we went to press, Bartucca was due to give birth to her first child in a matter of weeks. And just weeks *before* press time, Yung's first child, Eugene Oliver (above), came into the world, helped along by two graduates of the UConn School of Nursing.

Find a tribute to more of our nursing alums on page 40, and please don't miss the story Bartucca penned about the American Girl zeitgeist — it's a great read whether you lived the trend like she did or never heard of the dolls before today.

*Lisa T. Stiepock*



## LETTERS

We want to hear from you — good, bad, just not ugly. Please share thoughts, insights, discrepancies, recollections, and how's your Tom's Trivia win-loss percentage coming? Post to our website at [magazine.uconn.edu](http://magazine.uconn.edu), email me at [lisa.stiepock@uconn.edu](mailto:lisa.stiepock@uconn.edu), or send by regular mail to *UConn Magazine Letters*, 34 N. Eagleville Rd., Storrs, CT 06268-3144.

Here's a letter sampling, edited for fit, from our last issue. Find more at [magazine.uconn.edu](http://magazine.uconn.edu).

### Dee Rowe

▶▶ Thank you for your effort to keep UConn in contact with all alumni. This issue was particularly important to me. Coming from Meriden, the article on Miguel Cardona was special. Even more important was the recognition you gave to my friend Dee Rowe. Ronald J. Meoni '55 (BUS), Warwick, Rhode Island, via e-mail

▶▶ I second your motion noting Dee Rowe as one of the "Good People" at UConn. My dad was also a friend of Dee, and he was a key reason I am a proud UConn graduate. Greg Bartels '82 (BUS), Tewksbury, New Jersey, via e-mail

▶▶ I met Coach Rowe in the spring of 1969; I was part of his first recruiting class. He was a good and decent man who loved his family, his players, and

the game of basketball. His primary objective in life was reaching out to help people. He leaves behind that wonderful legacy. Rich Begen '73 (CLAS), Boston, Massachusetts, via our website

### Do Good, Feel Good

▶▶ I always enjoy reading the *UConn Magazine*. I must say I was really disappointed in the last edition. I am amazed that you did not include a representative from the nursing profession in this "Do Good" edition. Nurses have been heroes in this pandemic; accolades have been offered throughout the country for front line health care workers, especially nurses. I've been leading a hospice team through this pandemic; it's been the most challenging year of my long professional career. Maureen Groden '90 MS, Southampton, Massachusetts, via e-mail

▶▶ What a joy to read this narrative of Professor Marilyn (Waniek) Nelson. I was just a bright-eyed kid when I enrolled in her class. I still have my journal and Marilyn's critiques of some of my poems. When I wrote about a Nostradamus quatrain that year, foretelling the "King of Terror," she wrote an imaginary note to me from the future, placed in New York City, saying how wonderful it is that we're all still here. How wonderful indeed. Peace. Chester Dalzell '83 (CLAS), New York, New York, via our website

▶▶ Richie Mutts is inspirational; he opens up his heart to let others dive in. We need more people like him. Suzie Arildsen, via our website

▶▶ I'm even cute in cartoon form. Jonathan the Husky, Storrs, Connecticut, via Instagram

## SOCIAL MEDIA



Congrats to @uconntfxc 🏆 @bigeast Men's Champions and Women's Runner Up! #BleedBlue



Honoring #UConn21 🏡❤️ @UConn HorsebarnHill



If you missed the announcement last week our building has reopened!! Thursday through Sunday 11am-7pm - welcome back Dairy Bar fans!! 🍦 shoutout to @fuelinghuskies

## ON CAMPUS

# UConn Health CEO Selected as University's Interim President



© Paul Horton

Dr. Andrew Agwunobi, UConn Health's CEO and a highly respected leader with strong medical, academic, and business credentials, has been selected to serve as UConn's interim president after President Thomas Katsouleas announced he would step down on July 1.

A pediatrician by training who also holds an MBA, Agwunobi will be the first physician and the first person of color to lead the University.

After his appointment was announced on May 19, Agwunobi said that UConn's most critical near-term priority is successfully reopening at nearly full capacity this fall, and that while much has been accomplished to achieve that goal, much more work is

ahead. He also pledged that other critical missions under way at UConn will continue unabated, such as creating a new long-term academic strategic plan, growing research and innovation, expanding student access to mental health care, affordability, and many others.

"Having been here in Connecticut at UConn Health for several years, I know how much UConn means to the people of this state and our faculty, staff, students, and alumni everywhere. For many, I know UConn is more than just an educational institution or an employer, but an important part of their lives and their personal histories. It is fundamentally part of our identity

as a state," Agwunobi says.

"UConn also of course plays a vital role in fueling Connecticut's economy and its workforce. And we know we are not just graduating workers; we are graduating citizens, leaders, thinkers, and innovators of the future for Connecticut and beyond. Given these high stakes, all of us who are fortunate enough to be here are driven — and I certainly am driven — to do all we can to ensure the continued success of this institution as we carry out its mission in Storrs, in Farmington, and on each of our regional campuses and beyond," he says.

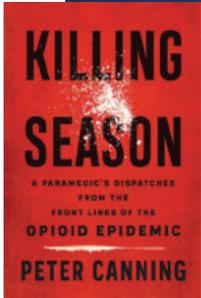
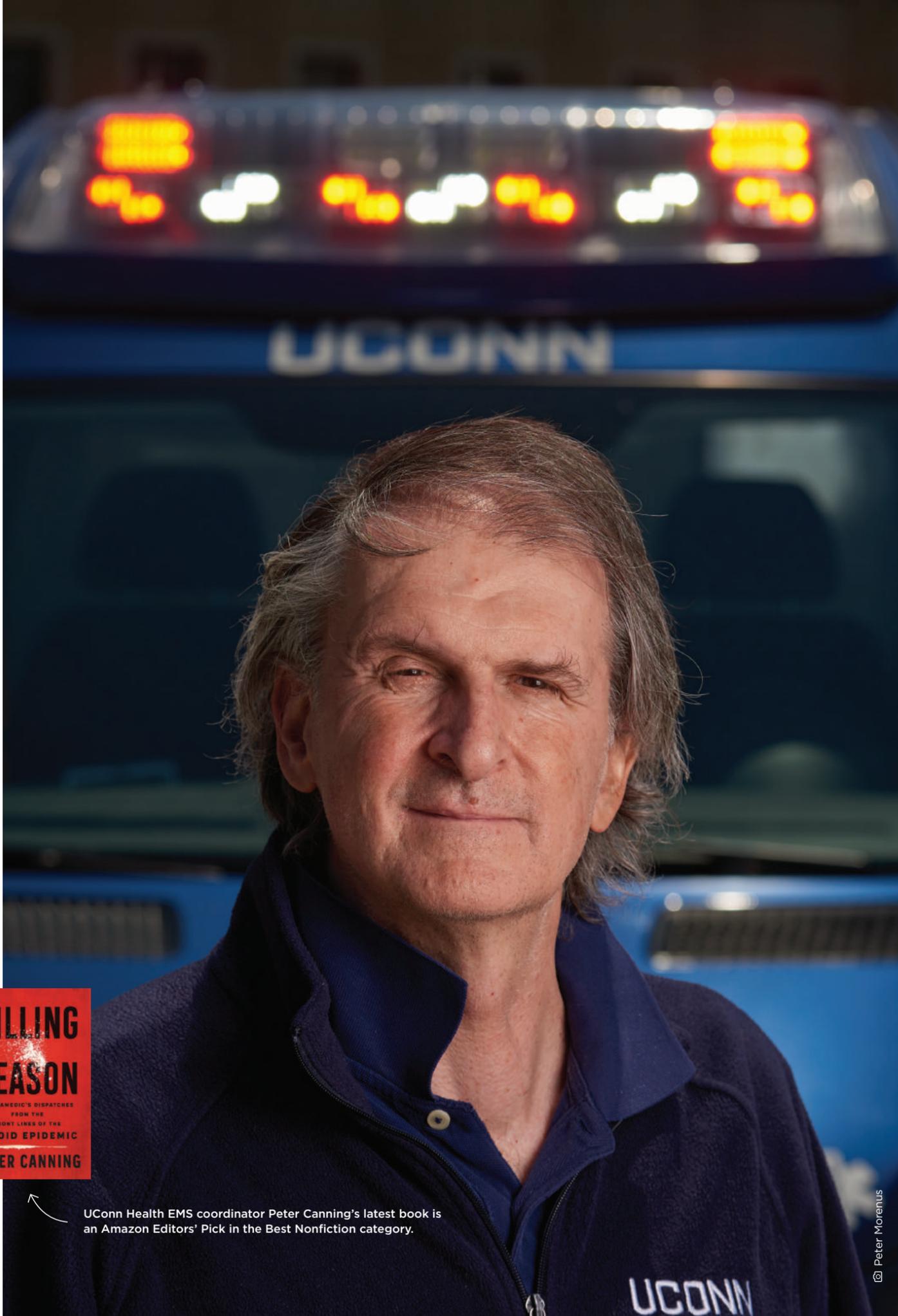
### Dr. Andy

In his time as CEO of UConn Health, Agwunobi, colloquially known to many as "Dr. Andy," grew clinical revenue an average of 10 percent per year; led a comprehensive turnaround that improved operational and financial performance by tens of millions of dollars; and oversaw \$800 million in construction. He also oversaw the successful implementation of the \$100 million Electronic Medical Record installation; partnered with deans in hiring more than 60 new faculty per year for the past three years; and led the "One UConn" strategy at UConn Health, centralizing shared functions across campuses.

"Anyone who has worked with him or watched him guide that institution forward, particularly through the last 15 months of Covid, has seen a master class in leadership," says chairman of the UConn Board of Trustees, Daniel Toscano. "He is bold when boldness is needed, cautious when caution is the wisest choice, and methodical in all things."

The University plans to undertake a search for President Katsouleas' permanent replacement, but does not plan to start that process in the near term.

—STEPHANIE REITZ



UConn Health EMS coordinator Peter Canning's latest book is an Amazon Editors' Pick in the Best Nonfiction category.

© Peter Morenus

CHECKING IN WITH

## DOUBLE JEOPARDY

UConn Health EMS coordinator Peter Canning brings a unique perspective to emergency care. When not overseeing pre-hospital services for the expansive system, he serves as a paramedic himself with 25 years of experience in Hartford. "Sometimes I'll read a report and wonder why a paramedic did something a certain way. And then I'll be out there the next week and it's like, 'Okay, now I know.' It's a different level of understanding." One other hat he wears is author. A graduate of the prestigious University of Iowa Writer's Workshop and a former speechwriter for U.S. Senator and Connecticut Governor Lowell Weicker, Canning is the author of five books, most recently "Killing Season" from Johns Hopkins University Press. Named an Amazon Editors' Pick for nonfiction, it takes readers on a ride-along through the street-level devastation of America's opioid epidemic.

**How has the Covid pandemic affected your work?** I didn't realize how stressed I had been until I got vaccinated. One hard part in the beginning was that we didn't have very many masks. We went out on calls and asked patients three questions: Do you have a fever? Do you have a cough? Have you recently visited China? And if they said no, we didn't use a mask. Then we'd arrive in the ER and everybody's in space suits.

**Many people barely left home for groceries. But EMS had to be out in the streets in constant close contact with patients.** It got a lot better once we had more equipment. But I'm 6'8" and putting on the full body suits was like the Incredible Hulk. One arm would rip off, the other would tear away. But the PPE works. It has protected us. And being vaccinated is even better.

**Meanwhile, a second epidemic continues to rage. In "Killing Season" you write about how your view of opioid users has shifted over your time on the job.** When I started as a paramedic in 1995, we would see a certain number of heroin overdoses. I couldn't understand how somebody could put into their body something that could kill them. Then the number of overdoses began to visibly increase, and I started asking people what was going on. Why are you doing this? The stories they told me were extremely similar: I was injured in a car accident; I tore my shoulder playing football and the doctor gave

me oxycodone; skateboard injury; fell off a ladder. Just over and over.

**One of the stories you tell involves a high school cheerleader.** I got called one day to a motor vehicle accident and found a car up against a pole. A young woman was slumped over the steering column, but you could see that it hadn't been a high-speed collision. Then I spotted heroin paraphernalia in the front seat. I was able to reverse the overdose with naloxone [Narcan], and she came around. I asked her how she started using. She said, "I broke my back cheerleading." And I remembered being there. I had taken the emergency call the day her squad dropped her. She ended up on heavy-duty opioids. After a while, her doctor cut her off, and she started buying prescription pills from a classmate. Then the same guy offered to sell her heroin, which is basically the same thing only much cheaper. "I used to be a normal girl," she told me. It wakes you up. I started learning as much as I could. I learned about how drug companies marketed this stuff. I learned about the science of addiction, how some people are more susceptible than others.

**Susceptible in what way?** If you love pizza and you eat a nice slice, it's like a firework of pleasure goes off in your brain. What happens for some people when they take opioids, rather than one firework it's the Fourth of July. The brain is hijacked into thinking you need

opioids to survive. In time it is rewired. You can take somebody who's severely addicted and do a brain scan, and you can see the damage. That's why people shoot up in front of their kids. That's why they steal in front of a policeman. To expect somebody whose brain is damaged in this way to act rationally is akin to expecting someone with a broken leg to run a hundred-yard dash. We need to have compassion and understand that this is a health problem not a criminal problem.

**You make it clear that you believe the criminal problem lies elsewhere.** If Purdue Pharma hadn't pushed the drugs, which they knew were addictive and lied about, this army of people we have living in tents and under bridges wouldn't be there. There was always heroin out there, but it was not like this. It came into the mainstream when pharmaceutical companies started pushing oxycodone.

**What can be done?** The biggest thing is just to get rid of the stigma around addiction. It does so much damage. When I worked for Lowell Weicker, he always said that the mark of a great society is not how it treats its richest members, but how it treats its most vulnerable.

**Masks and vaccines are making progress against Covid. What tools are being brought to bear against the opioid crisis?** Here at UConn Health we've developed a great program with the Connecticut Poison Control Center, where EMS now reports every overdose. We describe what happened at the scene, the drugs involved, where the patient went. This has provided a wealth of knowledge, and it wouldn't have happened without UConn Health understanding that the opioid epidemic is a major public health crisis that needs to be addressed. I'm very grateful to the University of Connecticut.

—KEVIN MARKEY

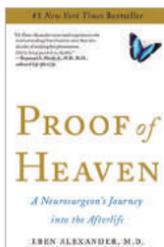
3 BOOKS



TRUTH, FANTASY, AND GETTING IN THE ZONE

UConn’s fire chief, William Perez, likes his books on hard copy and audio. If he’s really enjoying a book, he will buy both versions. That way, the Puerto Rico native who grew up in Bridgeport, Connecticut, can listen while driving and turn pages while sitting on the porch. And, he says, the more senses you use to take in information, the longer and better you retain that information. That’s an expert opinion. A U.S. Navy veteran and 30-year firefighter and paramedic, Perez is also a professor — at Capital Community College in Hartford and the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland. And the first-generation college student now has four degrees, including doctor of education. His taste in reading material is as varied as his vocations.

