

UConn

MAGAZINE

FALL 2024



DAN ORLOVSKY IS...

SNAP!

3.28.24

Matthew Maramo '24 (ENG) uses a scanning electron microscope at Science 1. It's unusual for undergraduates to get hands-on experience with equipment of this caliber — and especially important for students in disciplines like materials science and engineering. As part of a senior design project, Maramo was documenting pitting and corrosion in stainless steel welding coupons (metal plates) that he and his project partner Kevin Li '24 (ENG) had treated. See what he sees at s.uconn.edu/steel.





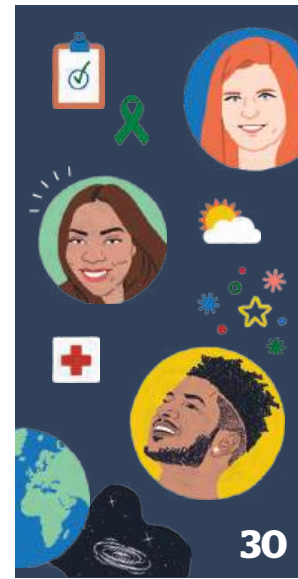
14



22



26



30

FEATURES

- 14 ALL IN**
Dan Orlovsky '17 (BGS), former UConn and NFL QB and current football analyst for ESPN, needs a first down on every play — at work, yes, but especially at home.
- 22 HE'S GOT GAME**
How Ethan Antonucci '99 (CLAS) saved his hometown Connecticut movie theater and conquered Hollywood to write for the groundbreaking "Game of Thrones."
- 26 KNOW THE LAND ON WHICH YOU STAND**
Since completing her doctorate in anthropology, geoarchaeologist Tiziana Matarazzo '14 Ph.D. has been unearthing the past to illuminate the present.
- 30 IF THEY'D KNOWN THEN ...**
Remember those rising first-years of the Class of 2024, whose touching, eager, and sometimes prophetic admissions essays we shared for our Fall 2020 issue's cover story? We discovered how those four years turned out for them — and where they are now.

SECTIONS

- 4 UCONN NOW**
What sorts of toys do you find in an engineering dean's office? What makes an MCB major obsessed with MMA? How do you hit on the ideal topic for a documentary? Who are the women making real change in today's world? And more burning questions answered.
- 36 UCONN NATION**
Alums find inspiration in pieces of the Gampel floor, wedding cake toppers, underwater rugby scrums, the wisdom of jazz musicians, and the human connection. Plus Class Notes, Tom's Trivia, and more.



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FROM THE EDITOR



A still dry Orlovsky (left) and Morenus (with camera), Janavey, and lab Berks by the trampoline (right).

GOOD SPORTS

Some photo-shoot requests are bigger than others. It was a lot to ask the family of star ESPN analyst Dan Orlovsky '17 (BGS) to set aside an entire late-summer morning for our UConn magazine team of photographer Peter Morenus, designer Andrew Janavey '15 (SFA), and me to take pictures for the cover and the feature story that begins on page 14.

But that was only the beginning.

We asked what games they might typically play together in their backyard and, despite the drippingly humid day, would they mind leaping on the trampoline, soaring on the swings, and playing some seriously intense soccer for our cameras?

They would not. And all the while their natural and obvious delight in, and support of, one another kept things fun. Their competing competitiveness — yellow lab Berks the singular exception there — kept it tumultuous.

At times it felt more like a day at summer camp than a serious photo shoot. Still, when the time came for me to approach Dan with the really big ask — Do you have a suit you wouldn't mind jumping into the pool in? — I figured my odds of getting a yes were 50-50 at best.

As our cover attests, Orlovsky was the ultimate good sport, suiting up and making repeated exuberant backward flops into the pool. Morenus stepped up, too — literally — getting the ideal angle by standing on a metal ladder placed atop a grilling table. Those are his shoes in the picture above — it's the only angle I was able to get while simultaneously keeping his perch steady.

At the end of the day we had only one final ask: Can we all be part of this family?

Lisa J. Stiepock
Editor



FEEDBACK

We want to hear from you! Please share thoughts, insights, discrepancies, recollections, photos — and how's your Tom's Trivia win-loss percentage coming? Post to our website at magazine.uconn.edu, email the editor at lisa.stiepock@uconn.edu, or send by regular mail to UConn Magazine Letters, 34 N. Eagleville Rd., Storrs, CT 06269-3144.

Here's a sampling of web, social media, mailed, and emailed comments on our last issue, edited for clarity and length. Find more and join the conversation at magazine.uconn.edu.



Happy 80th Birthday to Two UConn Alums — My Parents

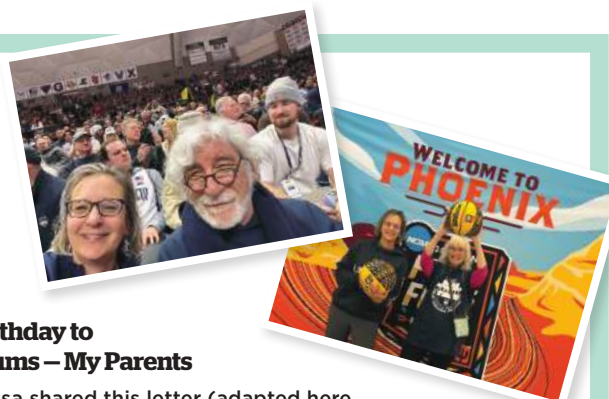
In January, Vanessa shared this letter (adapted here, with the full letter and more pics online) about her plans to celebrate her parents' 80th birthday with Husky tickets. Then she sent photos from the games themselves!

➔ My parents are class of 1965 alumni, and this year they are turning 80. They gifted me the love of college basketball and the UConn Huskies as my team. This passion is indicative of the other things they gifted me: to be full of hope and always count on a brighter future. The most appropriate gift in return is UConn basketball tickets.

So here's what I'm doing. I'm taking my mom to Phoenix for the Men's Final Four, with an option for the championship game. Am I being too dreamy? Nope, my mom's a risk-taker, and she has always dreamed of going to the Final Four. With a nod to all the superstitious fans out there, all my other comments on this will remain unwritten. As for my dad, he does not like big venues like the XL, and he doesn't watch the games as they get closer to the championship because it makes him too anxious. Seriously, he watches the games afterward on YouTube once the brackets start. So Dad and I have third-row seats at Gampel for the men's game against Creighton coming up. It's still early in the season so he can watch without getting too nervous, but it's bound to be a good, competitive game.

Nothing is perfect, because that's who we are. But when you are not perfect and you win big and then shape something beyond yourself, well that's something to live by. I'm going to return a slice of those things that my parents gave me — the love of UConn basketball. Happy birthday, Mom and Dad!

Vanessa Sylvester, Peaks Island, Maine
Daughter of Sandra Lucas '65 (CLAS) and John Surowiecki '65 (CLAS)



Trading Cards

➔ I attended my first UConn game in 1956 at the old Field House against Springfield AIC with my best friend, Lloyd Hinchey, and our parents. I am a native of Norwich and now retired, living in Florida. I was fortunate to be able to go to many more UConn games over the years, including two national championships in 1999 and 2004. The past two years have been great with UConn basketball frequently on TV and of course winning two more national championships.

Theodore Montgomery '91 (BGS)
Largo, Florida

➔ Loved the Banner Year pages in the new UConn Magazine; however, on page 2 of the section that reads "UConn Men's 2024 March Madness Run" you list "First back-to-back titles since Duke in 2007." Actually, it was Florida under Coach Billy Donovan that had back-to-back NCAA men's basketball titles in 2006 and 2007.

John Allen Tanner '69 (CAHNR)
Yarmouth, Massachusetts

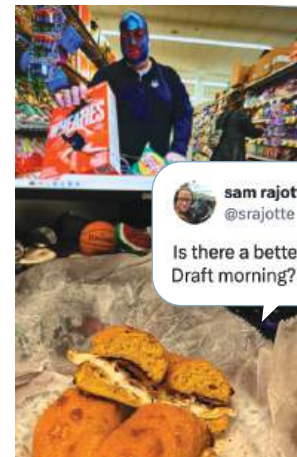
➔ Loved the Summer 2024 edition. Coffee-table worthy!

One boo-boo ... in 2007 it was the University of Florida that won back-to-back national championships. Hate to give Duke anything, let alone when undeserved.

Ken Gilkes '63 (BUS)
Kissimmee, Florida



Superfans



sam rajotte
@srajotte
Is there a better way to spend Draft morning? I don't think so.

Cynthia
@Cynthia1k
Holy crap, I know these people. From Twitter 🤔🏀🏀🏀🏀

Prem
@premdawg
This was incredibly fun, Julie. Thanks for sharing our story and it is an honor to be in the same article with the others who are the real, true legends of #UConnNation...

Dan Madigan
@dmad1433
A murderers row of Husky fans here. Fun read!



Arrogant Husky (Taylor's Version)
@ArrogantHusky
The @MisterHotBalls photo propelled me out of my chair, but further down this goes so hard. Shoutout to the dynamic duo! @premdawg

Patrick Madden
@TheSportsJD
Well written story. @MisterHotBalls is an entity to himself and knows more about the game than he gets credit for. Although @premdawg bleeds blue he's a very polite fan and has such an appreciation for his team that few have.

Indeed! As many of you noted, the Banner Year trading cards in the Summer 2024 issue should have said the University of Florida was the last men's basketball team to win back-to-back March Madness championships. Guess we had our old Duke rivalry on the brain. —Ed.

Net Worth

➔ As a UConn grad and now Arizona resident, I was very interested and proud to read the article on Jesse Senko. What great teachings and innovations can come from schools to inspire new ways to work with others and create ideas! All the ideas have not already been done, and I look forward to what UConn and ASU create in the future.

I also enjoyed the basketball trading cards. You showed creativity all around in this edition!

Jill Coughlin '85 (CLAS)
Phoenix, Arizona

Withered Flowers

➔ Kimberly [Rosado] — I just read about your [documentary] work in UConn Magazine. Congratulations and thank you so much for doing this very important work. Welcome to health

care and nursing. Wishing you all the best in your life and career.

Karen Lemieux '97 MSW
Rocky Hill, Connecticut

Superfans

➔ I loved your article on the superfans. Not to blow my own horn but I consider myself a superfan. I've been writing a daily blog (doggydaddyuconn.blogspot.com) during the season about the UConn women since October 2014. Since its inception, I have over 1 million views. Maybe I can make your next article.

Mark Wolfberg
Delray Beach, Florida

➔ Husky Harper here. Doggydaddy-uconn is an exceptional daily read. If you haven't checked it out, you are missing a ton of great info and timely analysis. Truly, he is a superfan.

"Husky Harper" '81 (CLAS)
Manchester, Connecticut

➔ Mark's blog is the best thing to read for McHuskies worldwide.

Semper B. Ball
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

➔ People are coming up to me at the Connecticut Sun games telling me they saw me in the magazine. The first person actually called me a movie star as I was walking past her seat — too funny.

Angel Earle
Bethlehem, Connecticut

Toward a More Perfect Union

➔ Thank you for such a timely, thought-provoking piece. As a public school teacher, contentious conversations are more and more frequently showing up in my classroom, even at the elementary level.

I had been heading into the residential election this November with trepidation, knowing that things would get ugly. Nelson's article gave me some great ideas on how to facilitate conversations among my students to help them (and me) understand each other in a respectful way.

And let's face it, it gave me good ideas to navigate family picnics with my own Uncle Bob, too.

Christal Banville '18 MA
Ellington, Connecticut



Milla's work traces how disordered breathing and seizures can contribute to sudden death.

CHECKING IN WITH

BRENDA MILLA

Milla's postdoc research seeks answers to why our sleeping brains sometimes forget to remind us to breathe

Brenda Milla '19 (CLAS), '24 Ph.D. reached her fifth year of undergrad before she considered doing research — UConn, she says, taught her to never turn down an opportunity. We caught up with the Stamford native at a coffee shop in Manchester this summer, where she told us about breathing, brain cells, and why it's her dream to attend a mixed martial arts bout.

