FINALLY!

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

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- 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!
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.

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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UConn Magazine
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Correction In the Spring 2021 issue we stated that Miguel Cardona ’01 MA, ’04 Ed.D., ’12 ELF was the first UConn alumnus 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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Cover Sean Flynn, manipulated for fit Snap Peter Moremus
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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 simi-lar 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 1900s-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. Had Attolino 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.
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, email me at lisa.stiepock@uconn.edu, or send by regular mail to UConn Magazine Letters, 34 X. Eagleville Rd., Storrs, CT 06268-3144.

Here’s a letter sampling, edited for fit, from our last issue. Find more at 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, Mass., 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 Bogen ‘73 (CLAS), Boston, Massachusetts, via our website

Do Good, Feel Good

➤ 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, Mass., 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 Nos- tradamus 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

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

LETTERS

Dear Editor,

I am writing to comment on Miguel Cardona and his recent appointment as US Secretary of Education. I believe that his appointment is an appropriate choice for the position.

As a member of the UConn community, I believe that it is important for our university to have a strong presence in Washington, D.C. Miguel Cardona has a strong background in education and has demonstrated his commitment to improving educational outcomes for all students. His appointment is a testament to the excellence of our university.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide my thoughts on this important issue. Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]
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 1996, 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 shoul- der 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 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 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

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.
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.

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!
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 mixed with dentistry, pharmacy (counting and sales con- 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 (DG5) 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 21andMe 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 “Afri- can American” because she has no idea where her lineage actually comes from; what matters is how she is perceived. How we — and others — perceive our- selves, 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 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 prac- tices what they preach. —Kim Krieger

Brown’s classes are open to all. Attend- ers can 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.

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, volun- teered to staff the clinics. Here, fourth year postgrad Angal Deenagore and professor and primary care physician Steven Angus help vaccinate residents in Norwalk, Connecticut.
GOT MICROPARTICLES? 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)
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 and Indigenous 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.

“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.

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.”

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

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

Sage Phillips in her regalia in the UConn Forest

“Let’s go and see what’s around 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 Baeza 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.”

“Tribal leaders believe that in order for future generations to feel good about their identity, they need to reconnect with the land of their ancestors,” she says. “It’s not going to be easy, 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.

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“Things are going to start happening fast.”


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

“Hackathon” in which students seek work on. My ancestors did it for me, and I have to do the same for future generations.”

— GEORGE SPENCER

The New London Day, March 9, 2021

On the unexpected ways we were educated during the pandemic:

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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!”

“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.
By Jackie Fitzpatrick Hennessey ’83 (CLAS)

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.

Rohan 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...
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 Dunkin’ Donuts Park 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 eventually 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. “It was amazing.”

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 Carstensz 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 those 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 education-related 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 (Stagia) Bartucca '10 (BUS, CLAS), '19 MBA -

MEET MARY

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

- Illustrations by Brian Lutz and Christa Yung -
I f 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 on ‘The Bachelor’ 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., a historian who created and hosts the “American Girls” podcast with her friend and fellow UConn his- tory 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 refer- ences has earned it a global community of fans. In one 71-minute episode, the hosts discuss the American Girl book and its problematic Netflix popularity during last sum- mer’s racial justice protests.

“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.”

When people in podcasting talk about what works, “it’s not just about the content — it’s about how we talk to each other,” says Horrocks.

“We record, conservatively, four hours of tape together a month. You can’t fake that.”

But the podcast isn’t just about history. It’s also about pop culture: “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: ‘POW: 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 femi- nism largely through the writings of other girls, and was drawn to American Girl books “because they centered the stories of young girls like me.”

Eighth grade, 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 course- work 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 com- ing to UConn.

The two women, both public histo- rians passionate about making history accessible to the masses, pull podcast
They’re expert historians, they’re best friends, and they also have something important to say about Justin Timberlake.”

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 whole theme reeks of privilege — the items have always been pricey; today, a “Historical Character” doll and book set will set you back $810 — 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 would saliva 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 narratives 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 some- what 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 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 patri- otsm 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 irrespon- sible 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 some- thing wrong,” Mahoney says.