Just Finished:



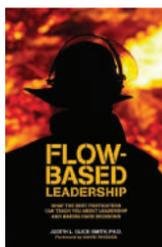
“Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon’s Journey into the Afterlife” by Eben Alexander, MD

What a powerful book! A top neurosurgeon with no real belief in God contracts a rare form of bacterial meningitis. He ends up in a coma, with no brain activity.

When they’re ready to take him off the support systems, his little kid is talking to him, and he wakes up, sits up. He says he’s been dreaming of God, of angels, but the doctors say there’s no possibility he could have had dreams. The explanations are very thorough, very scientific.

I don’t want to give everything away, but I’ve read hundreds of books, and this one really impacted me.

Reading Now:

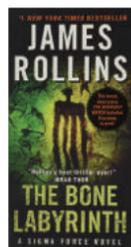


“Flow-Based Leadership: What the Best Firefighters Can Teach You about Leadership and Making Hard Decisions” by Judith L. Glick-Smith, Ph.D.

I met the author at a conference. She studied firefighters in the flow. Have you ever been doing something — could be making cupcakes or writing a book — when you just hit a rhythm, time stands still, what they call being in the zone or the flow? As a chief working a fire you know that if you choose the wrong tactic, path, you can kill your own people, let alone the people we’re there to save.

The author talks about how to control that flow to make good decisions, then how to trigger it, and the last point I haven’t gotten to yet is leadership.

On Deck:



“The Bone Labyrinth,” a Sigma Force novel by James Rollins

This one’s going to be great — fun and relaxing. The author, James Rollins, is like Dan Brown.

I’ve read all of Dan Brown’s books. I like how Brown takes real history, real science, and then puts fantasy and science fiction into it. There’s lots of research; he does his homework. This guy Rollins does the same.

“The Bone Labyrinth” also gets pretty complicated. Just on the first few pages you’ve got mountain climbing, Croatian folklore, geology, meteorology, evolutionary anthropology, and historical tales of horror.

I’m really looking forward to this one!

JOB ENVY

CANNED MULE

Merican Mule, based in South Norwalk, made its beverage debut with its reinvention of the popular Moscow Mule cocktail. Because it requires only a few ingredients — including vodka, ginger beer, and lime juice — people mistakenly believe it is simple to create, says company co-founder Dean Mahoney ’09 (BUS). “It’s an easy drink to make, but a hard drink to make as well,” he says. It’s in the nuances. Mahoney and his partners made, and tasted, more than 70 versions of the mule before developing their final recipe.

They’ve since added Mexican, tropical, and southern versions, as well as an array of seasonal varieties. —CLAIRE HALL



© Nathan Oldham; Illustration by Kyle Hilton



ON CAMPUS

© Peter Morenus

THE COLLEGE TOUR: UCONN

Recent graduate Cydney-Alexis DeLaRosa ’21 (ENG) shoots a scene for “The College Tour” in the Learning Community Innovation Zone at Peter J. Werth Residence Tower, known to students as a “makerspace.” DeLaRosa is one of 10 students who talked with host Alex Boylan for the UConn episode of this popular series from the producers of “Survivor.” It will begin streaming on Amazon Prime and Roku this summer.

In her segment “Real-World Research,” the Albany, New York, native speaks about attending a Research I institution like UConn, where nearly every professor is doing research of

their own. “One thing you will find about UConn,” she says, “is that there are opportunities for everyone here no matter your major. I am a biomedical engineering student, yet I was selected to work in civil engineering and materials science engineering labs after speaking with my professors.”

DeLaRosa tells prospective students about extracurriculars, too — about being on the board for SUBOG and UConn’s chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers, working as a teaching assistant and a campus tour guide, even singing the national anthem at basketball and volleyball games.



COVETED CLASS

## ISG 5095: DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN GENETICS

### The Instructor:

Opera divas have nothing on Judy Brown '98 MS, '07 Ph.D. When she stands to talk, all eyes are upon her. She speaks with such passion for her subject and empathy for her listener, and so compellingly does she make her points, that anyone who hears her may suddenly find themselves fascinated by the ethical implications of an extra chromosome or variant gene.

That's Judy Brown the instructor, Judy Brown the panel guest, Judy

Brown the project director. But there's another side of Brown, too. Her expertise and passion come with a self-effacing humility and quiet thoughtfulness that make her all the more effective as an instructor.

"I don't think of myself as a teacher, rather as a learner alongside others, a facilitator of showing others how to learn and where to find information," Brown says. "I dislike the term 'lecture' as it reminds me of being a child and being reprimanded by a parent."

Brown's parents were quite surprised when she decided to go for an undergraduate degree in science — they were under the impression she was going to be a novelist. But somehow the science bug bit. After trying out veterinary work (allergies nixed that), dentistry (she fainted at the first sight of blood), pharmacy (counting and sales contra-indicated with her interests), she finally got a job in a cytology lab and found she was into it. Lab maintenance and the glass shards that stuck into her fingers did not deter her.

Shortly after college, Brown scored a job in the cytogenetics lab at the SUNY Upstate Medical Center (now University), and she found she had a thing for chromosomes. She accepted a teaching position in the Diagnostic Genetic Sciences (DGS) program in UConn's School of Allied Health while pursuing her Ph.D., and ended up becoming the program director. She has created two graduate degrees at UConn (Health Care Genetics and the Genetic and Genomic Counseling Professional Science Masters), co-founded the UConn Chromosome Core, and most recently joined the School of Nursing in fall 2020.

"The School of Nursing has an innovative, quick response to education — it's been a delight," Brown says.

In response to the current social climate, Brown, a faculty member of the Institute for System Genomics, decided to offer a special-topics class this year — ISG 5095: Diversity and Inclusion in Genetics.

### Class Description:

Genetics — especially our own, and the secrets we can learn with it about our ancestors' past and our medical future — have captivated the nation since 23andMe became the first company to offer popular DNA testing for ancestry purposes in 2007. The availability of medical genetic testing has also surged. But neither the people who donate the genetic material most of our clinicians rely on, nor the genetic counselors themselves, are very diverse. That lack of diversity limits the usefulness of the information, Brown says.

"If there's no such thing as race,

but people of certain backgrounds are predisposed to certain conditions — why?" she asks. Genetics counselors need to understand the nuances around perceived race, risk, and predisposition. And if genetics counselors all come from the same background, being taught by and with people who are the same as themselves, they can lack necessary perspective. They can also turn off clients who might benefit from testing but need a counselor who shares their background in order to feel comfortable.

"We need not necessarily implement a new policy or a new political view, but we need to address diversity," Brown says.

### Brown's Teaching Style:

Brown says she hasn't "taught" a class in 20 years. She prefers to assign readings and research to be done before the class so the students can discuss it during class time.

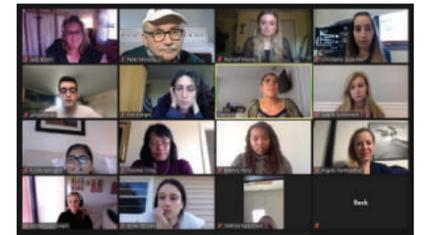
"Class is so much about in-person interactions, discussions, and 'Judge Judy' debates," Brown says. All of that has been harder this year using the remote pandemic learning model, but she's adapted. The diversity topic demanded that she schedule guest speakers, and she's turned to her colleagues in nursing and genomics.

At a recent class, a question posed to guest speaker Mallory Perry, an acute pediatric nurse practitioner at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, quickly pivoted to mainstream media's recent move toward capitalizing "Black" when referring to people's ethnicity. Perry explained she prefers "Black" to "African American" because she has no idea where her lineage actually comes from; what matters is how she is perceived. How we — and others — perceive ourselves, and what our genetic variants suggest about our background and our health, can be very divergent things. Genetics counselors need to navigate this with tact.

Another class activity involves research questions designed to lead the students on hunts to navigate genetic databases relevant to specific groups of people. And this year in particular, Brown is leading writing exercises to help the students develop their own diversity statements.

### Why We Want to Take It Ourselves:

The word "diversity" is being thrown around a lot these days. In Brown's class, students take a deep dive into what diversity really means. And they delve into how every one of us, no matter our race, can further the cause



Brown's classes are open to all. Attendees change on any given day, but often include doctors, nurses, and program directors from UConn Health and the Jackson Laboratory, as well as professors and students from across the University.

of inclusion. One way any student or professor can do that is to work on their own institutions. So this year Brown's students are interviewing people on campus, as well as members of UConn's Institute for Systems Genomics, in order to make a formal proposal for diversity and inclusion policies for the Institute itself.

"A Native American student, Yellow Bird Woman, made me more aware of the lack of diversity in genomics professionals," Brown says. And she decided to do something about it. When you want to learn something, it's always best to learn from someone who practices what they preach. —KIM KRIEGER



OFF CAMPUS

### VAX ON WHEELS

UConn Health made it easier for Connecticut residents to get vaccinated this spring by partnering with FEMA (the Federal Emergency Management Agency) to get mobile vaccine units into nine communities identified as most in need of such services.

UConn medicine, dental medicine, pharmacy, nursing, and public health sciences students, as well as medical and dental residents and physicians, volunteered to staff the clinics. Here, fourth year postgrad Angad Deengares and professor and primary care physician Steven Angus help vaccinate residents in Norwalk, Connecticut.



UConn Water Pollution Control Facility, Storrs

THIS JUST IN

### GOT MICROPLASTICS? MOLLUSKS TO THE RESCUE!

On a hot summer day in Connecticut, it's common to go to a beachside restaurant, eat some fresh oysters and mussels, and enjoy the crashing of the waves against the sand. But for one group of UConn faculty, the plan is to skip the beach and the hors d'oeuvres and use those seafarers for another purpose — filtering the harmful microplastics that end up back in our environment.

It turns out that suspension-feeding bivalves, such as oysters, clams, and zebra mussels, are remarkably efficient at filtering water, capturing on their gills particles as small as four micrometers in size — that's less than 1,000th of an inch. "They are nature's perfect filtering 'machine,'" says marine sciences professor J. Evan Ward.

Over the next four years, the group — including associate dean Leslie Shor, chemical and biomolecular engineering professor Kelly Burke, molecular and cell biology professor Daniel Gage, civil and environmental engineering professor Baikun Li, and Ward — will use a \$2 million grant from the National Science Foundation's Emerging Frontiers in Research and Innovation program to study the use of mussels, combined with microplastic-degrading bacteria, to filter microplastics from the discharge that flows back into our surface water from wastewater treatment plants.

Microplastics are commonly found in the environment through the shedding of synthetic fibers that wash off clothes in the laundry and tiny plastic fragments that end up throughout the environment in a number of ways. The concern is that they could cause harm to animals, plant life, and eventually humans.

Most of our wastewater treatment plants are more than 50 years old, and they rely on technology, like sand filtration, that's ancient, explains Li. "When these facilities were designed and built, plastics simply did not exist in the variety or quantity that they do today."

Tracy Mincer, a biology professor from Florida Atlantic University who is working with the UConn group, says that plastic particles less than 150 micrometers have been shown to make their way into our lymphatic systems, causing systemic exposure and, perhaps, affecting human health. "Microplastics can also act as sponges, gathering up other harmful things in the environment. Many studies have shown that concentrations of other common contaminants such as harmful chemicals, pathogenic bacteria, and even viruses can be much higher in microplastics than they are in the surrounding water. Consuming microplastics is therefore a way to be exposed to other harmful contaminants," says Mincer.

The group hopes learning from nature and working with stakeholders on the barriers to adopting new technology will lead to a sustainable way to better treat wastewater. — ELI FREUND '14 (CLAS)

KUDOS

## BUECKERS BUZZ

Husky phenom Paige Bueckers, aka Paige Buckets, seemed to win every award out there this year, including AP Player of the Year — a first for a freshman in women's college basketball history. UConn Nation took note.

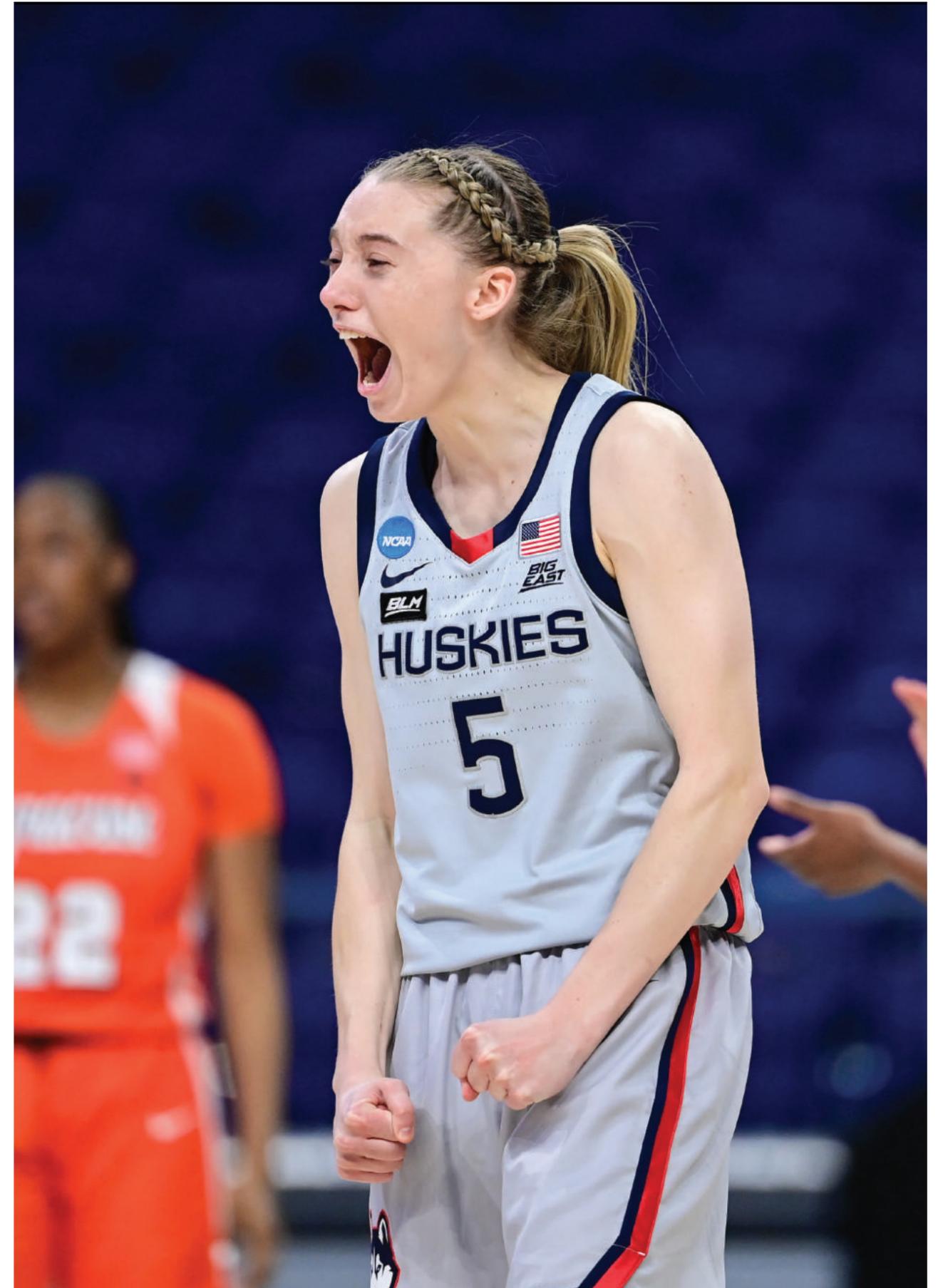
**"She's the best player in basketball already for the simple fact that she can pass. She makes really hard passes look really easy and she makes really easy passes look easy. That alone sets her apart from every other player in college."** *Diana Taurasi '05 (CLAS), WNBA Phoenix Mercury*

**"Some of her passes, it's less about the actual pass and more about the fact that she saw it in the moment. That speaks to instinct."** *Sue Bird '02 (CLAS), WNBA Seattle Storm*

**"She has what it takes to be one of the great players at UConn, to be one of the great players in women's college basketball... The beauty with Paige is, there's nothing she has to change about who she is. She's built for this. She's built for the spotlight. Her game is, her personality is. She's built to be a future star in the WNBA."** *Rebecca Lobo '95 (CLAS), ESPN analyst*

**"What she's done this year, in such a year of unknown, is actually ridiculous. She doesn't look like a freshman, that's for sure."** *Breanna Stewart '16 (CLAS), WNBA Seattle Storm*

**"You can see how smart a player she is. She puts herself in position to be better, but she also puts her teammates in position to be their best selves. Players that can make other players around them better, those are the ones that become great."** *Katie Lou Samuelson '19 (CLAS), WNBA Seattle Storm*



OUR STUDENTS

## THIS LAND

**Sage Phillips '22 (CLAS) is unearthing more of UConn's origin story**

A “sage” is a mature person who is wise through reflection and experience. It also happens to be the name of the founding president of NAISA, the Native American and Indigenous Students Association, and newly named Truman Scholar and Udall Scholar — Sage Phillips.