Your Ph.D. advisor, Dan Mulkey, mentioned that you are a boxer.

I'm interested in the sport, and mixed martial arts generally. As an undergrad, I went to a boxing gym and learned Muay Thai. It's similar to kickboxing, but you can strike with your knees and elbows. In the beginning, it was to gain more confidence in myself. It brings something out of you.

Why did you transfer from UConn Stamford to Storrs?

To finish the biology major. As a first-generation college student, the transition to a large campus was more challenging than I anticipated; I didn't do so well. My initial year was a whirlwind of adjustment, especially after caring for an uncle and grandmother who eventually lost their battles with cancer. I took additional classes that weren't required, and I wasn't familiar with add-drop. I knew this was not reflective of my capabilities. I could have graduated fourth year, but I decided to stay a fifth year. My major was MCB, and I'd pretty much taken all the MCB courses, so first semester fifth year I took PNB cardiorespiratory physiology. That's when I met Dan [Mulkey] — it changed my life.

You did a lot of volunteering in both Storrs and Stamford.

I grew up speaking Spanish at home. As an undergrad, I began interpreting

at a free clinic in Stamford. In Storrs I volunteered with Windham Hospital, the Collegiate Health Service Corps, and Covenant Soup Kitchen. I also gave presentations to migrant farm workers at their lunch space. I'm not much of a public speaker — it was quite scary!

For someone who says she's not much of a public speaker, you gave a pretty good commencement speech.

I got the selection email the day before my trip to give a talk at Seattle Children's and Microsoft SIDS Research Summit in Washington. It was an overwhelming time. I was in the midst of finishing a complicated analysis, writing my dissertation, applying for a postdoctoral fellowship, and preparing for my first-ever talk at a conference. I felt a lot of pressure, and it took me a day or two to respond yes. I'm quite timid, but this was an incredible once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I decided to challenge myself.

You're happy with how it went?

I reflected on this surreal moment in my life where not only am I the first person to graduate from college in my family, but now I will be earning a Ph.D. — breaking generational cycles. Overall, I was happy with it, especially because my mother was in the audience, and I mentioned her in my speech. She replays the video over and over, and it makes her so happy!

You mention your mom a lot. Has she had a big influence on your career?

My parents immigrated here from Mexico. My mom was a housekeeper. Even for her to attend high school, she had to take multiple buses over an hour each way. Her experience really motivates me. She always encouraged me to achieve my dreams. Even when I was close to just getting a job to help my family financially, she said, "No, follow

your interests." It feels selfish in a way, wanting to pursue this academic route that has very delayed gratification. When I was at UConn Stamford, on Fridays I'd go with her and help her clean. Big houses, tall ceilings, nice furniture. Some day I'm going to buy Mom a house. For now, I'll keep focusing on my career path.

We've talked about how your research could potentially discover lifesaving truths, even treatments, for people with severe epilepsy. How does that intersect with life-threatening breathing problems, such as sudden death in sleep — for infants and adults?

My current project is understanding the neural basis of breathing dysfunction in Dravet syndrome, a rare form of epilepsy that begins in infancy, and understanding how that may contribute to premature mortality. I'm looking into an unexplored population of neurons called glycinergic neurons. They've been completely ignored in the field. I'm really interested in connecting my current work with epilepsy and my postdoc studies on sleep disordered breathing.

Your postdoc is at Harvard, right?

I'll work at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston. It's a Harvard teaching hospital. I wasn't actively looking for postdocs. But then I met [Harvard professor] Thomas Scammell. He's a leading expert in orexin neurons and in narcolepsy. He stopped by my poster at the Society for Neuroscience conference. We talked about my research, about his research, and it just sort of organically flowed. The more I started to learn about Tom's lab, the more it just seemed like a no-brainer. I couldn't say no.

Do you think about your own breathing a lot?

When I get stressed, I'm too vigilant of my own breathing. I may sigh or hold my breath for too long, which will cause CO₂ buildup in the blood and cause me to take a breath again. Thankfully, I know my central chemoreceptors are working!

—KIM KRIEGER

UConn Talks

On the signature looks she incorporated into her Barbie doll (see back cover):

“The one characteristic that probably is most represented on the doll is just how meticulous and careful I was with my hair. It’s just a simple ponytail, but I took a lot of pride in making sure there were no flyaways. Because for me, when I played, it was really important that I didn’t have to worry about anything else but playing.”

Sue Bird '02 (CLAS), Husky women’s basketball royalty, People, July 16, 2024

On the “1,000-year storm” that hit Connecticut in August:

“It’s likely that extreme precipitation events will increase in frequency ... These events – 10 inches in a day, or 12 inches in a day – we should plan for that everywhere in Connecticut.”

James O’Donnell, professor of marine sciences and executive director of the Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation, The Boston Globe, Aug. 21, 2024

On the practice of “unit packing”:

“To saddle the workers with a bunch of new colleagues who don’t really work there only so they can vote against the union seems like a one-way ticket to a bargaining order to me.”

Michael Fischl, professor of labor law, Bloomberg Law, July 18, 2024

On the rise in groups combating the threat of Christian nationalism:

“Almost every time we turn around, there’s a new organization or campaign that is dedicated to this cause.”

Ruth Braunstein, professor of sociology, Faith & Leadership, Aug. 6, 2024

On not making traumatized people “walk through a gauntlet of cameras and reporters shouting questions as they leave a crime scene, a reunification center, or a memorial”:

“When I speak about covering mass shootings, I give advice that journalists never want to hear: Sometimes you should stay home. Especially if you are a famous journalist and require a crew and a staff of hair, makeup, and craft services. Check your privilege and consider whether you are doing more harm than good by being there.”

Amanda J. Crawford, professor of journalism, Nieman Reports, July 12, 2024

On dousing yourself to beat the heat:

“The more surface area being cooled the better, [and] the colder the water the better.”

Douglas Casa '97 Ph.D., Professor of Kinesiology and CEO of UConn’s Korey Stringer Institute, The New York Times, June 21, 2024

On the deadly sexually transmitted disease turning cicadas into “zombies”:

It’s “even stranger than science fiction ... They’re completely at the mercy of the fungus; they’re walking dead.”

John Cooley, professor of entomology, Associated Press, June 4, 2024

On finding tiny tropical bigeye fish at the Jersey Shore:

“It’s great that people are aware of these kinds of (sightings), these species that look odd on the beach. People can be citizen scientists.”

Peter Auster, professor of marine sciences, Lehigh Valley Live, July 24, 2024



Office Space

SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

It’s obvious walking into the office of Dan Burkey ’23 MA that he’s a Lego nerd, but does he consider himself one? “Oh yeah. I get the catalog and everything.” Overflow creations came to work when the College of Engineering’s associate dean for undergraduate education and diversity started running out of display surfaces at home. “I grew up in the ’80s, and I had a ton of Legos as a kid. My mom kept them all, and when I had a child of my own, I started to buy them for him as well,” Burkey says. “Legos are synonymous, in a way, with engineering. A lot of kids that grew up to be engineers were probably into Legos.”

Give Me Space While he loves co-branded Legos for beloved IP – “The Simpsons” and “Lord of the Rings” are favorites – the bulk of his collection is NASA- or space-related. The Saturn V

rocket behind Burkey’s monitor was the first he brought to campus in 2017; the Earth and moon in orbit and Perseverance Mars Rover are 2024 additions.

Precious Gifts The “Tiny Plants” set was a thank-you from a student for writing recommendation letters. At home, Burkey’s 16-year-old son displays the 4,000-piece “Star Wars” Death Star the two built together after Christmas 2015.

The Coolest While not the largest or most expensive, Burkey says the “neatest idea” he’s seen is the Lego ship in a bottle on display in his Engineering II space (not pictured). “It’s a little Lego ship in a bunch of Lego water with the ‘glass’ bottle built around it, sitting on a little stand. It’s unique.” —JULIE (STAGIS) BARTUCCA '10 (BUS, CLAS), '19 MBA

With the arrival of a new dean – Ji-Cheng “JC” Zhao – and other leadership changes, “it’s obviously a really exciting time for the College,” Burkey says. When he’s not building Legos, he’s supporting undergraduate engineering students and serves as an advisor to two of the first Ph.D. students in the new engineering education doctoral program. While his chemical engineering research focused on vapor deposition, Burkey has shifted his work to engineering pedagogy, especially game-based and game-inspired teaching methods. During the pandemic, he added “alum” to his list of UConn credentials, completing the Neag School’s online master’s program.

OUR STUDENTS

GET PERSONAL

Film what you know and embrace the vulnerability, advises this Emmy-winning filmmaker-professor, whose students now have Emmys themselves

When the undergraduate seniors studying in UConn Stamford's digital film and video production concentration start preparing for their capstone projects, their professor advises them to go personal.

"When they pitch me an idea, and they say, 'Oh, I want to do the next Marvel movie,' I'm like, man, you have no budget," Emmy award-winning documentary filmmaker Oscar Guerra tells his students. "But use the capital you have. And the capital you have is telling your own story."

It's a challenge to share your own story — it means you have to be vulnerable. And along the way you'll undoubtedly be critiqued — by your professor, by your peers, and by your audiences, something made all the more difficult by that oh-so-personal investment in the story.

But it's also an opportunity, says Guerra, for a young filmmaker to write their own narrative.

And to learn a valuable lesson about trust — trust in your mentors; trust in those working alongside you; and trust that, when you tell a great story, it will resonate.

It might even resonate enough for a bevy of wins at the 47th Boston/New England Emmy Awards Gala.

UConn launched its digital film and video production concentration through the Digital Media and Design (DMD) program at UConn Storrs and UConn Stamford in 2019. The first UConn Stamford cohort — Agustina Aranda '23 (SFA), Christopher Orrico '23 (SFA), Jayvell Gray '23



Jayvell Gray '23 (SFA), Agustina Aranda '23 (SFA), and Christopher Orrico '23 (SFA) at the 47th Boston/New England Emmy Awards Gala in June.

(SFA), Shannon Nasution '23 (SFA), and Yazmine Uvidia '23 (SFA) — also are the first students to have their work distributed through UConn Reels, a new collaboration between DMD and Connecticut Public.

"PBS Connecticut was really committed to finding ways to work with us," says Guerra, who's produced multiple documentaries for PBS's "Frontline" and worked to start discussions with the network to find ways to collaborate. "They really liked the idea, because it's not just that they want content, they want good content. So it was just a matter of everyone getting connected to see the type of work that we're doing."

Guerra's students ultimately produced five short documentaries, which were published online and aired on PBS broadcast channels through UConn Reels. These largely Connecticut-centric stories included a profile of the local indie-pop band Similar Kind; an examination of the once-thriving, now-waning skateboard culture in Bridgeport; and a glimpse into the innovative Bridgeport fashion scene pioneered by Black and Brown designers, models, and promoters.

The students also shared their

personal stories — the ones where they had to be vulnerable and allow themselves to be present in the work. For Aranda and Orrico, those came through vastly different portraits of their fathers.

Aranda's "Say Something" offers an intensely intimate look at the de-evolution of a father-daughter relationship portrayed through interview, archival footage, and animation. For Orrico, "The Ladder" explains the events that helped shape his own father's life and shares the lessons of that life that are now being passed on to new generations within their family. Both say their willingness to share such personal aspects of their lives was made easier by the relationships they'd developed with their teachers and classmates. "I think being vulnerable came kind of easy," Aranda says, "because I knew these guys for my entire college career, and I knew the guidance they'd given me and would give me if I wanted to do this."

"We're friends at this point," agrees Orrico. "We had built this relationship, and we knew what each of us was good at. In terms of Agustina and myself, she was like, 'I'll direct something and you film it.' And I'm there for it. I know my strengths.



Top: Christopher Orrico's short film "The Ladder" takes a look at events that helped shape his father's life and shares the lessons of that life that are now being passed on to new generations of his family. **Middle:** Students collaborated on the short film "Public Hazard," which examines the once-thriving, now-waning skateboard culture in Bridgeport, Connecticut. **Bottom:** Two members of the collaborative first cohort of film production students at UConn Stamford — Agustina Aranda (left) and Shannon Nasution.