“We’re saying why is this, what are these books inviting us to think about the 1990s, 1980s, and today? This erausere 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 boil- ing point.

“Our timing could not have been 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 8:30 accessories the weekend people were being beaten while marching for their lives?’” says Horrocks. “If you’re creating some- thing and putting it out in the world and you didn’t think about it differ- ently 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.’”
“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.

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

“Farms = Food = Life”

Written by Kevin Markey | Photos from WFP Media
“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.

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 progress Omamo had made as a 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

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

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 staff inspect 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.
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 Gambian Red Cross started a seed distribution program.

World Food Programme’s headquarters in Rome. There a Green Revolution in Africa. From 2006 to 2012, he was coordinator of the Eastern Africa Food Policy Network Agricultural Development, senior research fellow and research with the United Nations International Fund for

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

He expressed through agriculture, I hope you find opportu-

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 opportu-

nities 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

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

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 resilience in rural communities.

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 con-

tinued 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.”

It is humbling.

The WFP has been working on Ethiopia’s food security issues for many years. Omamo says, “I really do relate to issues facing Africa and Africans,” he says. “I’ve always been drawn back for that reason.”

“Plant something to harvest every year.”
Breeds in Portraits & Stories” built a reputation shooting for many national magazines, including Forbes. 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 Small Farm Breeds in Portraits and Stories.”

Aliza Eliazarov ’95 (CAHNR) goes to great lengths to capture her stunning portraits of farm animals, even if it means lying on the ground to get the perfect shot. For her models to strike a pose, she’d hang backdrops, set up lights, then wait quietly for the 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.”

Paul J. Magarelli’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 Stronger Library. Magarelli ’99 (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 their lives. He has since been in exile in Algeria and Tanzania. A veteran of the United Nations’ criminal tribunal, Magarelli was O’Neal’s attorney during his federal court appeals (1997–2006).

Rhoda Kriessel ’61 MA works 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 Zelbourne Environmental Division, now Honeywell. She is retired in West Orange, New Jersey. Congratulations 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, plying 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.”


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Rhoda Kriessel ’61 MA works 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 Zelbourne Environmental Division, now Honeywell. She is retired in West Orange, New Jersey. Congratulations 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, plying 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.”
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 Israel are also all wet with 639. So says Mary Ann Dickinson ‘87 (BSG), 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 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 water savings, that will help in conservation as well,” 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

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 home town and then spent time abroad at the University of Oxford. Their undergraduate advisor was an alumnus 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 postgraduate studies. They quickly became involved at the Rainbow Center, including facilitating the graduate and postdoctoral fellow group and running the Out to Learn 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 “Free-dom to Serve: The Definitive Guide to LGBT Military Service,” which the Biden transition team formally requested ahead of the inauguration. Their 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 achievement during that time?
TB: First, I’m very proud of “Free-dom to Serve: The Definitive Guide to LGBT 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 queen 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.

CS: I’m 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 serves the asexual and aromantic community.

CS: 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 add?
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 reaction from the Biden transition team happens, I’m just 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.

CS: I haven’t had so many people that have been supportive to me in so many different ways, personally and professionally, and I’m just thankful for those people in my life. I really appreciate them for being there 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 STAGG BARTUCCA '70 (BUS, CLAS), '78 MFA
After retiring. A few of UConn’s finest have sacrificed their personal safety, helping fight the Covid-19 pandemic. They stepped directions for what we need to do, and initially, when I was told I would be in New Britain at the beginning of the pandemic, I thought it will be two years in the fall. Paul Valent’i ‘90 (CLAS) was recently appointed as director of the Miami district office of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The Miami district’s geographic 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.