Rising senior Phillips hails from Old Town, Maine, and is a member of the Penobscot Nation. She almost didn't come to UConn. The political science and human rights major wanted to immerse herself in a robust Native American college community. Unsure if UConn's offerings would be enough for her, she told her parents she wanted to go elsewhere. “Why don't you take this as an opportunity to build a program?” her father suggested.

“It's not going to be easy,” Phillips recalls thinking. “But if I can find a few other people, I think we can build something pretty special.” That is what she did. Her freshman year she joined UConn's Native American Cultural Programs (NACP) and got a job in the Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, where she helped plan Indigenous Peoples Week and Native American Month.

That wasn't enough. “We were struggling with student involvement. I thought there must be more Indigenous-identifying students, so I created NAISA,” she says. A place where members can reclaim their cultural identities, NAISA also aims to educate the broader UConn community on native history, cultural diversity, and current events. “It's going to show prospective students that when they get here, there'll be a place they can call home. This is the community I so desperately sought to welcome me,”



Phillips in her regalia in the UConn Forest

says Phillips, who also mentors local Native youth, represents the NACP on the President's Council on Race and Diversity, sits on Student Affairs' Student Leadership Council, and has an ex officio seat in the USG Senate.

She stood out from her peers the moment she stepped on campus, according to David T. Ouimette, the executive director of First Year Programs. Every term he leads a class highlighted by a 48-hour marathon “hackathon” in which students seek innovative solutions to challenges. “Most new students get intimidated, but not Sage. She didn't worry about other people judging her. The

strength that she has, the fortitude,” says Ouimette, who hired her to be his teaching assistant for that class the next semester.

A current priority for Phillips, thanks to a grant she secured with the help of Kiara Ruesta of the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and human rights and education professor Glenn Mitoma, is gathering data about how UConn obtained its land from seven local tribes. “The goal is to get UConn talking about this expropriation and to seek free tuition for Native students,” she says. “I'm really interested in looking at how we can provide reparations for those whose

lands UConn occupies.”

Phillips has also joined a coalition seeking a state ban on American Indian sports mascots. “I've lived the negative repercussions that racist mascot imagery can have on Native youth,” she says. Because mascots have dark skin and hair, according to her “the dominant society” uses them against Native Americans who have lighter skin, saying in effect, “You don't look like an Indian. So you're not one, and we won't allow you to be one.”

“That's why Native youth lose confidence. At your core you know who you are — you know you are Penobscot — but when people constantly look at you on a surface level, it builds up over time and has such a negative effect,” says Phillips, who plans to attend law school and work on a joint degree in American Indian studies.

She says she learned her leadership skills from her father and grandfather. Both men helped lead a decade-long effort by the Penobscot River Restoration Trust that removed two dams and bypassed a third to open nearly 1,000 miles of river and streams to salmon for the first time in nearly 200 years. Their effort involved the state of Maine, the federal government, power companies, conservation groups, and the Penobscot Nation.

“The river was the Penobscot's highway,” says Phillips. To commemorate its reopening she and her father took part in a 15.5-mile race in a 12-person war canoe. Her grandfather gave her a medicine pouch so she could bring her ancestors down the river with her, and during the ceremony he led before the event, an eagle soared overhead. “It was such a powerful moment,” she says.

She credits both men for raising her to cherish her heritage. “You are here because of your ancestors. It's your duty to use the opportunities they gave you and take them to their fullest extent,” says Phillips. “That's what my grandfather taught me time and time again, and that's what I center my work on. My ancestors did it for me, and I have to do the same for future generations.” —GEORGE SPENCER

UConn Talks

On how noisy periodic cicadas' mating songs can be:

**“Like a singles bar gone horribly, horribly wrong.”**

John Cooley, entomology professor, AP, May 5, 2021

On uninhabitable land at the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant in Japan:

**“The money spent on the Olympics could easily have helped these families rebuild lives elsewhere.”**

Alexis Dudden, history professor, NPR, March 25, 2021

On solar geoengineering — cooling the planet by reflecting sunlight away from the Earth and back out to space:

**“The problem is the extent to which researchers are really helpless in deciding how research is used in the political system.”**

Prakash Kashwan, political science professor, *Scientific American*, March 26, 2021

On the unexpected ways we were educated during the pandemic:

**“There is no such thing as learning loss.”**

Rachael Gabriel, literacy education professor, *The Washington Post*, March 10, 2021

On the rate at which butterflies are disappearing across wildlands:

**“Calamitous.”**

David Wagner, ecology and evolutionary biology professor, *Smithsonian*, March 9, 2021

On Connecticut's offshore wind projects:

**“Things are going to start happening fast.”**

Sylvain De Guise, pathobiology professor and Connecticut Sea Grant director, *The New London Day*, April 29, 2021



# FINALLY!

They had waited long enough. UConn's classes of 2020 and 2021 gathered in person at The Rent for five days in May to celebrate endings and beginnings — *together*.

By Lisa Stiepock  
Photography by Peter Morenus and Sean Flynn

**5** days

**10** ceremonies

**2** classes of Huskies

**8,100+** degrees awarded

“It was coming home,” U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona ’01 MA, ’04 6th Year, ’11 Ed.D., ’12 ELP said of heading to Pratt & Whitney Stadium at Rentschler Field to give this year’s commencement address. Students could not have agreed more. At a string of outdoor ceremonies May 8–12, students and families gathered together for the first time in many long pandemic months.

Saturday’s celebration brought 2020 grads, whose ceremony last year was entirely virtual, home to UConn from across the country. “We have seen over this past year that love knows no distance. Whether six feet apart, or a Zoom call away, we Huskies are always there for each other: today, tomorrow, and every day after that,” said Tanya Miller ’20 (CLAS).

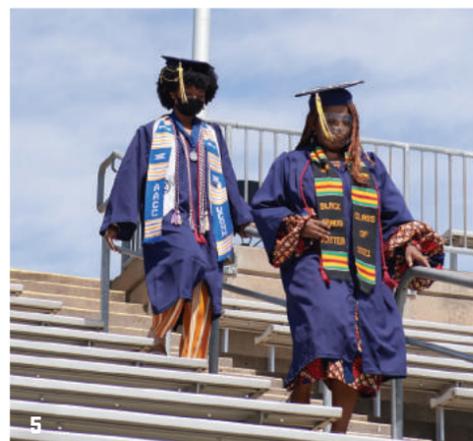
The mood at The Rent every one of those days was often euphoric, the tableau rife with fist pumps, hugs, and kisses. But there was a palpable sense of shared purpose, too — to remember this time, who we lost, and what we lost — and to carry it all forward.

Cardona, whose speech played on the jumbotron at each of the 10 ceremonies and whose godson, Hector Cardona III, graduated in the Neag School of Education, said he could feel that heightened sense of commitment in the graduates. “I know they’re graduating with a passion to serve that’s been strengthened by the challenging year we’ve had,” he said later that week. “It’s powerful. It’s like we’ve all suffered together and now, how privileged are we that we get to be in a position of service when our country needs us most?”

Said Katherine Merrick ’20 MD, “Most of us graduating today are millennials — a generation searching for drive, passion, and meaning in our professional lives . . . Our class has intimate knowledge of the interrelated mental health, substance use, suicide, and gun violence crises in our country. For us, these areas will never be purely academic.”

When all was said and done, though, as Shaharia Ferdus ’21 (CAHNR, CLAS) put it, “No matter how they play out, every single one of our stories will have one thing in common: that we all made it thanks to UConn. Long after the credits have rolled and the pages have turned on our UConn story, we remain Huskies, and we’ll stay Huskies forever!” ☺

1. A purposeful 2020 grad
2. CLAS on the jumbotron
3. Anjana Mishra (BUS) holds a photo of her father who died of Covid
4. CLAS grads get ready to take the stage
5. CLAS grads head down the bleachers
6. School of Medicine students had a rainy day
7. The Schools of Business, Education, and Social Work gathered Tuesday
8. An engineering grad at Saturday’s 2020 ceremony
9. Cheering CLASers
10. Speaker Fizza Alam ’21 (CLAS)
11. 2020 grads with Jonathan XIV
12. The 2020 ceremony



“Embrace your uniqueness and use it to find your purpose. When you find your purpose, make the pursuit of your purpose greater than the pursuit of your position,” Secretary Cardona told graduates.



# Uphill



© Peter Morenus

## Battles

**Growing up in Jamaica, Rohan Freeman could not have envisioned himself as an engineer, re-creating the Hartford landscape. And he certainly could not have seen himself as the first Black American to climb the Seven Summits.**

**R**ohan Freeman doesn't use the word trailblazer to define himself, though the paths he's blazed have been quite extraordinary.

Growing up poor in Jamaica, there were times, he says, when he couldn't see what life might hold for him.

In high school, he moved with his mother to the North End of Hartford and found himself having to navigate a very different world. But the people in that community made him feel like part of the place. "Coming from Jamaica and not knowing anything about this country, this was my door to having the

opportunities that I have now," says Freeman '95 (ENG). "I wanted to have a good education, and doing my research, UConn was at the top of my list because of its engineering program."

From the start he liked how welcoming the School of Engineering was and how rigorous. "I made lifelong friends at UConn, and they still say they could find me in one of three places: in class, at the field house after class training for track [he ran the 400 meters and for some time held UConn's indoor record in that event], and in the library — Three South — same table, same chair

every day, studying. Whoever wanted to find me could go there."

Though he was majoring in mechanical engineering, Freeman couldn't quite envision his future until after freshman year when he got a summer internship with Oswald Blint, Hartford's city surveyor. "The first time he sent me out to work on a survey site, I knew I'd been doing the wrong thing all along," Freeman says. Everything about civil engineering fit. "I understand it intuitively," he explains. "This is what I was born for." His first day back to campus that fall he changed his major



Left: Freeman in his Hartford office with the Park and Main development under construction behind him. This page: On the way to the summit of Mount Everest at 28,500 feet.

# “I hope I can influence kids who were in my position ... let them see what’s possible.”

to civil engineering, and in his first class he met professor Roger Ferguson who, like Blint, became a mentor.

Both imbued in Freeman a sense of land first, encouraging him to look closely at and listen to the land. To this day, his approach centers on “working with the land instead of forcing the land to be something it’s not meant to be, working to maximize the use and get the most return, but preserving the integrity of the land.”

He also knew, as the only Black student in his civil engineering classes, that one day when he had the chance to find ways to help make the field more representative, he would.

Today, he is president of Freeman Companies LLC, an award-winning, multidisciplinary site development, engineering design, and construction services enterprise, one of the few minority-owned engineering firms in the region. Based in Hartford, Freeman Companies provided building and construction survey and layout services to Dimeo Construction Company for the \$120 million Edward P. Evans Hall at Yale University and redesigned Weaver High School in Hartford. It also is working with the Metropolitan District Commission, handling the geotechnical engineering and land surveying for a major component of the \$280 million South Hartford Conveyance and Storage Tunnel, a four-mile-long tunnel that will protect Connecticut waterways during major storms.

His firm has worked on large-scale, transformative public projects across the state and is part of a development team with Spinnaker Real Estate Partners LLC in Norwalk, creating a mixed-use project at the corner of Park and Main Streets in Hartford. It’s also at work on a \$21 million development project featuring apartments and retail

space on Albany Avenue and Woodland Street in Hartford, an area where Freeman says there hasn’t been significant development with private funds in more than 50 years.

“I always have an eye for how I can help the city move forward,” he says. “That’s the reason I put my business here in Hartford. I feel like I’m part of the fabric of the city and want to be part of the solution to turning Hartford around. Though I lived in the North End for a short time, Hartford was very influential in shaping my life. I want to contribute to community development, to create jobs, housing, and opportunities for residents there.”

## Another Mountain

Growing up in Jamaica, Freeman loved to run, and he played cricket and soccer with his friends. They often talked about Mt. Kilimanjaro but not about climbing it. “I grew up hearing about Kilimanjaro, and my friends and I joked that we’d banish people we didn’t like to Kilimanjaro, this mythical, fictional place,” he says.

Just a couple of decades later, that mythical place would become very real to him. Though he’d “never heard of mountaineering as a kid,” Freeman met a group of friends after college who, like him, loved being active and being outside. They decided they would try to climb the highest point in Africa, — Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. When he reached the summit, Freeman says he was absolutely hooked on climbing.

He set his sights next on Denali in Alaska, climbing North America’s tallest peak. He then climbed Mt. Elbrus in Russia, the tallest peak in Europe, and Cerro Aconcagua in Argentina, the highest summit in South America. He started to wonder if he could reach the top of Mt. Everest and if he could even-



**On the summit of the famed Eiger in Switzerland (top) and Mount Everest — on that climb Freeman raised funds for the Boys & Girls Club of Hartford. Right: In the board room with representations of Dunkin’ Donuts Park and South Hartford Conveyance Tunnel.**

tually become one of the few people to reach the Seven Summits, the tallest peak on each continent.

He took mountaineering courses, honed his skills, and spent nearly every winter weekend training in the White Mountains. He had tried Everest once before and didn’t reach the top. By then, Freeman was a principal at an engineering firm, and when he asked for time off to tackle Everest again, he was told no. He decided two things right then — he’d start his own engineering firm and he’d make that climb.

On May 19, 2009, Freeman became the first Black American and first Jamaican-born person to reach Everest’s summit. “Two things are indelibly imprinted on my brain that I’ll never, never forget,” he says. “I was climbing up to the summit before 4 a.m., and I looked to my right and was looking



© Peter Morenus

down at this teeny tiny light way in the distance. I was so distracted by it, the light; I was taking one foot forward, then I’d look at the light. I realized it was the sun coming up over the horizon except it was below me. It was the most spectacular light show I’d ever seen.”