I know her strengths. And it's just really important to trust. Sometimes, working with other people, it can make or break something. So trust was very much the biggest thing."

"The way that these particular students who are featured through UConn Reels were able to work together and work collaboratively on realizing these films is a real testament to the kind of community we create within the department, and to some of the uniqueness of the Stamford campus in particular," says Heather Elliott-Famularo, an award-winning filmmaker and head of DMD.

At the Boston/New England Emmy Awards Gala on June 8, Aranda won two Pillar Awards, the equivalent of a student regional Emmy, taking the College/University – Video Essay category for "Say Something" and the College/University – Arts/Entertainment/Cultural Affairs category for "Made in Bridgeport."

Orrico was recognized with an Honorable Mention in the College/University – Video Essay category for "The Ladder."

Aranda also won Best Documentary 2022 at the Bridgeport Film Festival for "Public Hazard" and the Student Documentary Award of Excellence at the BEA Festival of Media Arts 2024 for "Made in Bridgeport," and she premiered "Say Something" at the Slamdance 2024 film festival.

"It's always cool to accomplish something and feel proud of something and move forward with your work when you're so young, because it feels like you're on the right track," says Aranda. "As a student, I think it's just an extra layer of accomplishment. I did it, and I'm just a student. Imagine what I could do when I've done it for a while." It was also, Aranda says, an acknowledgment of her identity — something critically important to her and deeply apparent in all her work.

"I'm a Paraguayan American multimedia artist and filmmaker from Bridgeport, Connecticut," she says. "All these layers, that's all me, and every single layer comes into every moment of my work. That could be good or bad, because it's the way I navigate the world and a way that other people don't navigate the world. So all of these proud and public acknowledgments of my work, its extra special for me, personally."

It's also special for Guerra and for the program he, Elliott-Famularo, and their colleagues are nurturing in Stamford — a young program, not even technically its own major at UConn, that's already competing with larger, more established film programs in the Northeast region.

"A night like that one was a night of a lot of satisfaction and a lot of pride, to see them thrive," says Guerra. "And also for us, as educators, to know that what we do has some impact."

"Sometimes you don't get to see that at all. And that's what we do as educators — you plant a seed that you're not going to get to see grow. But on some rare occasions, like this, you do actually get to see it bloom." —JACLYN SEVERANCE

Go to uconn.edu/reels for links to these films, Oscar Guerra's latest documentary, and information about a second season of UConn Reels.

TOP 10

TRUE GRIT



In a tight-knit Armenian enclave in Lowell, Massachusetts, **Richard Juknavorian '95 (CLAS)** grew up surrounded by a community of fierce matriarchs, immigrant mothers who juggled full-time jobs while keeping their families intact. “A lot of these women escaped the 1915 Armenian genocide and thrived in America against all odds,” he says. This early exposure to female resilience laid the foundation for his podcast, “Meeting You Where You’re At,” in which Juknavorian talks to trailblazers, visionaries, and change-makers who draw from a similar well of uncompromising grit. These women are taking action and driving real impact — as advocates for child internet safety, nonprofit leaders uplifting women’s causes, and champions of gender pay equity. Selecting just 10 standouts from his more than 90 insightful episodes to date was no easy feat for Juknavorian, but a common thread binds his picks together. These women don’t just dream of changing the world — they do it.

Richard’s Top 10 Guests



1. Cristina Torres: Opening Up About Grief, Episode 32

A business and brand content coach, Cristina describes herself as a “first-generation Dominican daughter, single parent, style enthusiast, and widow.” What I didn’t realize before we spoke was that her husband, who had encouraged her to leave her day

job and start her own company, had died just eight months earlier. She was grieving deeply and so vulnerable and open about her loss.



2. Professor Rita Colwell: Doyenne of Science, Episode 41

I felt like I earned a microbiology degree after talking to Professor Colwell. I was intimidated — I mean, she was the first female director of the National Science Foundation! She’s 89 years old, and I always ask my interviewees about who their community is, who their people are. It floored me when she responded, “Oh, my posse?” Now that’s how I refer to it, too.



3. Angelique Albert: Champion of Native Scholars, Episode 74

Angelique was raised on the Flathead Indian Reservation in Northwest Montana and talked about how she grew up with a value system that focused not just on her but on being part of a community. Her focus has always been on elevating tribal communities: Angelique’s Native Forward Scholars Fund has given almost half a billion dollars to thousands of native scholars to pursue degrees!



4. Betty Francisco: A Powerhouse in Impact Investing, Episode 39

I don’t think you’ll find a bigger advocate for social entrepreneurship than Betty Francisco. Betty embodies everything powerful, and she’s unapologetic. She shared how she came from a working-class family where sometimes her mother couldn’t work because she had mental

health issues. She clearly understands the barriers people face.



5. Hayley Segar '17 (CLAS): Making Waves in Swimwear, Episode 25

I think Hayley’s show being one of our top-downloaded podcasts is a testament to her charisma. She’s been single-minded in her approach to creating onewith: a brand of swimwear for women that fits like underwear. Hayley credits the support she received from Jennifer Mathieu at CCEI [see #6] along with her business advisor from the Connecticut Business Development Center for being “angel human beings” and getting her to where she is today. She and onewith have a huge viral following, and her suits were just featured in People magazine. She’s blowing up and is completely unencumbered and unafraid.



6. Jennifer Mathieu '09 (CLAS), '23 MBA: Startup Dynamo, Episode 20

As executive director of the Connecticut Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (CCEI), Jennifer’s helped people launch and grow hundreds of businesses. What people may not know is that she’s also a successful entrepreneur herself. She started and ran several businesses before turning to education and mentorship. One was jewelry that came with inspirational cards. It started as a side hustle, but she turned it into a successful business.



7. Stephanie Wong: A Personal Touch of Inspiration, Episode 31

Stephanie’s been a

writer/creator of several Google YouTube series, the voice behind “Google Cloud Platform Podcast,” a dancer, a beauty pageant winner, a community ambassador, a mentor, and an angel investor for women in technology. She has a huge social media presence, so when I approached her to be on the show, I wasn’t sure she’d do it. It was at the height of the pandemic, and my daughter had just graduated from high school. Everything was canceled, like graduations and proms. I’ll never forget how Stephanie recorded an inspirational video message to my daughter during such a hard time.



8. Isabella Mandis: Venture Visionary, Episode 48

Isabella, wow — I mean to be a 20-year-old undergraduate and not just recognize the problem of underrepresentation of women in venture capital but to kick down that door and do something about it! She said she was 13 when she learned that women get only 2% of venture capital funding — and later decided to change the paradigm by starting Girls into VC. At first I thought, Oh, this must be a club she started at Harvard, but I was so wrong! It’s a full-fledged organization, providing targeted education, resources, and mentorship to empower the next gen of young women leaders in venture capital. She has thousands of members!



9. Tamika Bickham: Passion Pivot, Episode 62

The most interesting thing about Tamika is that she had an extremely lucrative career as an on-air personality and was winning awards as a broadcast journalist. Then she gave it all up to start a video and content marketing agency focused on health and happiness brands. There was significant risk associated with that pivot, but she’s one example of women on my show who’ve reached that same inflection point — leaving successful corporate careers to pursue what they truly want to do.



10. Sarah Gardner: Putting the Heat on Child Porn, Episode 59

With her Heat Initiative, Sarah’s leading the charge to remove child pornography and child sex abuse materials from the internet and social media platforms. She’s bravely gone straight after Apple, holding them accountable for their inaction. She drives trucks with huge signs saying, “Child sexual abuse is stored on iCloud. Apple allows it.” Apple’s her target because if they change their policy, the hope is that others will follow. —TOMMI LEWIS TILDEN

Fun Fact: Naming Rights

In 2022 and 2023, Juknavorian was invited to be a name reader at UConn’s College of Liberal Arts and Science’s commencement ceremonies, which he admits can be a daunting task given some of the unfamiliar names of the graduates. “They give you cards with phonetic descriptions of the names,” Juknavorian reveals, “but even that can be tricky. So sometimes I’d ask the graduates to whisper their correct name pronunciation to me before they’d go up on stage.”

KUDOS



Barely 20 years ago, from 2003 to 2007, **Mark Daigneault '07 (ED)** was a student basketball manager under **Jim Calhoun**. This April he was named **2023-24 NBA Coach of the Year**. The Oklahoma City Thunder head coach led his team to a 57-25 record as they became the youngest team in NBA history

“He’s just a regular guy. A regular guy who’s killing it right now.”

@ManthonyHearst

to claim the No. 1 seed in either conference. The Thunder under Daigneault also became the youngest team in NBA history to win 55-plus games.

After UConn, Daigneault worked as an assistant coach at Holy Cross, then as a graduate assistant at Florida under Billy Donovan. When Donovan became the Thunder’s head coach, he took Daigneault with him. Five years later, in 2020, Donovan asked Daigneault to go with him to the Chicago Bulls; instead, Daigneault took over as head coach of the Thunder. At the time, he was the second youngest NBA head coach (now he’s the third).



DAN ORLOVSKY NEEDS A FIRST DOWN ON EVERY PLAY – AT WORK, YES, BUT ESPECIALLY AT HOME.

BY PETE CROATTO

PHOTOS BY
PETER MORENUS

The cafeteria at the ESPN campus in Bristol, Connecticut, is a monument to distraction. I'm confronted by three preposterous flat-screen TVs on the far wall. Look up. A parade of smaller screens offers a high-definition plea not to engage with your lunch companion.

Into this boulevard of broken attention spans enters **Dan Orlovsky '17 (BGS)**, ESPN's NFL analyst, 20 years removed from a storied career as the UConn quarterback who propelled the football program into national prominence. He absolutely looks the part, dressed in a slim-fit suit that straddles the line between blueberry and robin's egg. There's no tie but a sharp blue-gridded white dress shirt and stylish salt-and-pepper stubble. His hair is perfect.

Aside from developing a reputation as a great football analyst, Orlovsky has become known for his pile of oddities, which he embraces. ("I told you I'm weird," he reminds me during our conversation.) Food is a big one. Today, he arrives with what looks like a chicken avocado salad. But because there is no lettuce present, his lunch resembles an entrée from the apocalypse, a hillock of (seasoned?) browns and beiges specked with green. There was his memorable admission on Twitter that he uses a bath towel around 30 times before it's removed from the rotation — presumably with tongs into a hazmat bag.

At work, Orlovsky has a "maniacal desire to be the best," says Laura Rutledge, the host of "NFL Live," his main gig. "He preps like no one I've ever seen in my entire life for anything that he does."

Orlovsky, 41, does not do these things to perpetuate an image. Everything has a reason, even the bizarre food choices. Why introduce something new and possibly disruptive? Then he can't spend time with his family or do his job. That's not how to win the day. When you help resurrect a college football program and get drafted by a National Football League team, that credo isn't ridiculous. It's required. Lack the drive to excel while reducing the game's din and violence to its necessities and you'll be prowling LinkedIn by your 25th birthday. Orlovsky spent 12 years in the NFL; the average career lasts a hair over three.

Why, he wonders, can't the principles that made him a millionaire in the NFL work away from the football field?

Every day Dan Orlovsky tries to answer that question.



Quarterback is the glamour position in American sports. At UConn, Orlovsky was Tom Brady. He remains the school's all-time leader in passing yards, touchdowns, attempts, and completions. Orlovsky led the Huskies to their first bowl win. His NFL career

was spent as a backup quarterback who managed to start some games and win a few. That makes him a smashing success in the metrics measured outside of sports bars and fans' unforgiving memories.