Gwen Gerken Noel ‘92 (CLAS) is celebrating their 55th wedding anniversary. They met in 1965, 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, Zosy and Megan. Gwen is a counselor at 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, Odoles Energy, Inc. The 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 (Chmieleski) Sharif ‘92 (CLAS) was recently appointed as the NASW Ohio Statewide Executive Director. Jill is the first woman to serve as president for family services. She is also a director of the National Association of Social Workers division. Jill’s role is being published by Black Cat Press on May 6. The story explores the psychological profile of a troubled teenager obsessed with guns and death. Nurses have been remarkable during the pandemic, and nurses more, seeing it firsthand. It’s all thanks to UConn!

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 Biatoswak ‘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, I never go in there feeling unprepared. 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 be 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 I just made me appreciate the work of nurses more, seeing it firsthand.

Sophia Szopczynski ‘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 acuteness, 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 caring for these patients, and are a much stronger team now for all that we experienced together. Jessaca (Cav- ander) Varenc ‘10 NUR (CLAS) received her commission in the U.S. Army. Her class coincidentally joined our team in New Britain at the beginning of the pandemic! We’re proud to be Huskies! Make Good

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 precious this gift to the world should be. Over the past year and a half, nurses have responded to the call of duty to help fight the coronavirus pandemic. They have sacrificed their personal safety, overcome enormous demands at the bedside, and returned to the field after retiring. A few of UConn’s finest shared experiences from the past year.

Anika Bennett ’19 (CLAS) Children’s in Hartford, and initially, when I was told I would be helping Covid patients. I was nervous because, at times, this virus is such a little known about the virus compared to what we know now. But I just feel confident because of the doctors’ guidance and procedures. They give us step-by-step directions for what we need to do, so I never go in there feeling unprepared.
**AFFORDABLE MS DRUGS**

As president and CEO of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Cynthia Zagieboylo ’86 MD 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 Forces Pathways, Disease Groups to Join.” 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 there is 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 every 300 of our activists lead their legislators.”

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 asking, ‘Do we have on people’s lives, and I learned a terrific amount in all of those areas.”

Surprised 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

**LIVE FROM BOSTON**

**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 sourcing Smith’s latest business venture: Wear Ya Mask’ers. 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 on one 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 Caruvasquilla ’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.

**TEA JECTORY**

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.”

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.”

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 17 in Boston, is being genuine. “It’s really hard, meeting people at their 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 fiance, and his unborn child.

“I called him in the hospital, and he wanted to talk about how incredible his fiance 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 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 her a letter.

“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
Gifted mind, steadfast advocate, caring friend. These words offer a glimpse into the effects of her relentless and audaciousness of Rose Wong's spirit.

Some may recognize her name — at the time she went by Callie Wong ‘16 (CLAS) — from the 2013 media frenzy that surrounded her unread applications to Smith College, both denied review solely on the basis of gender. From Smith College.

Because of Rose's persistence, over 15 American colleges and universities have revised their admissions policies following her. In 2017, she was satisfied with how things turned out, which immediately made on a Smith College Q&A thread, exploring some of her digital footprint, 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 said: “Good.” Reading that, I knew Rose was satisfied with how things played out at Smith, though she didn’t get there herself. I know Rose was satisfied knowing other trans people continued to create change for all of us.

She fought for what is right and what is fair.

The news of Rose’s passing by suicide early this year gave me more than just 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 footprint, 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 said: “Good.” Reading that, I knew Rose was satisfied with how things played out at Smith, though she didn’t get there herself. I know Rose was satisfied knowing other trans people would forever be granted an opportunity she herself would never enjoy.

For Rose, her 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 forever.
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 Côté Orphan, responsible for all global operations within both the regulatory affairs and business development divisions and was a director with Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 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 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 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
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 dogs,” and keep joy as the center to people to practice self-love and courage educators and young people to practice self love and keep joy as the center-piece 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 Choral Directors Association. “Gabriel Bachinel ’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.

Woźniakiec ’05 (ED), ’06 MA earned her administration degree from McDaniel College in Maryland. She is a special education instruction — degree from McDaniel College in Memphis, Tennessee. She coordinates wellness initiatives and outreach to students and faculty and provides mental health treatment and development 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.

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