The second moment happened when he reached Everest’s summit and saw the curvature of the Earth. “I was blown away when I looked out and I could actually see it with my own eyes,” he says. “It was amazing.”

After climbing Vinson Massif in Antarctica in 2011 and Oceania’s Carstenz Pyramid in Indonesia in 2012, he became the first Black American to reach each of the Seven Summits.

## Next Gen

Beyond the achievement itself, Freeman says, the climbs enabled him to

see so much of the world, its cities, and many obscure, beautiful, tucked away places. “A lot of these places are surrounded by World Heritage sites, which you’d never see unless you are doing these really remote trips,” he says.

Another benefit has been raising money during each climb for causes he cares deeply about, including the Boys and Girls Club of Hartford and the BRIDGE Endowed Engineering Scholarship, which he established through the UConn Foundation to support students with an interest in civil engineering, especially those who have overcome socioeconomic or educational disadvantages.

“That’s very important to me,” he says. “I hope I can influence kids who were in my position, who are kind of feeling hopeless, not seeing a path forward. I want to inspire them and let

them see what’s possible.”

He speaks often to school groups and serves on many boards, including those for Connecticut Business & Industry Association and Outward Bound. In 2015, he was inducted into the UConn School of Engineering’s Academy of Distinguished Engineers and Hall of Fame. “It meant the world to me,” Freeman says. “I have my medallion and my program booklet to show my daughter as something for her to aspire to.”

His climbs behind him, Freeman plans to run a marathon on each of the seven continents and the North and South Poles — once the pandemic has ended and people are traveling again. And he’ll continue to seek out projects in the profession he says has given him so much. “I do think I have a lot more to accomplish, a much longer way to walk.” ☺

# OUR AMERICAN GIRLS



## MEET ALLISON

What do you do with a history doctorate and a pop culture obsession?

- By Julie (Stagis) Bartucca '10 (BUS, CLAS), '19 MBA -

19

44



## MEET MARY

If you're these two alums, you create a hit podcast centering on '90s nostalgia.

- Illustrations by Brian Lutz and Christa Yung -

20

21

If you're surprised to learn that a podcast about the American Girl children's series of historical fiction books, best known for its accompanying dolls, has amassed 30,000 downloads a month from listeners all over the world and spawned a book deal, you're not alone.

"I thought the group of friends I watch 'The Bachelor' with would listen to this show, and my wife, and that would be it," says **Mary Mahoney '18 Ph.D.**, a historian who created and hosts the "American Girls" podcast with her friend and fellow UConn history grad **Allison Horrocks '16 Ph.D.** "I wanted a reason to hang out with my friend every other week. I had absolutely no idea we would have the kind of listenership we have."

The show's blend of astute historical analysis, warm banter between close friends, and copious pop culture references has earned it a global community of fans. In one 71-minute episode, the hosts discuss the American Girl book "Meet Samantha," about an orphan living with her wealthy grandmother in 1904 New York. During that episode, the following such pop culture artifacts, along with a few straight up literary and historical references, are mined at various depths:

- *American figure skater Nancy Kerrigan*
- *the 2000 book "Bowling Alone: The*

*Collapse and Revival of American Community*

- *Garth Brooks: "The Road I'm On" documentary series*
- *American figure skater Kristi Yamaguchi*
- *Dante*
- *Freddie Mercury*
- *The Beatles*
- *Gwyneth Paltrow, Goop, and Blythe Danner*
- *Depression-era photojournalist Dorothea Lange*
- *the "Eloise" books*
- *Pride Month*
- *"The Help," and its problematic Netflix popularity during last summer's racial justice protests*
- *George Edwin Taylor — the first Black man to run for president, the NAACP, and Ida B. Wells*
- *novelist V.C. Andrews*
- *"Bohemian Rhapsody" (the movie)*
- *Alice James (Henry's sister)*
- *"The Barefoot Contessa" Ina Garten and her husband, Jeffrey*
- *Prince Edward*
- *Kelly Clarkson and her divorce*

**Seriously Silly**

As doctoral students in Storrs, Horrocks and Mahoney bonded over the way they both identified strongly with Molly McIntire, one of three original American Girl characters, a spunky,

bespectacled World War II-era girl sporting brown braids.

Early in their friendship, they discovered they also shared a passion for taking pop culture more seriously than most, perhaps best evidenced by an argument over who was at fault in actress Reese Witherspoon's divorce, which spurred Mahoney to create a Google doc for the women to lay out their cases titled "The People vs. Ryan Phillippe."

Mahoney trained as a DJ at the UConn radio station WHUS. Creating a podcast in which the two friends revisited the books of their youth as learned historians became a shared goal, a reward for completing their doctorates.

"We had a friend who told us, 'I would pay to hear you two go through an *US Weekly*,'" says Mahoney, who is by day the digital scholarship coordinator at Trinity College in Hartford. "What you hear on the show, that's how we talk to each other. We take things seriously that are not, but we also take history seriously. We just wanted to do something that was meaningful to us without apology."

So while they bring decades of schooling to their reflections on the books' historical contexts and the way they are portrayed, they are just as comfortable going deep on the perfection of "Grease 2." Or dissolving into fits of laughter after Mahoney



A fan crafted Mary and Allison as American Girl dolls



"I knew the podcast would provide me hours of delights ... I did not, however, expect it to recontextualize the abundant doll joys of my youth — but it's done that too," wrote Margaret Lyons in this *New York Times* article



BFFs — Horrocks (left) was the one friend Mahoney invited to her pandemic wedding

responds to a plot development in one Molly book with a quote attributed to Wynonna Judd that she saw on a Starbucks cup: "You can either be right or be loved."

"Stop! No!" Horrocks protests. "That's, like, neoliberal nonsense. No!"

It may not be for everyone — among hundreds of glowing five-star reviews on Apple Podcasts are a handful that complain about the non-American Girl aspects of the show and even the critical eye the hosts take toward the books' characters — but for Horrocks and Mahoney, the "secret sauce" lies in their authenticity.

"I think part of what pulls people in is we're not fake. There's a sincerity we bring to it," says Horrocks. "We record, conservatively, four hours of tape together a month. You can't fake that."

When people in podcasting talk about what works, "a lot of it is that you have a chemistry that people want to listen to — or you don't," she says. And to be sure, trying to be anything but themselves would not fit Horrocks' or Mahoney's style.

**Coming of Age**

In elementary school, Mary Mahoney transferred from public school to Catholic school. One of her first assignments was to write a letter to Santa.

"I wrote mine to Mrs. Claus because

I thought it was unfair that nobody ever wrote to her, and she probably did a lot of work," Mahoney says. "At the bottom, I wrote 'P.O.W.: Power of Women.' My teacher sent the letter home and I thought I was in trouble, but I think she was trying to say, 'We've got a live one here.'"

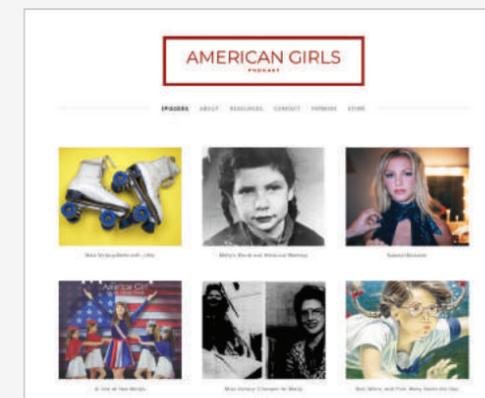
"That's what I was like at 9. I haven't gotten much taller, and my viewpoints haven't changed much."

Growing up in Wethersfield, one of the oldest towns in Connecticut, with a librarian mom and a history-buff dad, Mahoney explored history and feminism largely through the writings of other girls, and was drawn to American Girl books "because they centered the stories of young girls like me."

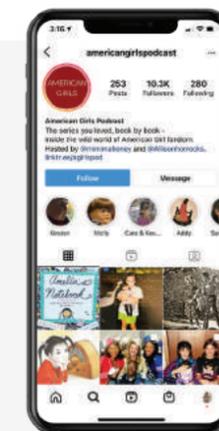
Eighty miles east, Horrocks was coming of age in Rhode Island, an avid reader who also loved the American Girl books. She was into science, competing in school science fairs and initially pursuing a pre-med path before realizing she was simply too squeamish and didn't find the coursework interesting.

Though both graduated from Trinity College in 2009 with degrees in history and American studies (Horrocks) and history and English (Mahoney), the two barely crossed paths before coming to UConn.

The two women, both public historians passionate about making history accessible to the masses, pull podcast



The podcast has more than 30,000 downloads per episode . . .



. . . and over 10,000 followers on Instagram

"What you hear on the show, that's how we talk to each other. We take things seriously that are not, but we also take history seriously."

“They’re expert historians, they’re best friends, and they also have something important to say about Justin Timberlake.”

inspiration and knowledge from their experiences teaching as graduate assistants and creating an exhibit for the Dodd Center while they were at UConn.

Mahoney recalls using current topics to pull uninterested students into important subjects, for example, and Horrocks says learning to explain their WWI exhibit to “a group of women in a rec center who just had dinner and a two hour meeting” gave her the tools to break history down in a way that appeals to everyone.

“We want someone who could be curious about history, but feels like, ‘I didn’t go to college for that. It might not be for me,’ to get over that imposter syndrome. We’re talking to you and we want you to talk back to us and be part of the conversation,” says Mahoney.

One of Horrocks’ favorite parts of her day job — as a park ranger at Lowell National Historical Park in Lowell, Massachusetts — is “making history real for people.” She brings that same energy to the show.

“We definitely see what we’re doing as being historians and being academic. But to us, it’s having a wider view of who that’s for,” Mahoney says. “It should not be something that’s just for a handful of people who have the same credentials that you do. It should be welcoming and inclusive and representative of how you imagine the public to be.”



Recording live at the American Girl store in New York City

### Wrestling with Privilege

Centering a show around a brand like American Girl means the hosts have to work to dissect representation and inclusion. The nature of American Girl inherently means that the audience will be overwhelmingly female, overwhelmingly middle class, and overwhelmingly white.

American Girl began in 1986 as a catalog-only operation selling a number of dolls that represented fictional characters, each from a specific historical period and background, along with accessories and a series of books about each character.

Purchased by Mattel in 1998, American Girl has since grown to include different lines such as “Girl of the Year” dolls, hawked not only online and in catalogs but at giant retail stores in more than a dozen North American cities that also feature doll hair salons and restaurants for doll-and-girl tea parties.

That the whole thing reeks of privilege — the items have always been pricey; today, a “Historical Character” doll and book set will set you back \$110 — is not lost on Horrocks and Mahoney. Though the focus of their historical interrogation is on the stories, “we talk a lot about the super middle class marker of privilege it is to have any of this stuff,” Mahoney says.

“We have listeners who couldn’t have an American Girl doll as children and bought it as adults, people who

Addy and her mother are based on real self-freed enslaved people



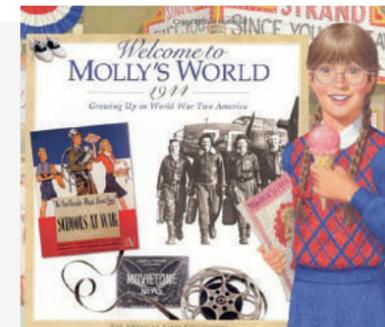
would salivate over the catalogs or who would buy the dolls secondhand and make clothes. It’s important to us to make explicit the class issues inherent in this brand,” she says. “The privilege of their life allows them to be blind to it if they want to be. A lot of our listeners, to their credit, don’t want to be like that.”

So in diving into the stories they loved as children, the hosts bring a new lens that allows them to challenge the beloved stories and their shortcomings, to examine how they might have been a product of the times during which they were written, and to reflect on how the same issues persist today.

### Keeping it Real

Before giving too much credit to the company for introducing Addy, the first Black American Girl, in 1993, the hosts point out the complexities of Black girls being happy to have a doll that looks like them, but conflicted about the character being born into slavery and then self-liberated with her mother. Despite their decades-long love for Molly, the hosts weren’t shy about questioning the practical absence of the Holocaust from her stories, which take place during World War II.

“The stakes have always been somewhat high when you’re writing a book about what it means to be a person of a country or what it means to be an American girl. But I think it’s so hard



Horrocks and Mahoney question the blind patriotism portrayed in Molly’s World War II stories

to read Molly with any kind of neutrality when we have QAnon and we have fascism on the rise and we have people with Nazi memorabilia and with Auschwitz sweatshirts storming the Capitol,” Horrocks says during one of the Molly episodes.

“It is very difficult to see this sort of uncomplicated embrace of patriotism that’s now being taught to these 9-year-olds [reading the Molly books] that does not speak at all about the true origins or driving factors of this war,” she says.

“We can’t help but note that we are in book five, and there’s still no mention of the Holocaust. It’s so irresponsible to me that it’s not in these books, and it’s harder and harder to ignore.”

“Some listeners didn’t love hearing that their favorite book has done something wrong,” Mahoney says.

“We’re saying why is this, what are these books inviting us to think about the 1990s, 1980s, and today? This erasure matters, and noting it matters because it’s still happening now. You can bring that self-awareness to your life.”

The pandemic and racial unrest that heightened over the past year added further dimension to the show. While wrapping up production on a long-planned episode dissecting old American Girl catalogs last summer, Black Lives Matter protests hit a boiling point.

“Our timing could not have been



Horrocks and Mahoney keep boxes of fan art, like this embroidery

worse. We had an episode we were proud of, but we didn’t speak to what was going on,” Horrocks says.

“We’re historians — we understand when it’s time to take up space and when it’s not. While you’re living through a civil rights movement, it’s not that what we were doing was silly or unimportant, but there were other things to talk about.”

While they are aware that listeners look to the show for a light escape from reality, they were intentional in shifting the balance as 2020 unfolded.

“It is a time capsule. We don’t want people to look back and say, ‘Were they really talking about \$30 accessories the weekend people were being beaten while marching for their lives?’” says Horrocks. “If you’re creating something and putting it out in the world and you didn’t think about it differently between last February and this February, you’re probably not saying anything.”

But like the girls in the American Girl stories, these two women are complex. They’re expert historians, they’re best friends, and they also have important things to say about Justin Timberlake.

And that’s what makes “American Girls” the podcast work.

“We had people tweet at us in the beginning saying, ‘I was going to do a podcast about American Girl,’” Horrocks says. “And I’m like, ‘But you didn’t. We did.’” ☺



Mahoney with the first book covered on the podcast

# Farms = Food = Life

**When alum Steven Were Omamo sees someone planting, he sees hope. The Nobel Peace Prize Committee seems to agree.**

“Surprised, thrilled, humbled. All of those things,” says Steven Were Omamo ’88 MS of his reaction when the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize last fall. An agricultural economist with a master’s degree from the College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources, Omamo is WFP’s Country Director in Ethiopia. He leads a team of 850 relief and development workers, spread across 15 offices, who help feed some 8 million people a year.

“We’re a big organization, but not as well-known as some,” he says of the WFP, which is the food assistance branch of the U.N. “In many countries where we work, there are political sensitivities. We don’t want to create hurdles for our delivery of food, so we tend to speak quietly. For the organization to be recognized was extraordinary.”