That he now has this kind of job — a continuation of his past life — is a most fortunate development. Orlovsky left pro football in 2017 after the Los Angeles Rams released him before the season started. He did not have enough money or patience to stay retired. He took a meeting about a sales job in the medical field. It got serious. "I'm not trying to tell you what to do," his wife, Tiffany, said after she stopped laughing, "but what are you doing?" She saw Dan's gift: how he simplified the complexities on a football field. He started posting his insights on Twitter. That eventually led to ESPN, the home of "SportsCenter" and Stephen A. Smith's boiling lava takes and "Monday Night Football." Now friends joke they can't turn on the TV without seeing him. Tiffany, an Eagles fan, thought it was cool when he did quick hits on Comcast Philadelphia.

He went from one cultural behemoth, the NFL, to another. Even in a continuously fragmented world of entertainment options, ESPN is universally recognized as the place for sports. Good enough isn't good enough in the battle to get better, to exceed your limits, to win the day. As a kid, Orlovsky, who grew up in Shelton,



Connecticut, watched “SportsCenter” all the time. Dan and Keith, Rich and Stu — those were his boys. “He always lives in a world of being grateful for what he’s doing,” Rutledge says. “He never wants to let down that opportunity by not being prepared enough.”

The NFL season is a cram session from Sunday to Friday. After spending hours watching games Sunday and recording his observations, Orlovsky is up before 4 a.m. — he claims to have never hit a snooze button. In his shuttling between ESPN studios in New York City and Bristol during the NFL season to appear on “Get Up,” “First Take,” and “NFL Live,” he’ll watch more games. The film sessions continue Tuesday and Wednesday. Then there’s “Thursday Night Football.” Exhausted yet?

“I cannot talk about a player or a game on TV if I have not watched it,” Orlovsky says. “So, if that means I’ve got to get up at three and watch it, or I’ve got to go to bed at midnight and watch it, I have to.”

Rutledge says that Orlovsky produces from his position. It’s not unusual for Mark Eiseman, a producer on “NFL Live,” to open a text from Orlovsky

THERE’S NO GAME TAPE FOR PARENTING... EACH CHILD IS SO DIFFERENT, AND PARENTHOOD HAS NO END ZONE.

with 30 video clips that are worth exploring for the shows that week. Ideas will come in at 6 a.m. During commercial breaks, Orlovsky might watch more game footage on his phone or chat with his colleagues about the next topic. “The energy is contagious,” says Eiseman, and contributes to the cast’s camaraderie. “He’s a glue to a lot of that,” the producer adds. Rutledge, one of the show’s two female regulars, along with Sports Emmy-nominated analyst Mina Kimes, says the comfort she feels on set comes from the ana-

lysts’ support. That includes Orlovsky, who embraces Rutledge’s and Kimes’ insights.

What struck Rutledge when she first worked with Orlovsky was his willingness to make the people around him better. “I do think a big reason for his success,” she says, “is he shines on his own, but he makes others shine, too.” In a time when an analyst must entertain and educate, “nobody can hang better than Dan,” Eiseman says. “He will be the one making the joke, and he can take the joke.”

Orlovsky wants to be the best at this. How close is he? “I don’t think there’s anybody on the planet who can do what I do.”



There is a family waiting, the members so wholesome-looking and camera-ready they belong in the photo that comes with the frame. With them, there are no stats, no proof that he was right — man, he loves being right — that will be dissected on the sports blogs and social media. There’s no contract clause Dan Orlovsky can meet.

At home, he goes all in. Wanna shoot hoops, Dad? Sure! He packs

notes — sometimes it’s a Bible verse — with the kids’ lunches every day. The boys — Noah, Madden, and Hunter — are 12. Aren’t they a little old for that? “Don’t care,” Orlovsky says. He saves everything the kids commit to paper, including the 300 comic books Madden has drawn. They’re in giant boxes in the basement. He gives the kids interview questions at dinner, a trick he stole from rapper, entrepreneur, and fellow father of four Jesse Itzler. One was, “What does success look like to you?” Lennon, their 8-year-old daughter, wants to live with Mom and Dad and play for the U.S. women’s World Cup team. Orlovsky saved that piece of paper, too.

It’s the only way he knows — full force, ready for contact, embrace the chaos. He loves pain. It is a feature of his workouts. Without it, what’s the point? He is probably the only man in America who wishes he fought more with his wife. Every NFL offseason, Orlovsky would come home and take over like Patrick Mahomes with two minutes left in the fourth quarter. “Enough! I know what I’m doing,” Tiffany would say, exasperated. Eventually, they laughed about it; Dan stepped back. He cannot be a perfect father, but he has to try. Otherwise, he won’t get better. Six summers remain, maybe, before his kids would rather drink poi-

son than hang with Dad. Yesterday was a mess. He finished work and picked up the kids, who had been watching the high school lacrosse game. One of the triplets was being a knucklehead, as 12-year-old boys are apt to be. That put Tiffany in a bad mood. Orlovsky, a career big man on campus, was flummoxed.

“Do you try to fix the bad mood?” he says. “Do you try to listen to the bad mood? Do you yell at the kid? Is yelling at the kid going to do anything? So I

“I DON’T THINK THERE’S ANYBODY ON THE PLANET WHO CAN DO WHAT I DO.”

don’t know if I handled that perfectly. And I know she was bummed about it and then my son feels bad, and it’s like you feel like you could have done something better.” There’s no game tape for parenting. It’s an art, Orlovsky says, like play calling. Each child is so different, and parenthood has no end zone.

“The way that he loves them,” Rutledge says, “is very warm and wonderful.”

This morning, Orlovsky fumbled a conversation with Lennon. It wasn’t huge, “but I could have said something that maybe elevated her spirit 5% or made her feel loved — one fraction of a second longer type of thing. It’s the constant pursuit.” Today, Dan texted Tiffany: I feel like I’m failing as a husband. He sends those kinds of texts a lot. “It’s annoying how good he is,” Tiffany says. “He really is so considerate of my feelings. Even if I’m not saying something, he knows what I need. He’s always checking in. I don’t have any complaints.” Neither does Eiseman. If he takes a sick day, Orlovsky will text him to see if he’s OK.

Tiffany says Dan is always being asked — by friends, teams — to talk to kids. Rutledge, a mom, has learned the benefits of challenging her kids by watching Orlovsky parent — and, she says, he hunts for any nugget of infor-

mation to improve. Orlovsky knows he’s raising four white kids in Westport whose “mommy and daddy have money.” He must be harder on them and supply that “dose of reality.”

Dan has relaxed over the years, Tiffany says, but “he’s always thinking about what’s next.” Orlovsky will know he was a good father if the kids don’t go all “Cat’s in the Cradle” and they still want to spend time with him when they’re 30. Whether he was a good husband is a longer game with a specific desired outcome.

He sees it: Orlovsky is 80. The intense phone calls that served as a courtship and the challenges of raising a family alone as Dad chased a dream are

dull memories, a mere preface to this tender now, where Tiffany turns to Dan and says, “Well done.”



When Orlovsky played in the NFL, he had no idea of the extent the league dominated the sports calendar. There’s always intrigue: trades and free agency, the NFL Scouting Combine, the days-long job-fair glitz of the NFL draft, the unveiling of the teams’ schedules, training camp. That comes before the games, five months of weekly, unscripted drama, fed by fantasy points, fiery opinions, and shattered dreams.

Today, it’s baseball’s opening day; analysts Jeff Passan and Tim Kurkjian roam ESPN’s hallways. “NFL Live” will go on. Football always draws congregants, even if the sermon is slight.

The NFL draft isn’t for a month, but draft-bound University of North Carolina quarterback Drake Maye’s pro day is covered with the zeal of a presidential primary. The show runs professionally, smoothly. The cavernous studio is library quiet when the talking stops. Guest host Hannah Storm, a legend in TV sports journalism, and analyst Mike Tannenbaum, the ex-New York Jets general manager, remain serene for the 60-minute show. Orlovsky is the kid who’d rather be



outside climbing trees. You want to lasso the guy to his seat. This is a live show, Dan! It says so in the friggin' title! Five minutes to air, he's grooving to a barely audible country tune. (He's a big Morgan Wallen fan.)

During commercial breaks, Orlovsky uncoils that lean 6'5" frame. He puts his feet on the desk. He roams the set. Returning to his desk, he mimes a crossover dribble. He admires stage manager Trey Trahan's Carolina Blue Jordans, joking that he can't afford those kicks with four kids. At one point, he sings out, "Oh, darling!" like it's karaoke night at Bleachers. But when it's time — he's on.

Rutledge feels she has to assure newcomers to the set that what they're seeing is normal. "I think his brain a lot of the times is all over the place, so it sort of makes his body move," she says. "It's worth remembering he was such a high-level athlete."

Nothing, he says, replaces the "competitive fire" and the thrill of being on the field. Orlovsky seriously considered taking a coaching job with

the Carolina Panthers last year. He had conversations with teams this year. "If it's the right place, the right time, the right people, and I could look at myself in the mirror and say that this has no negative impact on our family, then there's the chance that happens," he says. "But if it's going to have a negative impact on our family — no shot." The Orlovskys have lived in their current house for more than four years, their longest in one place. Before then, the kids were in six schools in four years, victims of Dad's nomadic career. (Orlovsky played for four teams, including the Detroit Lions twice, in 12 seasons.) He couldn't rip his kids from their friends and routines or remove his son Madden, who is autistic, from the people who have helped him grow and develop.

"I don't want other elements of my life to be about me or to do things for myself," he says. "I wake up. I spend time with my Bible. I have my cup of coffee. I do my workout. That's the stuff for me. The rest of the time, I want it to be about my kids," Orlovsky

explains of his life now. "I want it to be about my wife. I want it to be about their friends. I want it to be about the things that they want. The only thing I've ever wanted, I've done."

There's no reason to leave this job. Surrounded by cameras, Orlovsky is comfortable on air and makes the viewer comfortable. He is a good hang. "He's just a caring human and empathetic," Eiseman says. "That stuff shows through." His knowledge is used for clarity, not condescension. It's about informing fans about the game that is — no offense to Passan and Kurkjian — the real national pastime. The game that has given Orlovsky all this.

Now, activities and problems and schoolwork, a lived-in house filled with kids and their glorious chaos, await. Dan Orlovsky exits the studio and heads into the late-March afternoon, chasing the ineffable, savoring the time left on the clock. ☼



HE'S GOT GAME

HOW ONE ALUM SAVED HIS HOMETOWN CONNECTICUT MOVIE THEATER AND CONQUERED HOLLYWOOD TO WRITE FOR THE GROUNDBREAKING "GAME OF THRONES."

By Tommi Lewis Tilden
Illustrations by Kyle Hilton

If the blue Huskies T-shirt, jacket, cap, and 2023 championship towel (a gift from basketball guard Joey Calcaterra's mom) aren't enough of a giveaway, **Ethan J. Antonucci '99 (CLAS)** is amped up to talk endlessly (his words) about his alma mater allegiance. With an ear-to-ear grin, the Hollywood writer and

producer admits he's even placed bets on his beloved Huskies over the years — one year paying off his wife Aimee's student loans. "I always hold it over her head that my school paid for her school's loans," he says with a laugh.

Antonucci wants you to know that his unintentional winding journey from sportswriter to literary agent, TV writer, producer, family

man, and proud savior of his hometown cinema was propelled by a series of pivotal and serendipitous moments — a fateful snowstorm, prescient advice, a clipping from the Los Angeles Times, and the lure of free pizza among them.

LET IT SNOW

In his senior year of high school, a planned visit to Emerson College in Boston was scrapped due to a harrowing snowstorm. "We

made it maybe 5 miles from our house and there was already 3 or 4 inches of snow piling up on the road," recalls Antonucci. His parents, both schoolteachers, had only a limited window in which to make college visits. The snowstorm had other ideas. "Connecticut kind of kept me from leaving Connecticut in the strangest of ways," Antonucci reflects about serendipitously missing out on his first-choice school.

THE PIZZA THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

Antonucci enrolled at UConn to study communications, but sophomore year a professor convinced him to add a journalism major. Two weeks later, he found himself at an open house for the student paper, primarily enticed by the promise of free pizza. Within days he was covering women's polo

for The Daily Campus. He eventually became the sports editor, a road games warrior clocking 44,000 miles in two years.