If other agencies have higher profiles, few can match WFP’s impact. It is the world’s largest humanitarian organization, annually delivering some 3 million tons of food and over \$2 billion worth of cash to well over 100 million people in 90 countries. Every day it sends thousands of trucks, ships, and planes into some of the most challenging places on Earth, many of them devastated by conflicts whose combatants use hunger as a weapon.

In bestowing the Peace Prize, the Nobel committee drew explicit attention to the link between war and hunger, highlighting how one contributes to the other in a vicious cycle: strife disrupts food security, while scarcity can trigger conflict that flares into violence.



“We will never achieve the goal of zero hunger unless we also put an end to war,” the Norwegian committee noted in its prize announcement. “The World Food Programme has taken the lead in combining humanitarian work with peace efforts through pioneering projects in South America, Africa, and Asia.”

Armed conflict is just one of several overlapping crises Omamo contends with in Ethiopia, where WFP partners with the government and other actors to keep millions of people from starvation. Recently one of his supply convoys disappeared while attempting to deliver humanitarian aid in the Tigray region, a mountainous area in the north of the country where the federal army and its allies have been battling rebel forces since November. The United Nations estimates the conflict has displaced more than a million people.

“There were three trucks,” Omamo says. “They sent an SOS signal and for two hours, we couldn’t contact them. Finally, we managed to raise them. They had been caught in a battle. They were not targets, but everything was unfolding in front of them.” The relief workers escaped, and the mission would proceed another day. But the underlying conditions that drive hunger in many parts of Ethiopia — and around the globe — remain in place. In addition to war, Omamo says, these include climate shocks, gender inequity, chronic poverty, lack of local control of natural resources such as water, and now, economic deterioration due to the pandemic. “I really believe that Ethiopia is at the center of the world,” he says, “in the sense that every issue you find around the world — both positive and less than positive — is expressed here at scale.”

## Kenya

A native of Kenya, Omamo grew up in the capital, Nairobi, spending school holidays on a farm his parents acquired when he was young. “The countryside has always been part of my world,” he says. “Even today, my home in Kenya is in a rural area, and that is a comfort to me.”

On the farm his family grew sugarcane and maize and raised cattle and other livestock. From an early age, he recognized farming to be a source of both income and deep emotional satisfaction. “I remember driving up to the farmhouse, usually arriving late at night from the city, and feeling my parents’ pride in the place. It was fantastic. They were very devoted to the farm, very hard working. They ran it as a serious business enterprise, and it funded everything the family was trying to do, including university for the children.”

For Omamo college meant California State University at Fresno, which his father recommended for its strong agriculture program, followed by UConn, then Stanford, where he earned his Ph.D. in agricultural economics. While at Fresno, Omamo says, he ventured off and tried many different things. Then one day he got a message from his mother: “Okay, now is the time to get serious. Back to agriculture.” He went on to major in agribusiness.



“It’s easy to become dejected. But the transformation is happening.”



He ended up at UConn in part because of a chance meeting in Kenya between his father and a visiting American political scientist, Fred Burke. A consultant to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Burke also happened to be vice president for graduate education and research at UConn. Always on the lookout for talented students to bring to Storrs, he immediately put the press on Omamo. “He was a very kind person, very generous. We became quite good friends,” Omamo remembers. “He owned an island with some friends in upstate New York, and he took me there once. It was just fantastic.”

## Connecticut

Arriving in Connecticut in August, Omamo remembers being alarmed by the density of the foliage. “The trees seemed so close as we drove from the airport to Storrs. I was used to being able to see long distances. Where am I, I wondered? What have I gotten myself into? It turned out to be the start of a very rich, very special time in my life.”

He moved into a graduate dorm (with a welcome view of an open field), joined the rugby club team as a player-coach, and formed many lasting friendships. “It was a very close community,” he says. “Just a really great time.”

Decades later, he easily recalls professors who influenced his career, including Boris Bravo-Ureta and Ron Cotterill from the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics. “That agricultural development is a quantitative study, I think Dr. Bravo-Ureta really put that idea in my mind,” Omamo says. “Then Ron Cotterill was very much a principled antitrust guy. He was a believer in markets, but he also understood that they don’t work well

## CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

Akon Garang, 27, washes vegetables from her garden in South Sudan where WFP programs involve the community in planning and creating crop farms, vegetable gardens, and access roads.

The desert locust is considered the most dangerous migratory pest in the world. A recent invasion in East Africa came after years of conflict and 2019 drought and floods.

WFP staffer Taban Michael inspects some of the desert locusts in South Sudan. WFP provided vehicles to help response

teams conduct surveillance and control.

A WFP truck carries food assistance through Libya and the Sahara Desert to Sudanese refugees in Chad.

A new hub inside Addis Ababa’s Bole International Airport is transporting Covid-19 supplies, equipment, and humanitarian workers across Ethiopia and Africa. “Thanks to the government of Ethiopia, WFP worked with airport and customs authorities to establish this air hub in days,” said Omamo at the launch of the Humanitarian Air Hub.

for everyone. These ideas ended up being quite important to me going forward.”

One other idea that stayed with him — the importance of layering to survive a New England winter. “Somebody told me, if you do it right, you’ll feel warmer than you did in the summer,” Omamo recalls.

In 2014 Omamo returned to Storrs to deliver the commencement address to the School of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources. Bravo-Ureta was on hand to watch his former student congratulate graduates for choosing what he called one of the world’s truly global professions. “And so anywhere you go,” he told the class, “you will find people with a great deal in common with you, even if their lives look nothing like yours. And so as you build your careers in agriculture, as you address the many local and global phenomena that are rooted in or expressed through agriculture, I hope you find opportunities to embrace the huge diversity of people in our field, I hope you share your dreams with them, and let them enrich your lives and expand your horizons with theirs.”

## Ethiopia

Omamo’s own career has taken him all over the world. He has served as director of global engagement and research with the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development, senior research fellow and coordinator of the Eastern Africa Food Policy Network with the International Food Policy Research Institute, and director of policy and advocacy with the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa. From 2006 to 2012, he was deputy director of policy, planning, and strategy at the World Food Programme’s headquarters in Rome. There



“Plant something to harvest every year.”



### CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

During his 2014 commencement address at the College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources, Omamo shared three hopes with, and made three asks of, the graduates, including that they plant something to harvest every year. Doing so, he said, “connects you to the world in a way that is truly unique and soul-enriching.”

After women in horticultural production requested support, the WFP and Gambia Red Cross started a seed distribution program.

One-year-old Bishara is a Somali refugee suffering from malnutrition. Her mother is feeding her PlumpySup, a high nutrient peanut paste from WFP.

WFP transporters distribute sorghum to refugees in Um Rakuba camp in eastern Sudan.

Last October WFP ready-to-eat rations were distributed to 1,500 families affected and displaced by hundreds of fires in the small villages surrounding Mashta El Helou town in Latakia governorate, Syria.

he helped create and launch the Purchase for Progress initiative, a program that leveraged the enormous buying power of the WFP to support economic resilience in rural communities.

“The idea was that since we buy so much food around the world, we could target smallholder farmers with our purchases and so create sustainable markets for their produce,” explains Omamo. Implemented in 2008, the program has become an operational model for WFP. It now is embedded in three dozen countries, connecting more than a million smallholders to valuable markets.

Wherever his work has brought him, Omamo has continued to feel the strong pull of Africa. “I really do relate to issues facing Africa and Africans,” he says. “I’ve always been drawn back for that reason.”

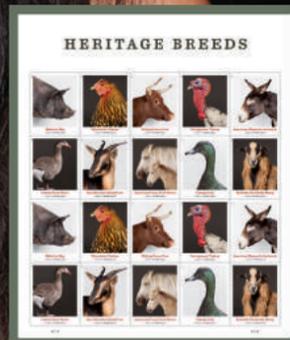
In Ethiopia those issues include recurrent drought, chronic undernutrition, limited access to health services and education, as well as the armed conflict emphasized by the Nobel Peace Prize committee. Additionally, the country shelters one of the largest refugee populations on the continent — some 750,000 men, women, and children displaced by political and climate shocks in neighboring Eritrea, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan. Together the crises threaten to upend a two-decade period of steady economic development that began after the end of the Ethiopian-Eritrean War in 2000.

To meet the challenges, Omamo directs a two-pronged response the WFP calls “saving lives and changing lives.” The first part is crisis mediation, the work of distributing food to communities pushed to the brink of starvation by natural and manmade disasters. This involves everything from running school feeding operations to providing logistical support for Ethiopian government relief efforts to building humanitarian cargo hubs and even Covid field hospitals. The second pillar, the transformational part, addresses the root causes of hunger by supporting economic development, farming, and sustainable growth.

“What we try to do is give vulnerable communities opportunities to enter into the transformation,” Omamo says. “Helping them manage natural resources, giving them access to markets, giving them new platforms, sharing new information or new financial instruments.”

Despite the many complex issues, Omamo believes there is cause for optimism. He describes meeting an old man while in Kenya a number of years ago and asking him about his life. The man marveled at how easy in his lifetime it had become to move around. When he was young, he told Omamo, he couldn’t go anywhere because his village was always fighting the village next door.

“It’s easy to become dejected,” Omamo says. “But the transformation is happening. Opportunities are always coming, in agriculture, in technology, in the penetration of markets. It’s profound. Even in the most devastated community, you go there and you find people who are planting. They’re looking ahead, trying to start again. It is humbling.” ☺



A new pane of USPS stamps features photos of pre-industrial farm breeds by Aliza Eliazarov.

### Forever Stamps of Forgotten Breeds

Aliza Eliazarov '95 (CAHNR) goes to great lengths to capture her stunning portraits of farm animals, even if it means lying in a chicken coop or waiting hours to capture a donkey's soulful look. That's just part of the job when you're asked to create portraits for a U.S. Postal Service stamp series on heritage breeds. The author of "On the Farm: Heritage & Heralded Animal Breeds in Portraits & Stories" built a reputation shooting for many national magazines, including *Modern Farmer*. She visited small farms across the country and set up temporary studios in barns. She'd hang backdrops, set up lights, then wait quietly for her models to strike a pose. The stamp panel, released in May, features 10 farm animals, including the American Cream draft horse and the Wyandotte chicken. "It's a great honor and privilege to be asked to make U.S. postal stamps," she says. "It's my nerdiest dream come true." —GRACE MERRITT

### CLASS NOTES



➔ **Dominic D'Amato '52 (ENG)**, of Cheshire, Connecticut, writes to say that he is still consulting and recently published a new book, "Trisecting Angles and Other Solutions."  
 ➔ **Stoddard B. Williams '57 (CLAS)**, who served in the Air Force and then as a pastor in his community, has written a firsthand account of how times have changed in his memoir, "Showers of Sparks: Memories of Encounters with Love of God."



➔ Paul J. Magnarella's book, "Black Panther in Exile: The Pete O'Neal Story," won the silver medal in the 2020 Florida Book Awards General Nonfiction category and therefore will be put on permanent public display in the Florida Governor's Mansion Library and in Florida State University's Strozier Library. **Magnarella '59 (BUS)** got his Ph.D. at Harvard and is an emeritus professor at the University of Florida. The book tells the story of O'Neal, who founded the Kansas City branch of the Black Panther Party. After Illinois Black Panther Party chairman Fred Hampton was killed by the FBI and Chicago police in 1969, O'Neal and his wife fled the U.S. in 1970 in fear for his life. He has since been in exile in Algeria and Tanzania. A veteran of the United Nations criminal tribunals, Magnarella was O'Neal's attorney during his federal

court appeals (1997–2001).  
 ➔ Congratulations to **John C. Severino '59 (CLAS)** and **Sally Ann Ingalls Severino '59 (CLAS)**, who met on a blind date at UConn and just celebrated 60 years of marriage! John, who was a football student-athlete, retired in 2001 as president of CBS Television Stations. Sally Ann taught high school in Newton, Massachusetts, and, more recently, was a volunteer caregiver at UCLA Children's Hospital. They live in Encino, California.  
 ➔ **Nancy Mattoon Kline '59 (CLAS), '61 (NEAG) '61 MS, '94 Ph.D.** just published her first book of poetry, "On the Edge." She and her husband, James Trail '54 (BUS), live at the Seabury Retirement Community in Bloomfield, Connecticut.



➔ **Rhoda Kriesel '61 MA** writes in with an update. She says she was lucky enough to have dual roles as a mom to two great girls and a marketing and international sales manager for instrumentation in chemical and semiconductor manufacturing facilities for Zellweger Environmental Division, now Honeywell. She is retired in West Orange, New Jersey. ➔ Congrats to **Francis "Frank" Dillon '62 (BUS)**, who published his third novel, "Hidden Innocence: Human Trafficking," about the scourge of smuggling young people into the country, flying them with drugs, and forcing them into prostitution. ➔ **Leigh Montville '65 (CLAS)**, longtime *Sports Illustrated* writer and *Boston Globe* columnist, releases his latest book with Doubleday in July: "Tall Men, Short Shorts: The 1969 NBA Finals: Wilt, Russ, Lakers, Celtics, and a Very Young Sports Reporter." ➔ **Gary Goshgarian '66 MA**, who writes under



➔ **Laura Bocon '10 (CLAS)** shared this photo of her grandfather, James Barlow, who graduated from UConn in the late 1940s, in the marching band with Jonathan II. Her maternal grandparents met at UConn.

the pen name Gary Braver, teamed up with internationally bestselling author Tess Gerritsen to write the murder mystery "Choose Me," about a police detective determined to find out what happened in a reckless affair between a popular college professor and his student. ➔ **Mike Pierson '66 (CLAS)**, a retired Coast Guard captain, reports that he and his wife, Elaine, recently moved to Virginia Beach to be closer to their daughter and grandkids. ➔ After graduating from UConn, **Carol Milardo Floriani '68 (NURS)** earned her MSN from Loma Linda University in California and taught nursing for 20 years. She went on to manage home health and hospice agencies until she retired at age 71. She credits her UConn education, particularly dean Carolyn Widmer and professor Jo Dolan, with preparing her to expand and succeed in her varied career. She lives in Easley, South Carolina, with her husband of 48 years. ➔ After first meeting at UConn when he was a junior and she was a freshman, **Alan H. Jaffe '68 (BUS), '73 JD** and **Sari Blonder Jaffe '70 (CLAS)** just celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. They are both retired from

a career of practicing law together and live in Stamford, Connecticut. ➔ Congrats to **Arnold Nieminen '69 (CAHNR)**, of Lebanon, Connecticut. The UConn 4-H volunteer for 50 years has been nominated to the National 4-H Hall of Fame. Only 12 outstanding 4-H volunteers from across the country are selected each year to compete for national honors.