During his prolific sportswriting period, Antonucci made a vow to watch the American Film Institute's Top 100 list of movies. "I considered myself a film buff but had only seen 18 or 19 of the movies," he remembers. "Then I thought it would be funny to see how many top 100

movie references I could incorporate into every article I wrote. I was figuring out creative ways to do it, starting with obvious ones like 'Rocky.' I just sort of rolled with it."

THE PINNACLE AND THE EPIPHANY

His senior year, UConn won its first men's basketball national title. This pinnacle moment marked the end of an era for Antonucci. He was done with sportswriting. "This was a team that I had followed for literally my entire cognizant life. And here they were winning the national title. I'm standing right next to everybody on the team. I have a piece of the net that's, like, my most prized possession. I thought, it's just not going to get any better than this, so I don't want to do this anymore. I want to go work in Hollywood." He remembers his journalism advisor Wayne Worcester hearing his plans and dryly telling him, "Well, somebody's gotta do it."

INSIDE "OUTSIDE PROVIDENCE"

The last movie he saw before leaving Connecticut for Los Angeles was 1999's "Outside Providence," which evoked a prophecy about actor Shawn Hatosy. "I said to my buddy, 'When I get to LA, I swear I'm going to meet the lead of this movie, and I have a feeling we're gonna work together some day.'"

He landed a job in the mailroom of the Gersh Agency, and a year and a half later, his prediction came true. In an odd twist of fate, Antonucci met Hatosy, who was dating a close friend's stepsister. The two hit it off, and their bond became a creative one when Hatosy recruited Antonucci to co-write a screenplay — his first official foray into screenwriting after years of reading scripts as a literary agent at Gersh, where he had swiftly risen from the mailroom. While the 2007 writers' strike put their creative relationship on hold, the experience primed Antonucci for his biggest break yet in the industry.

LET THE GAMES BEGIN

Witness Hollywood networking at its finest: Antonucci's former assistant at Gersh turned him on to a recruiter



ANTONUCCI AT GRADUATION, WITH HIS FATHER (LEFT) AND LATE GRANDFATHER PROUDLY HOLDING COPIES OF THE DAILY CAMPUS

for entertainment law firms who connected him with entertainment lawyer Gretchen Rush. While prepping for his interview with Rush, Antonucci noticed David Benioff's name on her client list. Years earlier a Los Angeles Times profile on Benioff, when his film "25th Hour" was coming out, had caught Antonucci's attention. "I thought, this is the type of person I want to creatively align myself with; this guy has it figured out."

Landing the gig for Rush's firm ushered in the next serendipitous life course change. It was November 2008, and HBO had just greenlit the pilot for "Game of Thrones." Suddenly he had a front-row seat to the making of "GoT." His passion for the show was palpable as he became part of every deal and privy to behind-the-scenes action. "Every time David [Benioff] or Dan [D. B. Weiss] called, I stopped everything to find out what was going on."

A DREAM OPPORTUNITY AND SECOND CHANCE

"Game of Thrones" turned into a cultural phenomenon and Antonucci got an offer to join the production team for Season 4. But it came with a catch —

relocating to Belfast for eight months of the year. "As thrilling as that sounded, I couldn't leave my wife and young son behind to make no money to be a writer's assistant on the show."

During Season 5, an opportunity came up again, but this time to work locally. Antonucci happily joined the postproduction crew, and for seasons 6 through 8, he was in the writers' room. "It was a crazy experience seeing what we were writing end up on people's TV screens." By Season 8, he was a staff writer and on stage for the show's historic final Emmys sweep in 2019. He vividly recalls the surreal experience of looking out at the audience as the team accepted the Outstanding Drama Series award. "You see everybody you've ever recognized in Hollywood sitting in the front rows ... it was just wild," he remembers. "I never had more text messages in my life."

THE ONE ABOUT THE BOY AND THE MOVIE THEATER

While "Game of Thrones" thrust Antonucci's career to new heights, a childhood dream resurfaced. As a kindergartner waiting at his Bantam, Connecticut, bus stop across from the



ANTONUCCI (FAR LEFT) WITH CAST AND PRODUCERS OF "GAME OF THRONES" MINUTES AFTER THEIR 2019 EMMY WIN FOR BEST DRAMA. "THIS WAS A FEW MINUTES AFTER WE WALKED OFFSTAGE. EVERYONE IS JUST SORT OF BEING PULLED IN A MILLION DIRECTIONS AND YOU HEAR, 'HEY, YOU NEED TO COME INTO THIS ROOM AND TAKE THIS PICTURE.'"

local cinema, he boldly declared he intended to own that theater and show only movies that he wanted to watch.

In 2020, when the 92-year-old owner of Bantam's independent movie theater planned to permanently shut down during COVID-19, Antonucci sprang into action and called him. "I spent 90 minutes explaining to this sweet man why he needed to give me the Bantam Cinema, and he spent 90 minutes telling me to find \$300,000." So Antonucci pulled together a group of minority investors for the down payment and converted the theater into a nonprofit. By fall 2021, Bantam Cinema had risen again, with a grand reopening event screening of "The Graduate."

"Dustin Hoffman is sort of a local, and we thought for a split second we might get him to come introduce the movie." He didn't, so Antonucci did. "I told my story of my childhood bus stop and having seen 'Cinema Paradiso' there as a 12-year-old."

Bantam Cinema & Arts Center is now three years back into full operation. "It's like another job that I get no money for and just lose sleep over every week," Antonucci says of his role overseeing operations and programming

from Los Angeles.

"But I wouldn't trade anything for it. It's a very special place."

"LUCK IS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN PREPARATION MEETS OPPORTUNITY"

One of Antonucci's favorite quotes, attributed to the Roman philosopher Seneca, connects to his other special place: Bighead, Littlehead, Berniehead Inc., the production company helmed by "Game of Thrones" colleagues Benioff, Weiss, and Bernie Caulfield. When the trio decided to hang their own shingle in 2019, Antonucci received another career-defining offer to help run the company. "I was like, yeah, I'm in — no questions asked," he says.

Five years later, as BLB Inc.'s executive vice president, Antonucci has a hand in every facet of production. He's fresh off working as an executive on Netflix's adaptation of the bestselling sci-fi novel trilogy "The Three Body Problem," which even made Barack Obama's summer reading list, and knee-deep in preparations for Netflix's hotly anticipated historical drama about President James Garfield. "We start filming in Budapest in two weeks

with an incredible cast — Michael Shannon, Matthew Macfadyen, Betty Gilpin, Nick Offerman, Bradley Whitford ..." Antonucci rattles off excitedly.

THE END, BUT NOT REALLY

Despite the demands of work, Bantam Cinema, and his family, the diehard Huskies fan routinely opens the doors of his Hollywood office to offer tours and share advice with UConn students and alumni aspiring to break into the entertainment industry.

And just the other day he took his 15-year-old son, Cortland, to his first concert — Pearl Jam, a band he and his wife grew up loving. "A Pearl Jam show in Storrs would have been incredible," he muses, ever nostalgic. "But I did get to see the Violent Femmes open for Biggie Smalls on the football field my freshman year while standing next to Ray Allen, so I've always held that show in a special place in my heart" — yet another of the life moments he calls "spontaneous and whimsical."

Says Antonucci, "I've always felt that things in the universe have come into my path because they were meant to be, and I follow and trust my gut in those moments." ☺



Matarazzo last year at Villa Formia, about 100 miles north of Naples, Italy, and, right, on a family trip in the late 1970s at the archaeological park of Cumae, about 12 miles west of Naples.



Know the Land on Which You Stand

Since completing her doctorate in anthropology at UConn, geoarchaeologist Tiziana Matarazzo has been unearthing the past to illuminate the present.



*By
Steve Neumann*



“That’s what I really like about having a degree from UConn, because ... whether you’re studying dirt, bones, or stones, if you’re only very focused on your technique, you will not know the meaning of what you find.”

Even by Italian standards, **Tiziana Matarazzo ’14 Ph.D.** is exuberant as she talks about her work deciphering the remains

of volcanic eruptions thousands of years ago. Her passion is so palpable, beaming through the small Zoom screen, it’s almost like she’s in the room. In fact, she’s 4,000 miles away, sitting in the sunny environs of her home by the seaside in southern Italy.

Matarazzo, who was born in Naples between the shadows of two volcanoes — Mount Vesuvius and the Campi Flegrei caldera — says she was inspired to do this brand of anthropological work because of her experiences being a child in such a richly historical city. “I grew up in an ancient town, and every time I would walk to school, I would pass a Roman mausoleum; and every time I looked at the sea, I saw volcanoes.”

After studying volcanology at the University of Naples Federico II, Matarazzo moved to the United States and enrolled at UConn, where she took a class called Old World Prehistory with the late UConn professor Robert Dewar. “After that, I just fell in love with archaeology — I was completely captured.”

Geoarchaeologists like Matarazzo — who lives mainly in Italy but conducts all her research out of professor Natalie Munro’s anthropology lab at UConn in the summers — apply geological methods to archaeological data to gain insight into how ancient human societies interacted with their environments. Matarazzo’s specific area of expertise is micromorphology, a technique for examining small-scale structures and textures of sediment

and rocks that are not visible to the naked eye, allowing for detailed observations crucial for interpreting the material’s history and characteristics.

“Micromorphology can be used in different ways,” she says. “You can learn about past climates and different types of volcanic eruptions, but it can also tell you what people were doing in different places.”

Matarazzo’s doctoral thesis focused on the early Bronze Age, an important transitional period for humanity that was characterized by emerging social complexity. Specifically, she investigated the impact of the eruption of Vesuvius in 1995 BCE, which was actually larger than the more famous one that destroyed Pompeii in 79 CE.

Her research used micromorphological analysis of thin sections of sediment collected at the village of Afragola — on the opposite side of Vesuvius as Pompeii — to understand how its people used living spaces, organized daily activities, and related to other members of the village. The site she studied contained a large number of well-preserved structures and materials, but her analysis revealed a general lack of human remains. “This is surprising,” she says, “given the complexity of the site, as evidenced by multiple buildings utilized for storage and domestic activities — including the presence of large quantities of burned seeds; that suggests Afragola was an established agricultural village.”

One explanation could be that the village was occupied only briefly before the Avellino eruption destroyed it. “They could see the eruption before it affected the village, so they just left. Afterward, the wind changed, and the ash came and covered the village.”

This is different from what would happen a couple thousand years later at Pompeii, one of the most well-preserved catastrophes in human history. “The eruption of Vesuvius was preceded by numerous earthquakes years before the final erup-

tion,” Matarazzo says. “Because such tremors occurred frequently in this area, the people of Pompeii did not pay much attention. When Vesuvius erupted, some of them tried to leave, but most were trapped because there was a huge pyroclastic cloud that came down from the mountain at 200 kilometers per hour.”



In addition to her more scholarly work, Matarazzo has written two archaeological guide books and is working on a third. One, “Curbside Roman Archaeology of Itri,” was co-written with Anthony Philpotts, UConn professor emeritus of geology and geophysics.

Matarazzo says she is particularly passionate about a digital humanities project she has in mind for high school students at Liceo Scientifico Statale Enrico Fermi in her current town of Gaeta, Italy. “I want to focus on the archaeological sites during the Roman period in this little town,” she says. “I want students to digitize all this information, because some of the sites were destroyed during World War II; consequently, some ancient constructions have been obscured by recent construction.”

Though she started out researching the volcanic activity of the early Bronze Age of southern Italy after graduating from UConn, Matarazzo now studies the archaeology and anthropology of ancient Rome, in part to preserve and inform the local population about their cultural heritage.

“That’s what I really like about having a degree from UConn,” she says, “because in America, you have to have very good knowledge of anthropology to do archaeology — whether you’re studying dirt, bones, or stones, if you’re

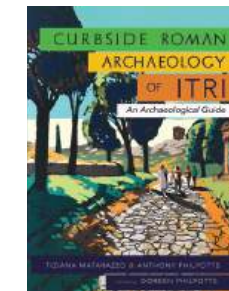
only very focused on your technique, you will not know the meaning of what you find.”