➔ **Roland Vinyard '71 MA** published "The Ballad of Pete Hauer (It Was Caves That Pete Loved Best)." Written entirely from primary sources, the book deals with the mystery surrounding Hauer, who had been a friend of Vinyard's. A pacifist and expert in saltpeter studies, Hauer killed someone he barely knew in 1975 and then hung himself in remorse. ➔ **Gerard J. Monaghan '72 MA** spent part of last year working for the U.S. Census Bureau in Connecticut, Louisiana, and Georgia. The co-founder and former president of the Association of Bridal Consultants, retired Army Reserve lieutenant

colonel, and self-described “recovering journalist” serves on the New Milford Planning Commission. He and his wife, Eileen, have four grown children and nine grandchildren. ➔ **John Long ’73 (CLAS)** wrote “Learning Experience” for an online production at the Phoenix Stage Company in Watertown, Connecticut. The play, directed by **Drew Scott ’72 (SFA), ’77 MFA**, is a series of monologues featuring people talking about their experiences coping with the pandemic. Scott teaches drama at UConn Hartford, while Long taught drama at UConn Torrington and Waterbury. ➔ Major kudos to **Lynne Maquat ’74 (CLAS)**, who won the 2021 Wolf Prize in Medicine, an international award given to outstanding scientists for achievements that benefit mankind. Maquat, the founding director of the Center for RNA Biology at the University of Rochester, was selected for “fundamental discoveries in RNA biology that have the potential to better human lives.” ➔ Congratulations to **Michael Sills ’74 MS, ’82 Ph.D.**, of Bedford, New Hampshire, who published a family history in the form of a cookbook, “A Lithuanian Cookbook for My Irish Wife.” The work centers around the Lithuanian community in Hartford, Connecticut. ➔ **Charles Bernhardt ’75 (CLAS)** retired after 37 years as cantor at Oseh Shalom synagogue in Laurel, Maryland, and was named cantor emeritus. ➔ **Nancy Rudner ’76 (CLAS)** writes to tell us she’s an associate professor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Nursing and lives in the Orlando, Florida, area. ➔ **Virgil Lloyd ’79 (ENG)**, who has spent more than four decades improving wastewater systems throughout New England, was named the 2021 president of the New England Water Environment

Association, a chapter of the International Water Environment Federation. Lloyd is a senior vice president at Fuss & O’Neill.



➔ **Beth (Turcy) Kilmarx ’80 (CLAS)** was named associate dean/director of Cushing Memorial Library and Archives, University Libraries at Texas A&M. Kilmarx is an associate professor and former curator of rare books. ➔ **Bob Sembler ’80 (CAHNR)** wrote to recognize the day-to-day workers like his fellow physical therapists and all the nurses who have tirelessly led us through and are leading us out of the pandemic — all the front-line health workers, graduates young and old from UConn, who haven’t had a moment off during this past year. One such brave individual, he notes, is **Chuck Cota ’80 (CAHNR)**, who has worked at St. Raphael’s (now part of Yale New Haven Hospital) for 47 years. Cota has been a true hero during

the pandemic, coming to the hospital every day to lead his therapy team, and was an integral part of the Covid crisis management and recovery at the hospital, writes Sembler. Cota, faithful UConn supporter and extreme patient care advocate, just retired after a storied career in PT. ➔ **Laurie P. Havanec ’82 (BUS), ’94 JD** was named executive vice president and chief people officer by CVS Health. She previously served in that role at Otis Worldwide Co. ➔ **Madelaine Podur-giel Lawrence ’83 Ph.D.**, a registered nurse, writes in about the impact that her advisor, Arthur Roberts, and a UConn writing course had on building her confidence as a writer. She has written several articles and five books, most recently “A Pocketful of \$20s,” about a nursing education director who hands out \$20 bills to five people at Christmastime. “I am proud to be a graduate of the School of Education at the University of Connecticut,” she says. ➔ **Frank Figliuzzi ’87 JD**, former assistant director of counterintelligence at the FBI and current MSNBC national security analyst,

published “The FBI Way: Inside the Bureau’s Code of Excellence” with Harper-Collins-Custom House in January. ➔ **Allen R. Jones, Jr. ’87 (CAHNR)**, who owns six outpatient physical therapy practices in Virginia, is now chair of the Virginia Board of Physical Therapy and chairman of the state’s Board of Health Professions. ➔ **Scott F. Nolan ’87 (ED)** was honored by Bristol Community College in Fall River, Massachusetts, with the 2020 Dale P. Parnell Distinguished Faculty Award. ➔ After decades of working at public relations agencies, including her own, **Kyle (MacDonald) Potvin ’87 (CLAS)** published her first poetry collection, “Loosen.” Potvin, who was diagnosed with breast cancer in her early 40s, says she found reading and writing poetry cathartic while undergoing surgery, chemo, and radiation. She co-founded The Prickly Pear Poetry Project, holding workshops to help those impacted by cancer. She says she met her husband, **Glen Potvin ’87 (PHAR)**, at UConn, but they didn’t start dating until a decade later. ➔ **Karen**

MAKING GOOD



H<sub>2</sub>O

When it comes to water, the number of gallons used per capita per day in Israel is 106. In France it’s 297. But in the USA — how about 873? Our neighbors in Canada are also all wet with 639. So says **Mary Ann Dickinson ’87 (BGS)**, president and CEO of the nonprofit Alliance for Water Efficiency.

“Some of these countries with less water usage are making a huge difference in conserving water,” says Dickinson. “In Israel, for example, they use water recycling, where used water goes into a purple pipe so it’s not used for drinking but can be used in other ways, such as flushing toilets and watering. We’re literally watering our lawns with drinking water in the U.S. This is a major part of the changes that need to be considered for the future of water in North America.”

Dickinson served for nearly two decades in the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. Later she took the helm as executive director at the California Urban Water Conservation Council.

“Water is becoming more expensive, and I think if we can point out potential savings, that will help in conservation also,” she says. “You think you’re saving money by holding on to that old washer, but what is it costing you — some parts of the country have a water bill that’s more expensive than their energy bill.” —ERIC BUTTERMAN



MAKING GOOD

PROFESSOR’S PRIDE

**Timothy Bussey ’14 MA, ’18 Ph.D.** grew up in a military family near the Fort Benning Army base in Georgia. After very briefly considering enrolling in a military college, they attended a smaller state university in their hometown and then spent time abroad at the University of Oxford.

Their undergraduate advisor was an alum of UConn and shared information about the Rainbow Center. Bussey was impressed by the support provided to the LGBTQ+ community in Storrs and thought UConn was the perfect fit for postgrad studies.

They quickly became involved at the Rainbow Center, including facilitating the graduate and postdoctoral fellow group and running the Out to Lunch lecture series. That work proved to Bussey that they wanted to pursue a career in student services rather than go the tenure-track route.

Today Bussey is associate director of the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Kenyon College in Ohio, where they have racked up an impressive array of DEI accomplishments, particularly in the LGBTQ+ inclusion space. They were asked by the Modern Military Association of America to write the newest edition of “Freedom to Serve: The Definitive Guide to LGBTQ Military Service,” which the Biden transition team formally requested ahead of the inauguration.

Political science professor Christine

Sylvester advised Bussey on their dissertation, “Lavender Security Threats: Understanding the Histories of Discrimination Against LGBT Persons in the American Military and Intelligence Community.” The two caught up recently over Zoom.

**CS:** You have achieved a great deal in the three years since completing your doctorate. Could you talk about a top-five achievements during that time? **TB:** First, I’m very proud of “Freedom to Serve: The Definitive Guide to LGBTQ Military Service.” Second, I would highlight that when I joined Kenyon College, they had a 3.5 out of 5 ranking on the Campus Pride Index, which is the go-to inclusivity index for LGBTQ+ support services at colleges and universities across the country. After my first year, that increased to a 4.5 out of 5. Halfway through my second year, that increased to a 5 out of 5.

I’m also definitely proud of the queer and transgender studies conference that I developed during my first year at Kenyon, which has now grown into the largest LGBTQ+ student conference in the state of Ohio.

And in terms of the fourth and fifth things, I was really proud to have planned the Newark Ohio Pride Festival, and I’m very proud to have come out as transgender and non-binary during the pandemic. For a lot of people, the pandemic really made us

sit with ourselves. Gender identity is a really interesting concept that I — despite having done so many things with LGBTQ+ students and having taught women’s, gender, and sexuality studies for several years — had never actively and personally reflected upon.

**CS:** I’m smiling ear to ear listening to you talk about it. Is there a new project within the community or the college that you plan to start this year?

**TB:** I am definitely interested in growing my new organization, the Ace and Aro Alliance of Central Ohio, which is the state of Ohio’s first community organization that explicitly and specifically works to support the asexual and aromantic community.

I’d also like to transition my dissertation into a book project. And of course, there will be some expansions with the changes that we’ve seen from both the end of the Trump administration and the start of the Biden administration.

**CS:** I always thought that your dissertation should come out as a book. Do you have anything else that you would like to share?

**TB:** When I think about the fact that the dissertation is done and all of these things are happening, it does sort of leave me bewildered. When something like the request from the Biden transition team happens, I’m just always kind of amazed and surprised.

But I always end up in a place where I’m thankful for the people that have supported me. That certainly includes you, Sherry Zane with UConn Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and so many other people.

Honestly, I’ve had so many people that have been supportive to me in so many ways, both professionally and personally, and I’m just thankful for those people in my life. I really appreciate everything that they’ve done for me, and I think that’s the big takeaway here.

**CS:** Well, you’re certainly a credit to UConn, to Kenyon, and to your larger community. —JULIE (STAGIS) BARTUCCA ’10 (BUS, CLAS), ’19 MBA

To listen to this interview as part of the Brave Space series on the UConn 360 podcast, visit [magazine.uconn.edu](http://magazine.uconn.edu).

MAKING GOOD

# THANK YOU

In early 2019, the World Health Organization designated 2020 as the Year of the Nurse and Midwife in honor of the 200th anniversary of Florence Nightingale's birth.

The public health agency had no idea how prescient their designation would be. Over the past year and a half, nurses have responded to the call of duty to help fight the Covid-19 pandemic. They have sacrificed their personal safety, overcome enormous demands at the bedside, and even returned to the field after retiring. A few of UConn's finest shared experiences from the past year.

—MIKALA KANE



**Sophia Sopczneski '10 (NUR)**

The past year has definitely been the most challenging of my nursing career. Treating Covid patients was unlike anything I had experienced, due to their level of acuity, the constantly evolving treatment plans, and the complexity of the illness. I am proud to say my colleagues in the intensive care unit at The Hospital of Central Connecticut quickly adapted to the challenges of each new day, and we are a much stronger team now for all that we experienced together. **Jessica (Cavaliere) Varrone '10 (NUR)** from my class coincidentally joined our team in New Britain at the beginning of the pandemic. We're proud to be Huskies!



**Anika Bennett '19 (CAHNR)**

I am a patient care assistant at Connecticut Children's in Hartford, and initially, when I was told I would be helping Covid patients, I was nervous because, at the time, there was just so little known about the virus compared to what we know now. But I just feel confident in the hospital's guidelines and procedures. They give us step-by-step directions for what we need to do, so I never go in there feeling unpre-

pared. It's a very rewarding experience to provide comfort to patients and their families as we face and tackle the unknown. It's shown me I want to become a nurse. I really admire the work that the nurses do, honestly. I admire the doctors and the PCAs too, of course. It's all about teamwork. But it just made me appreciate the work of nurses more, seeing it firsthand.



**Samantha Marquardt '19 (NUR)**

I have been an operating room nurse at Yale New Haven Hospital since August 2019 and currently am a part of the transplant team handling kidney and liver transplants. I also circulate (and sometimes scrub into) all different types of surgeries, including robotics, vascular, general/trauma, cranio-maxillofacial, plastics, and thoracic. I have been able to get hands-on experience with Level I traumas, as well as be a preceptor to newer OR nurses. From April to June 2020, I was sent to the intensive care units to be a member of the prone team. We would flip Covid-19 patients onto their stomachs to improve their oxygen levels. I saw the sickest of the sick during my nine weeks on the prone team.



**Haley Meier '15 (NUR)**

I stepped into the charge nurse role for the day shift just before the pandemic hit and also found out I was pregnant with my first child. My unit became the dedicated non-Covid unit, and all pregnant/immune-compromised staff were sent to work there. It was a major learning curve. I spent my maternity leave trying to get ahead in graduate school, so now I'm even closer to getting my doctorate in psychiatric nursing.



**Mallory and Samantha Edrich '20 (NUR)**

My triplet sister and I became nurses together and are lucky enough to both work at UConn Health! I work on UT 3, and Samantha works in the emergency department. We loved being able to study and experience clinical

hours with each other at UConn and now sometimes we even get to see each other at work! Despite the hardships of this past year, being able to become nurses together has been amazing, and it's all thanks to UConn!



**Maureen Groden '90 MS**

This past year has been the most difficult of my career. In March 2020, we faced the challenging task of finding enough personal protective equipment for our staff and the sudden departure of several psychosocial-spiritual staff members. As director of Hospice and Palliative Care at the Holyoke Visiting Nurse Association, I had to guide, support, and educate staff who were worried about patients, families, and their own health. Everything was changing and uncertain. We have survived surges, staff illnesses, and patient deaths. Nurses have been remarkable in their courage and dedication to people who are ill and dying.



**Raymond Blair '20 (NUR)**

After graduating, I became one of the first new grad nurses to ever be hired to the STAR Team at Hartford Hospital. Being a full-time float nurse has given me a chance to learn how to function effectively on multiple different units, including Covid-19 units.



**Kristen Biatowas '17 (NUR)**

It will be two years in July that I have been in my position as a mother-baby nurse at Yale New Haven Hospital. At first, it was recommended that Covid-19-positive mothers be separated from their newborns at birth, though that has since changed. I took care of one new mother who wore a mask and gloves when holding her new baby, which was difficult to see. I also cared for a Covid-19-positive mother of twins whose husband could not be at the bedside because he also had the virus. She was a new mother, and not having her husband there was tough.

Find more at [magazine.uconn.edu](http://magazine.uconn.edu).

**Ali '88 (CLAS)**, a former newspaper reporter turned advice columnist and dating coach, teaches ways to save time in the dating trenches in her new book, "A Woman's Guide to Understanding Men: Dating Secrets Most Women Don't Know." Ali, who writes under the pen name **Karena Alexander**, is a media strategist at the Trumbull, Connecticut, communications firm **Michael J. London & Associates**. ➔ **Lynn Katz '88 JD**, tells us she began writing fiction after retiring as a school principal in Farmington, Connecticut. Her debut novel, "The Surrogate," is being published by **Black Rose Writing** on May 6. The story explores the psychological profile of a troubled teenager obsessed with guns and the teacher who tries to help him.



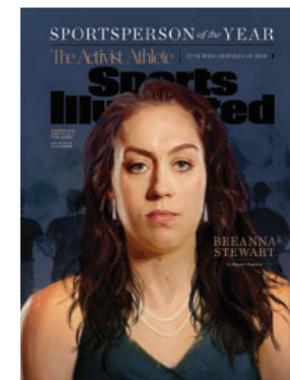
➔ **Anthony Susi '90 MM**, a composer and former band director at **Coventry High School**, recently published two adaptable arrangements of standard band repertoire to meet the needs of directors dealing with restrictive rehearsal requirements due to the pandemic. "Russian Sailors Dance" was released by **C-Alan Publications** in February, and "The Messen-

ger March" was released by **C.L. Barnhouse Company** in the fall. ➔ **Paul Valenti '90 (CLAS)** was recently appointed director of the Miami district office of the **U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)**. The Miami district's geographical jurisdiction includes all of Florida but the western panhandle, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The EEOC's mission is to prevent and remedy unlawful employment discrimination and advance equal opportunity for all in the workplace. ➔ **Gwenn Gerken Noel '92 (CLAS)** joined **High Point University** in North Carolina as assistant vice president for family services. She has worked in various communications, marketing, and guest relations roles in health care and entertainment for more than 25 years. ➔ **Keith Berger '93 (ENG)**, '98 MS recently founded and is CEO of a new company, **Oodles Energy, Inc.** His investor partners are senior Wall Street and European finance and hedge fund leaders interested in the transition to electric vehicles and the need for increased charging infrastructure. ➔ **Jill (Chmielecki) Sharif '93 (CLAS)** was named one of the 10 Outstanding Women of 2021 in **Commercial Real Estate** by the *Boston Real Estate Times*. Sharif is vice president of national busi-

ness development for **First American's** national commercial services division. ➔ The **National Association of Social Workers** presented **Rita Abdallah '94 MSW** with the **NASW Ohio Statewide 2020 Outstanding Service Award** for her support and service to the chapter. Her 25-year social work career has spanned nonprofit leadership, academia, and healthcare, primarily in oncology. She is a wellness coach and founder of **Turning Point Wellness & Yoga** in Westlake, Ohio. ➔ **Laura (Schieffer) Buonaiuto '94 MBA** and **Matt Buonaiuto '90 (CLAS)** are celebrating their 15th wedding anniversary. They met in Storrs in 1988, parted ways, then found each other again in 2005 and married a year later. They say they are "living the dream" on the coast of Maine with their daughters, Zoey and Megan. ➔ Congratulations to **Jennifer Aldworth '95 (CLAS)**, who was named a 2020 **Massachusetts Latinx Trailblazer** by the **Massachusetts Black and Latino Legislative Caucus**. Aldworth is the first woman and the first person of color to serve as executive director at the **Massachusetts Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs**. She worked with **Boys & Girls Clubs** across Massachusetts as they pivoted during the pandemic to provide childcare, distribute meals, and open remote learning sites.



➔ **Denise Quinn '96 (CLAS)** wrote to tell us her husband **Erik Dobratz '95 (CLAS)**, a sportscaster for **WTNH Channel 8** in New Haven, Connecticut, who has covered professional and local sports for the past 20 years, was named **Connecticut Sportscaster of the Year**. Congratulations! ➔ **Robert Irwin '95 (CLAS)** just released his second album, "Chasing the Tone," which features fellow Huskies **Suj Patel '20 (CLAS)** on bass and vocals by Irwin's wife, **Shelby Irwin '95 (CLAS)**, and his mother, **Barbara Claire '86 (CLAS)**, '89 JD. ➔ **Christopher Logan '95 MBA** was named president and CEO of **Bank of New Hampshire**. Logan joined **Bank of New Hampshire's** executive management team in 2017. ➔ **Jamelle R. Elliott '96 (BUS)**, '98 MA, an assistant coach for the **UConn Women's Basketball** team, received the **Distinguished Alumna** award from the **UConn Neag School of Education** in March. ➔ **Rowena Ortiz-Walters '96 (CLAS)**,



KUDOS

*Sports Illustrated's* 2020 Sportsperson of the Year went to five activist athletes, including the **Seattle Storm's Breanna Stewart '16 (CLAS)**. USA soccer star **Megan Rapinoe**, last year's Sportsperson of the Year, wrote: "What struck me watching Breanna Stewart take the microphone before the first game of the WNBA season was her willingness to step up in that moment . . . She was coming into the season off a torn Achilles tendon, an injury you don't know how you'll recover from. But she chose to take on more responsibility. Watching Stewie stand in front of everyone before that first game and ask for 26 seconds of silence to remember **Breonna Taylor**, the Black woman who was that age when she was killed by police in her Louisville apartment, was powerful . . . Then she went on the court and . . . won her second championship and [League MVP]. I don't know if you can fully appreciate how difficult it is to accomplish what she did this season. And she did it in classic, effortless Stewie fashion."

MAKING GOOD

## AFFORDABLE MS DRUGS

As president and CEO of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, **Cynthia Zagieboylo '86 MA** spends a lot of time working to keep down the price of prescription drugs. She made headlines in 2016 as a changemaker featured in a *New York Times* article titled “Furor Over Drug Prices Puts Patient Advocacy Groups in Bind.” The cost of MS meds had risen almost 400 percent in the previous four years, and Zagieboylo was working hard to turn that around. She says the Society’s effect on prices since then has been positive, but has much further to go.

“You need to have the right people in the room to make progress, so we work to maintain relationships with every company working on MS therapies,” Zagieboylo says. “Our goal is to understand what therapies are coming out and influence pricing coming out.”

The Society wants and needs the pharmaceutical companies to succeed. “They’ve invested millions of dollars to bring things to market,” she says. “If they lost interest 30 years ago, we would have zero therapies for people with multiple sclerosis.”

The fight takes place on Capitol Hill, too. “We have 30,000 volunteers who communicate with congresspeople and over 300 district activist leaders.”

Zagieboylo credits UConn with honing her skills to analyze data and recognize the big picture. “Today, we’re assessing our programmatic work, implementing the MS Society’s strategic plan, and measuring the impact we have on people’s lives, and I learned a terrific amount in all of those areas.”

Surprisingly, researchers still don’t know exactly what causes MS. But in her 30-year tenure at the Society, Zagieboylo says she has seen a vital growth rate of knowledge about the disease. For example, diagnoses come much quicker — what used to take 15 years now often takes around two years, so people can get the help they need far sooner. —ERIC BUTTERMAN



➔ When the pandemic first started last spring, **Michael Baczewski '12 (CLAS), '20 MPA** suddenly found himself working as many as 12 to 16 hours a day trying to track down millions of pieces of PPE for first responders in Connecticut. As a contract specialist for the state, he had to find, vet, and procure critical supplies, from N95 masks and face shields to mortuary bags. “We were essentially the air traffic control for the majority of the supply coming into Connecticut,” he says. “Succeeding was non-negotiable, saving lives was non-negotiable, working around the clock was non-negotiable.” Luckily, he had just finished UConn’s Master of Public Affairs program, which, he says, prepared him to lead and think outside the box during those early days when PPE was a scarce commodity that every state was hunting. “The skills we learned, what we analyzed, what we debated in class, it really prepared us as public servants for what we were about to face,” he says. “The MPA program gave me the ability to manage risk, analyze very complex problems, make decisions, and employ dynamic thinking to get the job done.”



ALL STAR

### Say it With a T-shirt

**Chris Smith '92 (BUS)**, Husky men’s basketball’s all-time leading scorer (left), gathered current and former basketball players to help **Jason Jakubowski '99 (CLAS), '01 MPA**, president and CEO of Connecticut Food Bank/Foodshare, hand out groceries at Pratt & Whitney Stadium at Rentschler Field.

Smith and Jakubowski were sporting Smith’s latest business venture: Wear Ya Mask! tees. The idea came to him last March, says Smith, while standing in line at a neighborhood shop in Shelton, Connecticut, and watching two guys in front of him get into a heated debate over the merits of mask wearing. Smith says that growing up in Bridgeport, Connecticut, he saw too many arguments turn ugly and dangerous, so he quickly paid for his items and left.

But later that night as he went to sleep, he kept thinking about what he could have done to intervene or to encourage the guy who was not wearing a mask to put one on for the consideration of everybody in the store. He realized that if he’d been wearing a shirt with a slogan like “Wear Ya Mask!” he could have said something without having to actually say anything.

The next morning he contacted a T-shirt supplier, created a simple design on his computer, and sold some tees to friends and family. A couple weeks later he posted pics of them on social media, which got the attention of **Cindy Carrasquilla '94 (CLAS)**, his former basketball team manager and now director of public relations at Haddad & Partners, a Fairfield, Connecticut, advertising agency. Designers there helped Smith create the version of the shirt now being sold at [wearyamask13.com](http://wearyamask13.com).

© Haddad & Partners



TRAJECTORY

## LIVE FROM BOSTON

Being a TV news reporter is hard. It’s not just the insane hours, rising at 2 a.m. to work the morning shift, or missing important weddings and birthdays, or never having the same days off as your partner, or being told by hurtful trolls on social media that you need to lose weight or change your hairstyle — right after you just got back from covering a blizzard where you were pelted in the face by snowflakes the size of chicken pot pies. But the most difficult part, says **Juliana Mazza '13 (CLAS)**, reporter and morning anchor at WHDH 7 in Boston, is being human.

“It’s really hard, meeting people at the lowest moment in their life, where they’re facing unspeakable tragedy, somebody who is on their knees in tears, and it’s your job to talk to them.”

Sometimes you hold the mike, and sometimes you hold the person.

“I did a story on Christmas Day,” says Mazza. “I was working in New Orleans, and I got sent to cover an awful car crash.” The sole survivor was the

father. He lost his two-year-old, his fiancée, and their unborn child.

“I called him in the hospital, and he wanted to talk about how incredible his fiancée was, how beautiful their child was. I think he found it helpful, being able to make sure that people knew she was perfect. I don’t know if I’ve ever cried so much — that was the hardest day I’ve ever had. My boss called me and asked me if I was okay, because in my live shot from the crash, I looked devastated. Because I was. A big part of being on TV is being genuine. I’m an emotional person. I’m not gonna try to come out and be crazy tough. It took me a while to realize that it’s okay for me to be who I am, and it’s okay for people to see that.”

Growing up in Milford, Connecticut, Mazza idolized a local anchor named Sonia Baghdady. So she wrote for the school paper and did morning P.A. announcements. At UConn, she credits journalism professor Steven Kalb, whose guidance, she says, arrived

“without sugar-coating.” She interned at News 12 in Norwalk, Connecticut, where she took every shift they offered her, driving 90 minutes from Storrs, working eight hours writing and editing scripts for other people to read, then driving 90 minutes back for classes. She worked Christmas break, summers, and weekends.

“I worked my butt off because it meant that they knew that I was serious,” she says.

In 2012, she was hired at WWLP 22 in Springfield, Massachusetts, where, after three months, a departure left an opening at the anchor desk.

“I came in at 3:30 in the afternoon for the nightside shift, and my boss said, ‘You want to anchor? Why don’t you take a stab at it?’ Ninety minutes later, I was sitting at the desk.”

She stayed there. She was 22 years old and “greener than green,” the youngest anchor in the station’s history. She was mentored by veteran anchor Barry Krieger, whom she describes as a “giant bucket of knowledge.” She went from Springfield to a job in New Orleans for two years, and from there to Boston, a top-10 market, and closer to home. At 29, her star continues to ascend, and while she is happy where she is, both anchoring and reporting outside the studio, no one would be surprised to see her rise to the national level. It’s still her humanity that makes her stand out.

In New Orleans she reported on 17-year-old Sam Butler, who was shot in the head during Mardi Gras. She checked in on him over the years and did updates. “The New Orleans Saints saw my story and learned Sam played football,” she says. “I connected with Demario Davis, a linebacker for the Saints, who went to visit Sam in the hospital. The team ended up getting him a handicapped-accessible van as a Christmas surprise.” Mazza stayed on the story and covered Sam’s first steps post-accident — collecting his high school diploma.

“It’s my job, as an individual and as a journalist, to find stories that matter,” she says. “If I find a story and I feel like there’s something I can do, on a human level, to try and help, then I will.”

—PETER NELSON

REMEMBRANCE

# SHE FOUGHT FOR WHAT IS RIGHT AND WHAT IS FAIR

Gifted mind, steadfast advocate, caring friend. These words offer a glimpse into the effervescence and assiduousness of Rose Wong's spirit.

Some may recognize her name — at the time she went by Calliope Wong '16 (CLAS) — from the 2013 media frenzy that surrounded her unread applications to Smith College, both denied review solely on the basis of her transgender identity. Undeterred from the pursuit of her education, Rose matriculated to UConn as a proud Husky and later graduated early, with honors, and a near perfect GPA. She was featured in *Time* magazine, the *New York Times*, the *Out 100*, and was awarded a Point Foundation Scholarship to Stanford University School of Medicine to pursue her dream of becoming an endocrinologist. Her goal was to serve and heal others, and she never once complained about the hard work she put in to become not only a competent, but an excellent, provider.

I will quote Rose herself when I say she was “many other things besides trans.” Indeed, those who had the privilege of being her friend knew Rose to be so, so much more — a talented artist and musician, a humble whiz behind a computer, a passionate sci-fi enthusiast, and above all a genuine, fiercely loyal friend. Rose sacrificed her own life's peace and privacy to create change for all of the trans folks who would follow her. Because of Rose's persistence, over 15 American colleges and universities instituted explicitly trans-inclusive admissions policies following her rejection, including Smith College. Rose was brave enough to forge a path for others that she herself would never walk, a fact that never deterred



While at UConn, Wong won a 2014 IDEA grant to record an album of improvisational piano music. She released “Hyaline Songs” in 2015.

her from doing the hard work of being “first.”

The news of Rose's passing by suicide early this year gave me more than pause — it brought me to a halt. I would never have imagined I would be asked to write a eulogy for someone who breathed such life and joy into this world. Rose has yet to be honored or recognized by Smith College, despite the *New York Times* editorial board calling for the school to grant her an honorary degree in 2017. While exploring some of Rose's digital footprints, I found a contribution she made on a Smith College Q&A thread, which announced that the class of 2020 would be the first to have out trans women in its ranks. Her comment in response to this change simply read: “Good.” Reading that, I knew Rose was satisfied with how things played out at Smith, though she didn't get her degree there. I know Rose was satisfied knowing other trans people would be granted an opportunity she

herself would never enjoy.

For her, life's journey was always about something much bigger than college, bigger than being trans, bigger than herself. For Rose, life's journey was about an unwavering commitment to what is right and fair, often at the expense of what is comfortable. Rose's brilliant mind and endless curiosity live on in every trans child who pursues an education. Her love for humanity lives on in the trans people who dream to one day take an oath to heal others. We honor Rose's memory and all trans lives when we listen to and learn from one another. So today, in Rose's honor, pull the trans people in your life close, tell them they are loved as their most authentic selves, and remind them that this world would not be the same without them in it. There is more of their story yet to be told, and we all want them here to help write it. We love you, Rose; Trans Huskies Forever. —MATT G. BRUSH '17 (CLAS)

'05 Ph.D. has been named dean of St. Mary's University Greehey School of Business, becoming the first Latina to lead the business school. Ortiz-Walters was previously the dean and professor of management in the School of Business and Economics at SUNY Plattsburgh. ➔ **Adam Bowles '97 (CLAS)** is the founding and lead pastor of Castle Church in Norwich, Connecticut. After a 15-year newspaper career, Bowles opened the church in 2019, converting the first floor of a former bank into a sanctuary and gathering area. He led an outreach to El Paso, Texas, after the mass shooting there and launched ministries to promote racial justice and compassion toward immigrants. He lives with his wife, Luisa, in Lisbon, Connecticut. They have two daughters in college, Victoria and Veronica. ➔ **Greg Brick '97 MS** has published seven books about caves since graduating from UConn, including his latest, “Caves and Karst of the Upper Midwest, USA.” His day job is mapping thousands of springs for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. ➔ **Harry Thomas**

'99 MSW reports that he has published his first book. “Peace by the Sea: Inspiring Images and Quotes to Light Your Way” features 111 of his seaside photographs paired with inspiring quotes that illustrate his 12 principles of “living your best life.”