Ultimately, Matarazzo wants to establish a type of honors program at the Liceo Scientifico school, where students can not only learn some archaeological techniques but also learn to be aware of the history that’s literally in their backyard.

“I want people to know that this is important, because if you don’t know where you’re from, you can’t know where you’re going. And if people know their territory and their cultural heritage, they will learn to preserve it, too.” ☺



Above: The view from the top of the Old Town of Gaeta, where Matarazzo hopes to work with high school students.



Above: Matarazzo collects micromorphological samples in Templeton, on a terrace of the Shepaug River in Washington, Connecticut. The Middle Paleo-Indian site is 11,190 years old. Top and left: UConn professor emeritus of geology and geophysics Anthony Philpotts and Matarazzo investigate a well-preserved stretch of the Appian Way in Itri, a small town near Rome, for their guidebook “Curbside Roman Archaeology of Itri.”

“Because such tremors occurred frequently ... the people of Pompeii did not pay much attention.”



If They'd Known Then...

Remember those rising first-years of the Class of 2024, whose touching, eager, and sometimes prophetic admissions essays we shared on the cover of our Fall 2020 issue? We wondered how those historic four years turned out for them — and where they are now.



Three shirts and two hairstyles later, I found the one.

I'd been tearing my closet apart for the last half hour trying to find the perfect outfit — a tank top and jeans. I was both sweating from moving so much in my humid Towers dorm room and beaming with excitement. Along with hundreds of other students, both new and seasoned, I was headed to SUBOG's semester kickoff block party. My new friend I'd met in the dining hall hours prior was waiting for me outside. My mentor — who was paired with me through the Puerto Rican and Latin American Cultural Center — would be waiting for us to share all her senior wisdom before we set off to wander around campus.

It was time for my first night out in college. Hundreds of students crowded Fairfield Way as music blared and the light summer breeze carried the smell of food. Friends screamed as they reconnected post-summer break. Timid first-years lined up for UConn freebies — plastic cups, stress balls, and retro logo T-shirts — to rep their new school. New and old Huskies were thrilled to be home.

Looking back, that night gave me a taste of what was to come in the next four years: friendships I'd cherish for the rest of my life, endless sweating as I trekked across campus, spontaneous nights that started with one plan and ended with something completely different — and an unforgettable sense of community. My introductory year was a bundle of firsts, many I never even imagined doing: first football game, first march, first Involvement

Fair, first Homecoming lip sync, first Huskython, and so much more.

This was not uncommon for first-years excited to take in all the campus had to offer. But it all changed for the Class of 2024. A global pandemic and health safety restrictions would completely alter that week, that year, that college experience, for 3,825 first-year students enrolled at Storrs. With campus at only 40% capacity, Welcome Weekend events shifted online. Floor meetings turned into group chats. Hitting the dining hall the next morning to catch up after a night out turned into grab-and-go with social distancing.

Four years ago, our cover story highlighted 10 students who'd written 10 of the best admissions essays among the incoming Class of 2024 — students who at the time of writing those essays

had no idea what the future would hold but were hungry to experience everything UConn had to offer. Four years on, we sought them out again. Had they physically come to campus that first year, had they graduated, what of the years in between? How had an unprecedented world event changed their expectations and their reality?

As I spoke with many of them at length, I was surprised and equally inspired. Being the first class to navigate a global pandemic and all the complexities of starting college, they had no one to guide them. But when the world as we knew it stopped, they found alternatives. Can't go to the gym? They walked every inch of campus possible. Can't make friends traditionally? They texted group chats and hoped someone would show up. Can't study abroad? They took advantage of alternative breaks and research trips. While they all agreed that their first year was far from what they had seen on social media or TV, it came with invaluable lessons. While others may have felt the pressure of college the second they set foot on campus, this class eased into it at their own pace.

And when it came time to shine, they hit the ground running. They jumped on employment opportunities, academic projects, internships, and more because if they had learned one thing it was this: Live in the now because nothing in life is promised.

Illustrations by Katie Carey



Cody Ottinger '24 (ENG), Hopkinton, Massachusetts

Ottinger is drawn to the intricacies of how things exist and why. "As I climb the four steps up to my front door, I try to be observant and learn about how those stairs were assembled. Then I go inside and check the weather forecast to see when I will get to run again tomorrow and escape back into my thoughts. I want to continue learning in the hopes that one day, just maybe, I will learn something that no one has before. That future depends on the decision you make. But if the future already exists, can it still be changed?" he wrote in his admissions essay, walking the reader through his thoughts as he went for an hour-long run.

He knew the best place for him to strengthen that skill was the College of Engineering at UConn. Whether he was determining the speed at which a heat exchanger would work best or measuring the flow rate of water, he says he felt like he fit right in.

Community: One of his favorite things to do with his friends during his free time was travel to other universities and visit one another's high school friends. After stopping by Quinnipiac, Binghamton, Boston, and countless others, he says he always came back to campus grateful to be a Husky.

"UConn seemed like a much closer community than a lot of places, particularly schools in big cities. Because UConn is in the middle of nowhere, everyone around you is a UConn student. I feel it makes the whole group closer together, makes it easier to talk to people."

Serendipity: Making friends in the middle of a global pandemic wasn't easy for the thousands of incoming first-years in the fall of 2020. But luckily that didn't stop Ottinger. A broken steam pipe, a fire alarm at one in the morning, and an evacuation later, Ottinger had met some of his closest friends.

My UConn Movie Must Include This Scene: Passing the time with friends first year playing countless rounds of President — a card game that honors the player who gets rid of their cards the fastest. While not as exciting as other memories of UConn, it's one he holds close to his heart because that extended downtime helped them bond in ways that might have taken years in other situations.

Only at UConn: Watching the UConn men's basketball team at their prime was a highlight for Ottinger. So much so, he and his friends had a running superstition. When watching games, they would all meet at the same house, and they had to sit in the same seats. Ottinger says he claimed the right side of the couch, with a rather poor view of the TV now that he thinks about it. He says you could often find him in his favorite UConn sweatshirt, which sports the early-2000s Husky.

Regrets? He wishes he had gotten more involved with student organizations. While COVID-19 played a part, once restrictions were lifted, he says it got hard to balance so many things at once, and club involvement was the first thing to get cut.

Now What: Ottinger works for HyAxiom Inc., a company that makes hydrogen fuel cell power plants.

My Class in One Word or Phrase: "Experienced beyond our years."



Playing endless games of President freshman year with friends — here Mario Boozang, Michael MacKinnon, Nitish Rajagopal, and Sahib Sandhu.



Taylor Pannell '24 (CLAS), Middletown, New York

Pannell has loved sports for as long as she can remember. "I am not being dramatic when I say sports has saved my life and is part of my family," she wrote in her admissions essay, nodding to sports for always keeping her on track.

At UConn, that love has only grown stronger. Being on the volleyball and track and field teams has taught her to stay true to herself while stepping into her power. Not only is she a dual-sport athlete, she's also a STEM major. This has led to numerous people questioning her decisions. But she shakes it off and always remembers her favorite quote: "Why not me?"

Wisdom: Pannell doesn't want to be put in a box. She says she's all about not necessarily proving people wrong but instead proving herself right. That holds true for academics. Today she holds a BA in biology and will add a second degree in communications next year. After much consideration, she says she chose both degrees because they give her the freedom to take her future in whichever direction she desires. She can go into animal science, dermatology, sports journalism, photography, and so much more. But she didn't always think this way. The key advice that helped her was when Tysen Kendig, UConn's then VP of Communications, told her the best thing she could do in life, and to appeal to employers, was to be versatile.

Moments Missed: Not being able to meet her teammates for more than two months thanks to her building being placed in quarantine six times in a row. Sometimes students were asked to move to other dorms for two weeks at a time. Pannell has lived in nine different rooms on campus!

Moments Gained: Enjoying UConn's natural beauty. Grabbing a



mask and water bottle and aimlessly walking around campus to pass time landed her in places she would have never stopped by otherwise: a hill behind the baseball field and Mirror Lake at night, for example.

"It felt like a sense of community because it was like other people are in this too. They are going through the same thing and just want a breath of fresh air," she says.

I Was Inspired By: Pannell has had more teammates than she can remember, but one that stands out is Kennadie Jake-Turner '22 (CLAS), whom Pannell looked up to as an athlete in STEM. Taking on both worlds can be hard, Pannell admits, but she saw Jake-Turner always advocate for herself and others while gracefully keeping people accountable. "Coming up in athletics is hard, and some of the people you work with are harder. Sometimes I felt defeated. But I would always think, 'How would KJ react?'"

I Will Inspire By: Leading by example. As she steps into a position of leadership on the volleyball team, she says she hopes to inspire the same way she was once inspired: hitting the gym early and leaving late, doing well academically, thinking of those looking up to her, and always being kind.



Playing in the National Invitational Volleyball Championship in the rounds we hosted at Gampel.

My UConn Movie Must Include This Scene:

Playing in the National Invitational Volleyball Championship in 2021 — the first time UConn played in the tournament since 1994. She says participating in the invitation-only championship was a testament to her team's hard work, and it's one of her proudest moments. "We came in fourth in the nation. We knew what we wanted, we set our goals, and we fell short of the NCAA tournament, but we bounced back right away — and that's always my biggest goal."

Now What: Because of COVID-19, the NCAA granted all student-athletes an extra year to play, so Pannell will continue to play on both teams. She's what her teammates call a "Grandma."

I Can't Wait For: As she takes advantage of this extra year, one must for this New Yorker is exploring more of the Nutmeg State. Despite living in Connecticut for the majority of the last four years, she feels like she has so much to see. Some spots she hopes to include: New Haven, Mystic, and Stamford.

My Class in One Word or Phrase:

"Pioneers."

Me in Mauritius! We were celebrating the end of our fieldwork and there was a beautiful sunset. My feet are in the Indian Ocean!



Joshua Ellenberg '24 (CLAS), Flemington, New Jersey

When Josh Ellenberg first set foot on campus, he wanted to be an astrophysicist. "I desperately want to learn more about not only the world around me but everything that surrounds it. In my opinion, our ability to imagine is driven by our desire to know more about everything," he wrote in his admissions essay.

Today, he says that sentiment to learn and explore is still very much with him. But his outlook has changed, and it's all thanks to UConn.

Match Made: Going into his sophomore year, Ellenberg realized studying space was no longer his calling. He googled all the majors UConn offered, and a picture of what seemed like cave paintings caught his eye. He decided to trust his gut and went down the rabbit hole of all things anthropology. He never looked back.

"I wanted to study space because it was like the last thing in the world that we don't know much about. I wanted to be the first to figure it out. And then I started studying anthropology and it was like, 'Wait, there's so much that I don't know that goes on here,'" he says, noting how anthropology pushed him to think of the world and his role in it differently. While space seemed appealing because it offered novelty, anthropology showed him that novelty was right in front of him depending on the perspective from which he looked at it.

Surprise! Being an out-of-state student, Ellenberg knew it would be hard to make friends, especially during a pandemic. But he says his motto was just to be open. He remembers his first night on campus fondly. Someone texted the hall group chat asking whether anyone wanted to meet at Mirror Lake after grabbing dinner at South — the entire dorm showed up. He never met the person who texted, but he did meet the person who would become one of his closest college friends that night.

My UConn Movie Must Include This Scene: Ellenberg says his best college moment was actually more than 9,000 miles away from Storrs. He traveled to Mauritius, an island off the coast of Madagascar, with Professor Dimitris Xygalatas. The summer program encouraged students to participate in existing research or conduct research of their own, and Ellenberg took full advantage of that. He wanted to know how the people of Mauritius saw themselves in government, especially women. As he spoke with locals, he says he learned a lot, not only about the region but about why he loved his major. The trip challenged him to think outside the box and remember that while there are differences, there are a lot more similarities among cultures around the world.

Community: Ellenberg says nothing made him appreciate his college experience like being part of the encampment his last few days as an undergraduate student, standing in solidarity with Palestine. As a Jewish student and anthropology major, he felt compelled to join — to learn, to reflect, to use his voice alongside people of all different backgrounds. To him, that's what college is all about: "You won't really get something like that anywhere other than a college campus ... The feeling of camaraderie at that encampment was something that I don't know if I'll ever experience again in my entire life."

Now What: Ellenberg dreams of becoming an anthropology professor, inspired by his teachers at UConn. He's headed to New York University this fall to get his master's in experimental humanities.

My Class in One Word or Phrase: "Resilient."



Horacio Honoret '24 (CLAS)

Honoret graduated with a degree in communications and is passionate about the sports industry. During his time at UConn, he was a campus tour guide, an orientation leader, and a member of Alpha Sigma Phi.



Dennis Dowding '24 (SFA)

Dowding graduates with a bachelor of fine arts in theater design and technology this December. At UConn, Dowding was the live production director with WHUS, the student radio station. Dowding was charged with running the Studio Session Series — UConn's version of NPR's Tiny Desk Concerts.



Samantha Ceravolo '24 (CLAS), Syracuse, New York

Growing up, Ceravolo says her hair was a point of contention. While some complimented her natural ginger locks, others taunted her. Learning to deal with all kinds of remarks wasn't easy on her self-confidence at first, but slowly she learned to shake it off and love her hair. "Walking the halls, hearing the same old redhead jokes, I tossed my hair proudly and walked a little taller. Bring it on! I'm stronger because of my mane. I embraced who I am and am comfortable in my own skin. The journey of accepting my appearance has taught me to resist conformity as well as to celebrate other people's differences," she wrote in her admissions essay.

Today, Ceravolo is what she calls a strawberry blonde. Keeping her red base intact, Ceravolo added blonde highlights during her time at UConn to achieve a look that makes her feel more comfortable than ever. She says her hair is very much a symbol of her college transformation. And she says her college experience was all about taking risks — socially, academically, and more.

Wisdom: Ceravolo's household is all about health care — her parents and two older sisters are dentists, and another sister is a doctor. She always knew she wanted to follow in their footsteps, but she is still working on narrowing that interest. She's shadowed six physicians but she says one

of the experiences that has opened her eyes the most was working with UConn Health Leaders. The program aims to expose student volunteers to the ins and outs of the medical field at health care clinics.

Ceravolo was placed in Hartford, where she helped patients in the waiting room detail any social factors that could be having effects on their health. While there, she realized how many patients had language barriers and how important it was for her to learn how to communicate with them. Now she's learning Spanish in hopes of helping patients feel more comfortable in medical settings.

Moments Missed: Studying abroad — she'd planned for Italy but had less on-campus time already and didn't want to lose more.

Moments Gained: Joining Greek life at UConn was unexpected and life changing. As an out-of-state student, freshman year was even more isolating than anticipated. Making friends was daunting until she found her Gamma Phi Beta sisterhood and ice cream socials, watching "The Bachelor," and adventures like attending a Red Sox game.

Transformation: Public speaking wasn't for her, Ceravolo says, thinking back to high school presentations. Fast-forward to her time at UConn and she loves being in front of a crowd, specifically at the Student Rec Center as a strength training and HIIT workout instructor — a job she



Me and my twin sister, Julia, in Phoenix for the Final Four!

never imagined doing or initially felt qualified for but one she admired in the end. If it taught her one thing: The opportunities are out there, you just have to go out and take 'em.

My UConn Movie Must Include This Scene: Ceravolo says seeing UConn Nation expand beyond Storrs was one of her favorite experiences to date. Along with her twin sister, Ceravolo packed her bag with as much UConn apparel as she could fit and headed to Phoenix, Arizona, to witness the men's basketball team once again bring home the national title. She remembers walking tall as people struck up conversations with her, picked up her tab, and more — all because she sported UConn gear.

"I feel like it was what people needed to celebrate. It was worth the weight of having to go through a tough freshman year." And she has a daily souvenir to remember the moment — she got her ears pierced for free in Arizona for the Final Four.

Now What: Ceravolo is a patient care technician at an urgent care facility in Syracuse and is applying to medical schools — UConn is in the mix.

My Class in One Word or Phrase: "Perseverance."



Eric Hwang '24 (CLAS)

Eric Hwang's degree is in political science. Today, he is a commissioned officer in the U.S. Army enrolled in the Basic Officer Leader Course for Armor School at Fort Moore, Georgia. He credits UConn's Army ROTC program for giving him valuable leadership skills, and says he hopes to go to law school someday.



Erin Carney '24 (CLAS)

With a degree in political science and criminal justice, Carney is now a proposal strategist at Cigna Healthcare. At UConn, she was an Honors student, Undergraduate Student Government operations director, and Huskython dancer representative.



Sydney Fournier '24 (SFA), South Windsor, Connecticut

"While I pride myself on my maturity and acceptance of others, I could learn a few things from the children I work with ... I have found myself being less judgmental of those around me. I am less afraid to be curious and ask questions, even if those questions aren't easy to address," wrote Fournier in her admissions essay.

More than five years later, she says some of the lessons she learned from the children she worked with at her town rec center helped her navigate college more than she ever could have imagined: Don't be afraid to try new things, be kind to everyone, and stay curious.

Only at UConn: Attending an NCAA Division I school has its perks, and for digital media and design (DMD) student Fournier, one was being able to work with some of the best teams in the nation. She says she never liked sports until her passion for media landed her at UConn Athletics. Unlike other students who joined the fandom attending games, her love blossomed behind the scenes, filming practices and live games for the Athletics video department.

The best feeling was seeing her designs on the jumbotron. Fournier joined the graphic design team, making content for basketball, hockey, and many other sports. The thrill of helping put on a show for fans was unmatched and something she's looking for as she searches for jobs postgraduation. She says this UConn-found affinity for sports is a love she'll carry forward.

Moments Missed: The traditional Torch Lighting Convocation Ceremony and lining up with peers on the Great Lawn to take your class picture during welcome weekend. "My [UConn alum] parents always told me that's the first time you're with your whole class and the last time until you graduate. We didn't get that 'first time' at all."

Moments Gained: Finding a space outside to enjoy dining hall grab-and-go with friends during her first year was something she missed once it was no longer the norm.

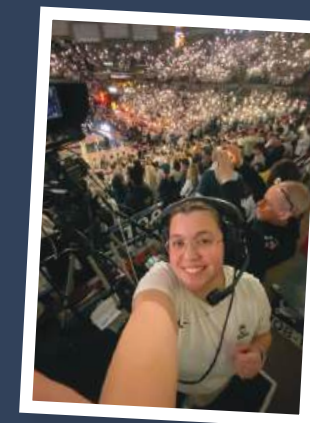
My UConn Movie Must Include This Scene: Flooding the streets to celebrate the men's championship in 2023, being shoulder to shoulder with so many students: "Getting to be excited about something as a community with that many people was so cool. And I get why people are into sports. You understand the drive and the excitement to have your team win."

Wait, What?! Working media for athletics, Fournier says she loved knowing tidbits that others might not notice. Her favorite: All commercial breaks, for any sport, are predetermined based on how much time is left or which time-out the game is in.

Now What: Fournier's passion lies in the art of putting on a show for the public. She'd like to put her DMD skills to use for a company like Disney, ESPN, or NBC Universal. In the meantime, she's working at Bright Path, an early childhood education center in Tolland, Connecticut.

My Class in One Word or Phrase: "Resilient." ✨

At my favorite place on campus — working Camera 2 at Gampel Pavilion during a live basketball game.



Analise Sanchez

Sanchez is a learning management system administrator with the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York. She attended UConn in 2020 for math but transferred to Binghamton University School of Management in 2022. During her time at UConn, she was involved with the Puerto Rican/Latin American Cultural Center and the Real Estate Society.



Find more on Bedoya's work — and learn why she finds it more nerve-racking to photograph underwater rugby than to actually play it — at s.uconn.edu/bedoya.

Underwater What?

▶ An art and art history major concentrating on photography and video, **Daniela Bedoya '24 (SFA)** spent the summer of '23 photographing underwater rugby games (as if rugby wasn't rough enough?) and interviewing professional female sports photographers, thanks to funding from UConn's BOLD Women's Leadership Network. "Women in Sports: Behind the Lens" was born from her love for photography and lifetime as an athlete, she says, and started with her interviewing nine female photographers who either serve as team photographers in national leagues or otherwise focus their work in athletics. —KIMBERLY PHILLIPS

CLASS NOTES

1960s

▶ **Jim D'Amore Jr. '63 (CLAS), '68 MBA** has created Learn for Life, a nonprofit with a mission to bring math tutoring to inner-city Hartford. ▶ **Wilma Bor Davidson '65 (ED)**, of Longboat Key, Florida, has written her seventh book, "Super Cat! Splat! Splat!" It teaches children that we can make happiness for ourselves, even though bad things may happen to us along life's path. Recently retired as a professor of practice at the University of South Florida, Davidson says she continues to run her business consulting practice and has fun writing.

1970s

▶ **Liz Scotta '72 (CLAS)** showcased 51 prints, drawings, and watercolors of Belgium, Morocco, and France during her first solo art exhibit at Alliance Française de San Francisco. She also held a book signing for her third book, "Not Just Paris: Scenes from France." ▶ **Carmen Effron '72 (ED), '81 MBA**, the founder and president of C F Effron Company in Weston, was named one of eight 2024 Neag School Alumni Award honorees. Effron was inducted into the School of Business Alumni Hall of Fame in 2011 and received the Connecticut Small Business Institute for Excellence in Commerce Award in 2013. ▶ Congrats to **Bruce A. Tomkins '73 (CLAS)**, who retired after 45 years at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. He worked on many diverse projects in the chemical sciences division, analyzing complex mixtures, such as cigarette smoke, synthetic fuels, environmental pollutants, and radionuclides in environmental samples.

▶ **Jeff Davidson '73 (BUS), '75 MBA**, a columnist for Townhall.com, a public issues forum, recently published his 200th article.



▶ **Marc Summerfield '74 (PHARM)** highlights his experiences at UConn, especially his participation in the marching band, in his recently published memoir, "A Baby Boomer's Memoir: From Baltimore to the Jersey Shore and Back." ▶ **Ray North '74**, who did his orthopedic residency at UConn Health, is celebrating a 50-year career as a knee surgeon.

▶ **Richard A. Dluhy '76 (CLAS)** reports that he is currently a professor and chair of the chemistry department at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. ▶ **Athos "Dean" Macris '79 (ENG)**, a seasoned cybersecurity expert, was appointed chief information security officer at Dispel. His career spans roles in operational and information technology, including serving as theater operations officer of U.S. Forces Korea and cyber technical director for Naval Special Warfare. Macris also continues his military service as a lieutenant commander in the U.S. Navy.



▶ Congratulations to **William "Bill" Hover '79 MS**, a leading national dam engineer, on receiving a top honor from the Boston Society of Civil Engineers. Hover, who recently retired as senior (continued on p. 39)



▶ You'd be hard-pressed to find a more UConn-themed wedding than **Lauren Kaszuba '10 (CLAS)** and Nate Neville's destination event on the beach in Mexico in May. From their adorable cake topper to the upbeat "UConn Fight Song" serenading guests, the couple wove their Husky pride into every detail. They even arranged to have a recording of UConn game day announcer Conor Geary introducing them as they arrived at the reception. "It feels like our relationship has been built on all things UConn," says Lauren. "I am an alum, and Nate grew up on all UConn sports. His late father, **Dennis Neville '75 (ENG)**, took him to every football and basketball game from the time he was a kid. UConn has held sentimental value to him." Congratulations, you two, and Go Huskies!