➔ Connecticut's Education Commissioner **Miguel Cardona '01 MA, '04 6th Year, '11 Ed.D., '12 ELP** was sworn in March 2 as U.S. Secretary of Education, the first UConn graduate in history to hold this position in the White House Cabinet and the second UConn alum to hold a Cabinet-level position. ➔ **Craig A. Cooke '01 6th Year, '07 Ph.D.** was appointed superintendent of schools in Madison, Connecticut. ➔ **Orlando Wright '01 (CLAS), '03 MA** became director of partnerships and innovation for the American Society for Addiction Medicine, where he oversees partnerships with states and other public

entities, strengthens health technology, and builds collaborations. He also was recently appointed to the Howard County Local Behavioral Health Advisory Board in Maryland. ➔ **Tamika Williams-Jeter '02 (CLAS)**, former Husky and WNBA forward, is the new head coach at Division III Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio. Williams-Jeter, who won three national championships at UConn, had spent the last two seasons as an assistant coach at Ohio State. ➔ **Matthew Necci '03 (CLAS)** published his first novel, “The Road Will Someday Bend.” The book is a 1940s-era coming-of-age tale about an immigrant's journey from Italy to the United States as his family tries to escape the looming war in Europe. ➔ **Jack Sheedy '03 (BGS)** published a collection of essays, “Magical Acts in Two Suitcases,” including one titled “Redemption by Shakespeare,” in which he describes returning to college and finishing his undergraduate degree at age 57 at UConn's Torrington campus. ➔ **Bonnie (Curran) Ru-**

**milly '04 (CLAS)** sent in an update. After graduating from UConn, she went on to Columbia University and became a licensed clinical social worker. She has a private practice in Wilton, Connecticut, where she specializes in trauma therapy and EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing). ➔ Connecticut's Association of Schools selected **Joy Wright '04 6th Year**, principal of King Philip Middle School in West Hartford, as 2020 Middle School Principal of the Year. ➔ Robinson+Cole, a Hartford law firm, hired **Samuel C. Maduabueke '05 (BUS), '10 MS, '17 MBA, '20 JD** as a law clerk. ➔ **Ira Steinberg '05 (CLAS)** was promoted to partner at Greenberg Glusker LLP, a Los Angeles law firm, where he practices complex commercial and business litigation in the technology, real estate, entertainment, and media fields. Outside of the office, he holds a pilot's license for single-engine aircraft and gliders with a certification for aerobatics and has completed multiple marathons. ➔ **Michelle (Kersten)**

LIFE LESSONS

## Sticking with It

**Keith Worts '88 MA** knows how to stick with it. The “it” being exercise. Worts is president of Crunch Signature — you know Crunch Fitness, the “no judgments” folks.

“People need to start off at a comfortable pace,” says Worts. “That probably means starting off with cardiovascular exercise like walking. Begin with 20 minutes a day to gently ease yourself into it. And that is exercise. Just as importantly, pick a time of day that will allow you to fall into a routine. For many people, that's early morning. I think as the day continues, the responsibilities increase and the likelihood of you not feeling there's time can grow. But remember, you don't have to start with so much. With small improvements, you have small wins. Keeping it positive helps keep it going.”

And he knows how tough it can be. With more than 350 locations and 3,000-plus employees to look after, it can be hard for even Worts to find time for the gym. But when he struggles, he reminds himself that this is a part of his life, not something to do when he's not living his life.

“Even as we're talking,” he says, “I just got through with a run. And it makes me feel better. It's easy to forget the positives of exercise when you're staring it down and you could be doing something else on your long list. But you have to remember all the good it does for you. If you fall off for weeks, remind yourself of how exercise made you feel good.”

To those who have never exercised much, Worts reminds that you don't have to wait for a New Year's resolution, a new month, even a new day. “Any time is a great time to start. And it can start with a walk.” —ERIC BUTTERMAN



MAKING GOOD

## UNDERACHIEVER NO MORE

Jim LaFlamme just made a multi-million-dollar bequest to the UConn School of Pharmacy, a gift that anyone who knew him back in the '70s would never have predicted.

This is, after all, the same **Jim LaFlamme '79 (PHAR)** who had a reputation as a bit of a troublemaker with little regard for classroom learning back then. "I mean, I took full advantage of the 18-year-old drinking age when I was at UConn," LaFlamme says. "I didn't take anything seriously because I had a photographic memory. For the first two years, I didn't go to class at all. I took the tests, and that was it."

LaFlamme readily admits that without the counsel of the dean at the time, Karl Nieforth, he wouldn't have graduated. "He told me, 'You may not see it yourself, but you're destined for something great. You don't have confidence in yourself, but I have confidence in you.' I said to myself, 'Shoot, now I owe this guy something, and I can't let him down.'"

### Something Great

The dean was right. LaFlamme earned a master's degree in management from Indiana Wesleyan University and went on to a distinguished and diverse health care career. He served as executive vice president with Coté Orphan, responsible for all global operations within both the regulatory affairs and business development divisions and was a director with PricewaterhouseCoopers, advising healthcare clients in both the public and commercial sectors. Early in his career, LaFlamme held director of pharmacy, administrative, and executive positions with medical centers in Maine, Indiana, Connecticut, and Colorado.

Four years ago, he started his own company, BioPharma Global in Vienna, Virginia, which shepherds pharmaceuticals used to treat rare "orphan diseases" through the FDA's regulatory process. An orphan disease affects fewer than 200,000 people. LaFlamme was inspired in part because he hopes



LaFlamme at his BioPharma Global office (right) and with his wife, entrepreneur Carolyn Thompson, at a Stanley Cup playoff game — the two are longtime Washington Capitals fans.

to find a treatment for his own inflammatory condition, which has yet to be named.

### Something Greater

LaFlamme's multimillion dollar bequest is the largest gift in the history of the School of Pharmacy.

"I realized there was an opportunity here for me to do something really special, really spectacular, and help the School move forward," he says.

The funds will endow a deanship, enabling the School to conduct more research, purchase lab and clean-room technology, recruit a more diverse faculty, and send a more diverse student body into pharmacy practice — a priority of LaFlamme's.

LaFlamme, who lives in Fairfax Station, Virginia, with his wife, Carolyn Thompson, an entrepreneur, grew up in South Windham, Connecticut, the oldest of six children. His mother was a nurse and his father held down three jobs to make ends meet. As a kid, he would help his father at the concession stand for UConn football and basketball games. He attributes his dynamic career success to the dean and others at UConn who encouraged him.

"I took full advantage of the education they gave me," he says. "When I finally graduated, I felt like if I wasn't successful, I would be letting down a lot of people. So, every time a door opened where I could move up, I took advantage of it. I had to be successful."

This is not LaFlamme's first gift. The longtime donor has mentored many pharmacy students. Last fall, he pledged \$25,000 to fund programming for the School's diversity committee, composed of students, faculty, and staff, and challenged pharmacy alumni to match his commitment. The fund pays for activities that foster and enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion for pharmacy students.

He also serves on the School of Pharmacy's advisory board and provides internships for students at his company, even going so far as working with his wife to review their résumés and run the students through practice interviews before they leave.

"I was not focused when I was in school, so my goal is to help give them a little dose of reality. So there is a little tough love involved, but there's also the soft side of things," he says.

—GRACE MERRITT

As a first-generation college student, an African American, the son of an immigrant, and a product of the foster care system, I am no stranger to adversity. Facing those challenges motivated me to reach for my dreams, and it was through scholarship support that I was able to make my college dream a reality.

Xavier S. Cole '20 (BUS)

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*Submissions may be edited for clarity or length.*

**TOM'S TRIVIA ANSWERS**

1. A, 2. C, 3. B, 4. D; 1990

**Wojtyniak '05 (ED), '06 MA** earned her administration degree from McDaniel College in Maryland. She is a special education instructional consultant for Carroll County Public Schools in Westminster, Maryland. ➔ Fenton River Veterinary Hospital in Stafford Springs, Connecticut, owned and operated by **Scott Morey '06 (CAHNR)** and **Heidi Morey '05 (CAHNR)**, was named Veterinary Hospital of the Year in hospital design in the category of under 8,000 square feet by *dmv360*, a national veterinary publication. ➔ **Grace Duarte de Baker '07 MSW** is the assistant

director of the Student Counseling Center at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee, where she coordinates wellness initiatives and outreach to students and faculty and provides mental health treatment and development and training to a multi-disciplinary intern staff. She also was appointed as adjunct professor at the University of Memphis School of Social Work and has a small private practice in Memphis and California. ➔ Congratulations to **Amanda (Molden) Wells '07 (CLAS)**, who was named Delaware School Psychologist of the Year for 2020–21. ➔ **Katie (Kopcha) Claywell '08 (SFA)** recently published a children's book, "The Birdy Got My Chips," which was inspired by her 3-year-old daughter. ➔ **Paul Freeman '09 Ed.D.**, superintendent of schools in Guilford, Connecticut, was named Connecticut's 2020–21 Superintendent of the Year by the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents. ➔ **Caroline Oks '09 (CLAS)** was promoted to director at Gibbons P.C., a business and commercial law firm. She handles complex business and commercial litigation in state and federal courts throughout New Jersey and New York.



➔ Congratulations to Assistant Professor **Austin H. Johnson '10 MA, '13 6th Year, '14 Ph.D.**, who was awarded tenure at the University of California

in the Graduate School of Education's school psychology program. ➔ **Alex Maki '10 (BUS)** was named vice president of Financial Planning & Analysis and Investor Relations for CIRCOR International. He joined CIRCOR after more than 10 years with General Electric and is part of the UConn School of Business's Mentor Program. ➔ Kudos to **Tsa Shelton '10 (CAHNR), '15 MPH**, who graduated from The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine and is a public health veterinarian for the USDA Food Safety Inspection Service. ➔ **Dave Hudson '11 Ph.D.** studies invasive crustaceans, which can wreak havoc on an ecosystem. He and his team were the first to report the presence of Chinese mitten crab and Dungeness crabs off the shores of Connecticut and Massachusetts recently. Hudson was a student Fulbright Fellow to Colombia after graduation and returned to Connecticut four years ago to begin building a Research and Conservation Department at The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk. Last year he was admitted to the prestigious Explorers Club, a group committed to the advancement of science and exploration. Among the other projects Hudson's been managing lately are horse-shoe crab stress research (find a deeper dive on that in "The Fortunate Ones?" in *UConn Magazine*, Summer 2019), water quality in Long Island Sound, shark acoustic tracking, and invasions research. He's the vice-chair of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums Sea Turtle SAFE (Saving Animals From



➔ **Collin Molano '20 (CLAS)** started working in January in customer relationship management at Fidelity Investments in Jacksonville, Florida, where he entered the training program.

Extinction) program. And last but not least, he's co-founder of UpWell Coffee in Norwalk, which raises funds for conservation and research of ecosystems related to oceans, lakes, and rivers, one cup at a time." ➔ **Ariel Borgendale '12 (CLAS)** graduated from Boston College Law School in May 2020 and is an attorney with Skaddan Arps Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP in Boston. She is married to fellow Husky **Dylan Landfear '12 (CLAS)**, and they live in South Boston. ➔ **Justis Lopez '14 (ED), '15 MA** and his colleague, Ryan Parker, have launched Project Happyvism to encourage educators and young people to practice self-love and keep joy as the centerpiece of their lives. ➔ **Jack Zaino '15 (SFA), '16 (ED), '17 MA**, a teacher at Swift Middle School in Oakville, Connecticut, was named 2020 Young Choral Director of the Year by the Connecticut chapter of the American Choral Directors Association. ➔ **Gabriel Bachinelo '16 (BUS)** was promoted to manager, corporate reporting and analysis, at The Nielsen Company. ➔ **Sushruta Kunnenkeri '18 MA** started a new job as a science teacher at Lexington High School in Massachusetts.



© Richard Termine '78 MFA

**JOB ENVY**

**The Grouch's Girlfriend**

When **Pam Arciero '82 MFA** went to try out to be a puppeteer on "Sesame Street," she found it wouldn't be a one-day audition; it would involve weekly workshops over four months. Three hundred people were part of that first workshop to fill the role of Grundgetta, Oscar the Grouch's significant other, and each week, fewer and fewer people were asked back. On the last day it was down to Arciero and one other person. She walked into the room and there were Jim Henson and many of the key people who created "Sesame Street." "It was the most intimidating room — they were the nicest people — but knowing who they were, and being a young person auditioning, it was pretty scary," she says. That was 38 years ago. Today Arciero is still Grundgetta. She's also played "cats and bats, goats and birds, and any kind of animal or monster you can imagine. That variety is part of the joy of the job," she says. Arciero says she loves so many things about "Sesame Street," the diversity of its puppets and human characters, the way it addresses big topics. The show recently did an outreach video on homelessness and food insecurity that emphasized that home is where your family is; home is where you love. "That was very moving," she says. Another favorite part of her work is the wonder that happens when children interact with "Sesame Street" characters live. "They never see us; they just see the puppet," she says. "They don't even realize we're talking. That's the magic. It's just the character they see." That magic was part of a tour she did with "Sesame Street," talking with children after Hurricane Katrina. "I think all of us are here on the planet to make things a little better for each other, and that kind of work, it's the best," she says. —*JACKIE FITZPATRICK HENNESSEY '83 (CLAS)*

Find more about Grundgetta and Grouch, including why they never married, and hear about Arciero's time at the UConn puppetry program at [magazine.uconn.edu](http://magazine.uconn.edu).

**IN MEMORIAM**

Please visit [foundation.uconn.edu/obituaries](http://foundation.uconn.edu/obituaries) 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](mailto: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 p. 48 or [magazine.uconn.edu](http://magazine.uconn.edu) to see if you know as much as King of UConn Trivia Tom Breen '00 (CLAS).

### TOM'S TRIVIA

1. What was the first year UConn freshmen had to have a high school diploma in order to enroll?

A: 1914 B: 1891 C: 1919 D: 1893

2. Prior to becoming one of the seven founding schools in the Big East in 1979, UConn had been a regional basketball power, winning 18 championships in which conference?

A: The New England Conference  
B: The Eastern College Athletic Conference  
C: The Yankee Conference  
D: The Athletic League of New England State Colleges

3. James "Angie" Verinis '41 was co-pilot of the famous *Memphis Belle* flying fortress during World War II. What did he name the bomber he piloted later in the war?

A: The Hellfire Husky  
B: The Connecticut Yankee  
C: The Lady of Mirror Lake  
D: The Spirit of '81

4. Frances Osborne Kellogg dropped out of high school and never attended class at UConn, yet her legacy has become one of the most prominent aspects of the University. What did she contribute?

A: She donated the basketballs and uniforms for the first women's team  
B: She applied the first coat of gold paint to the cupola atop Wilbur Cross  
C: She gave the school the Husky puppy chosen as Jonathan I  
D: She left a bequest that enables the production of Dairy Bar ice cream



**Bonus:** 2021 is not the first year UConn has held stadium graduations. For a few years in the early sixties during the Homer Babbidge administration, commencement was held in Memorial Stadium in Storrs. What was the final year UConn graduation was held at Memorial Stadium?