MAKING GOOD

“THIS WAR MATTERED”

Congress’ 16-member Afghanistan War Commission includes three UConn alums

As part of the National Defense Authorization Act for 2022, Congress called for a commission to study the war in Afghanistan, which lasted from Oct. 7, 2001, to Aug. 30, 2021. Three UConn political science alums are leading the nonpartisan effort. Commissioner **Dan Fata ’94 (CLAS)** is a national security expert who has focused on foreign policy issues for the past 30 years in think tanks and on Capitol Hill. Commissioner **Jeffrey Dressler ’08 (CLAS)** is a national security practitioner who previously worked on Afghanistan issues. Executive Director **Jaime Cheshire ’99 (CLAS)** is coordinating the study. She has 25 years of public service focused on national security, including 17 years on Capitol Hill and as an advisor to CIA leadership on legislative matters.

“This is unique,” says Cheshire. “This is the only time Congress has chartered a holistic war commission right after the conclusion of a war. We’ll be looking at all 20 years. That includes DOD, the diplomatic piece of it, the intelligence piece, and interagency deliberations and leadership decisions, covering four administrations and 11 Congresses. It’s intended to be the breadth and scope of the war. None of us have seen anything like it in our experience.”

“A lot of our modeling has been based on the 9/11 Commission,” Fata says. “Though 9/11 caught us by surprise. With the Afghanistan War, there’s far more data available. This was something that was big and important and tragic. People want answers.”

Deconstructing a “forever war” presents a monumental challenge. Each of the 16 members of the commission, all with different areas of expertise and experience in Afghanistan and the Middle East, will have their own take on what to examine — including Fata, Cheshire, and Dressler.

“The Taliban had freedom of movement across the Pakistan border,” notes Dressler, “so we were trying to fight an insurgency that could go to areas where we couldn’t, and rest and refit and recruit, and then come back across the border. That was a continuous challenge. We tried to stand up an army and police force that was unified and responsive to the center. Afghanistan has a complicated history of governance from the center. You can debate about whether that was the right approach.”

“We owe it to the American public to look at this, to study it, and to explain what we did, why we did it, and what we would do differently ...”

“The war planners never thought the war would take as long as it did,” says Fata. “The belief was, we could get Osama bin Laden far faster than it actually took to get him.”

Some thought getting Bin Laden (who was killed by U.S. forces on May 2, 2011) might have presented a window to withdraw, while others saw it as an opportunity to escalate and go after other targets taking refuge in Pakistan.

“There was an inflection point in 2011,” says Cheshire, “and decisions related to whether or not to rescale the effort. Bin Laden was not the only member of al-Qaeda with an external plot capability against the United States, but he was a hugely symbolic and operational leader of al-Qaeda. What did the U.S. consider in 2011, post-raid, in terms of decision-making and policy? Did they debate rescaling? Or changing the objectives? What was discussed at the time? That would be important for us to look at.”

The U.S. learned from Vietnam to form coalitions rather than go it alone so as not to look like a hegemonic bully, to not fight with drafted soldiers who don’t want to be there, to embed journalists who can relay real stories, but the U.S. did not learn how to best end this type of conflict. A key mission in Iraq was to stop al-Qaeda from attacking the U.S., and in 20 years, it has not. Yet there’s a difference between the cessation of hostilities and resolution.

“This war mattered,” says Dressler. “There were 800,000 Americans who served, 20,000 who were wounded, and nearly 2,500 who passed away, and tremendous costs in terms of resources. We owe it to the American public to look at this, to study it, and to explain what we did, why we did it, and what we would do differently — or what we did wrong and what we did right — and capture the right lessons from this to inform future policymakers.”

“We need to help our fellow Americans, and our veterans, come to closure on this,” agrees Fata. “Families were torn apart, people died, people lost limbs, their lives were forever changed, only to have us walk away, and the bad guys are still there.”

“We really want to capture what happened, while it’s still fresh,” adds Cheshire. “We very much care about providing answers to the American public, and to the service members who served in Afghanistan over the 20 years, and the diplomats. A lot of them are very proud of their individual service, and what they accomplished within their tours and within their specific missions, but they want to know why we didn’t achieve what we had hoped to achieve, in terms of an independent Afghanistan government. They do see their services contributing to the security of the country, but there’s an incredible amount of frustration and disappointment at the outcome.” —*PETER NELSON*



➔ **Brian Francese ’06 (BUS)** shares this story and invites others to share their own: “Last year Gampel Pavilion’s hardwood floor was replaced after 33 years. UConn engaged a third party, Artsman, to facilitate the calculated removal of the historic floor as well as the sale of those pieces in varying forms to interested buyers. I was fortunate enough to purchase some small pieces of the floor and also one very large piece [pictured above]. For the larger piece, I was able to work with Artsman to design and execute what I consider to be a work of art. The finished product commemorates flooring that witnessed 11 women’s and 5 men’s NCAA national championship seasons, but also pep rallies, commencement speeches, career fairs, etc. I am a partner with a top 10 CPA firm in the U.S. My office is in New York City, but I work from my home in Connecticut a few days a week, where the UConn floorboard art piece is prominently displayed on the wall opposite my desk, allowing for it to be right in sight during my frequent video calls with clients — and is certainly a frequent conversation starter. It would be interesting to see how Gampel Pavilion’s floor has taken on a new life for other lucky buyers.”

Do you have a piece of the historic Gampel floor? Share by emailing alumni-news@uconnalumni.com.

principal at GZA GeoEnvironmental Inc., was inducted as a lifetime honorary member of the society, one of only two people accorded this honor each year. During his 42-year career, Hover

provided dam engineering services for municipal water supplies serving metropolitan Hartford, Boston, and New York City and served on the firm’s board of directors.

1980s
➔ **David Ertl ’80 (CAHNR)**, of Waukee, Iowa, reports that he retired from a career in agriculture in June. He worked in plant breeding

at Pioneer Hi-Bred (now Corteva) for 23 years and spent the last 13 conducting genetic and production research for the Iowa Corn Growers Association. He recently received the Distinguished Career Award from the North American Plant Phenotyping Network. In retirement, he and his wife, Angie, plan to travel to see their musician sons perform. He also plans to continue pursuing his passion for cycling and coaching cyclists.
➔ Love squirrels? Then you might want to pick up a new book by **Jerome Lusa ’81 (CLAS)** called “Squirrel Poems.” Lusa, of Glastonbury, Connecticut, describes it as a collection of “free-verse poems with accompanying photos to celebrate the indomitable spirit and hilarity of squirrels.” His previous books are “Backyard Poems” and “Hometown Poems.”



➔ Congrats to Pullman & Comley litigation attorney **James T. “Tim” Shearin ’83 (CLAS), ’86 JD**, of Newtown, Connecticut, on becoming the 101st president of the Connecticut Bar Association. He’s held more than a dozen roles within the association, most recently as president-elect. At UConn, he served as president of the Law School Alumni Association and chair of the Law School Foundation.
➔ **Chet Dalzell ’83 (CLAS)**, the senior vice president of operations and participant engagement at Digital Advertising Alliance, was named president of the Marketing Club of New York.
➔ **Dr. Alan J. Lipman ’84 (CLAS)**, a clinical professor

of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at The George Washington University Medical Center, received the Who's Who in America Distinguished Lifetime Achievement Award.

➔ **Andrea Ezerins '84 (BUS)** retired in January after a 35-year career in the insurance industry, most recently serving as the chief underwriting officer at the HSB Group. During her career in the corporate world, she lived in nearby Hebron, raised a family, and wrote a novel. Her novel, "Again and Again Back to You," transports separated young lovers backward in their lives to reveal their road not taken. She and her husband, **Edgar Ezerins '91 MBA**, have identical twin sons and two daughters, including **Lydia Ezerins '14 (ED), '15 MA**.

➔ **Peter A. LaPorta '86 (CLAS)** was named Most Influential Motivational Speaker of 2024 by CXO Magazine. He was recently on tour for his 11th international bestselling book "Sanctuary."

➔ **Michael Ivy '87 MD** was appointed chief medical officer of Gaylord Specialty Healthcare in Wallingford. Before that, he was deputy chief medical officer at Yale New Haven Health. He lives in Guilford with his wife, Alice. They have four children.



➔ **Denise M. Dettingmeijer '87 (BUS), '89 MBA** was named Medical Solutions' new chief financial officer. She most recently served as CFO of Randstad North America and Global Businesses. ➔ **Victoria (Wessman) Brooking '89 MA** published her first book, "Garden of Forget-Me-Nots," a memoir portraying the gradual decline into the world of dementia and Alzheimer's. ➔ **Jon Russo '89 (BUS)**, who was a member of

the Delta Chi fraternity and ROTC at UConn, has been appointed to the advisory board for the Connecticut Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation representing veterans entrepreneurship initiatives. He is the chief marketing officer and founder of B2B Fusion, a marketing consultancy.

1990s

➔ Congratulations to **Andrea Chapdelaine '91 MA, '93 Ph.D.**, who became the new president of Connecticut College in July. Chapdelaine had been president of Hood College in Frederick, Maryland, since 2015. A native of Chicopee, Massachusetts, she has strong Connecticut ties. After earning her master's and

doctorate from UConn, she taught at Trinity College in Hartford from 1995 to 1998 as a visiting assistant professor. She then joined the psychology faculty at Albright College in Reading, Pennsylvania, where she rose to become dean of undergraduate studies, then provost, and finally, vice president of academic affairs before joining Hood.

➔ For the second year in a row, the Connecticut Art Directors Club awarded its Best in Show honor to **Pam Howard '91 (SFA)** and her Firebrick Design studio in West Hartford. It's the first time that a solo, woman-run studio has won consecutively.



➔ Looking for some Halloween reading? **Joe Azary '91 (CLAS)** just published the story collection "Vampires, Warriors and Nomads: The History, Mythology and Folklore of the Hungarians." ➔ **Lawrence P. Ward '92 (BUS)** is the new president of the University of Hartford. Ward had been vice president for learner success and dean of campus life at Babson College in Wellesley, Massachusetts. ➔ **David J. Moonay '92 MS, '99 Ph.D.** writes that he's a senior engineer in materials and rheology at Ametek Brookfield in Middleboro, Massachusetts. "I'm enjoying life in Massachusetts and have stayed in touch with UConn friends I made in grad school and at UConn Hillel! Alpine skiing, snowshoeing, mountain biking, and kayaking. (continued on p. 43)



➔ Despite her abiding love for pop culture, licensed clinical social worker **Portia Pendleton '13 (CLAS)** is unable to unabashedly delight in her social media feed. She just can't help noticing its flood of inaccurate information about mental health.

That's what spurred Pendleton to hook up with psychiatrist Katrina Furey and create the weekly podcast "Analyze Scripts," in which they analyze the mental health of characters in current movies and TV shows. Recent topics include ADHD, personality disorders, depression, adolescent development, and eating disorders.

With more than 80 episodes to date, Pendleton and Furey seem to have found a niche, earning more than 25,000 streams worldwide since the first became available last February. They credit the show's mix of medicine, psychology, and streaming trends.

"True mental health disorders are serious and impact people significantly, and while of course we want to break down stigma, I think we also need to get some real info out there," says Pendleton, who grew up in Haddam, Connecticut, and practices out of Old Saybrook. "We use the characters to illustrate either their mental health struggles or just experiences that we can speak to and how that impacts someone's mental health."

Some provide more humor than others. Take, for example, characters in "The White Lotus." They tend to have more of what Pendleton calls "flair," so analyzing, say, Tanya's likely borderline personality disorder can be done with some humor. A summer episode on the Netflix drama "Baby Reindeer," meanwhile, required a serious look at the show's stalking and sexual assault themes. "Harry Potter" characters offer a chance for the co-hosts to examine differences among anxious, ambivalent, and secure attachments. An "Oppenheimer" episode looks at the moral and ethical dilemmas facing the scientists who built the atomic bomb. "Barbie," "Inside Out," "Love Is Blind," "The Hangover," and "Mean Girls" provide decidedly lighter fodder.

Pendleton, who earned dual degrees in psychology and human development and family studies at UConn before getting her MSW at the University of Saint Joseph, hopes the podcast provides some antidote to what she sees on social media.

"I think the landscape has become so saturated with personal anecdotes or people who aren't qualified talking about mental health. Our idealized goal is bridging the gap for accessing mental health info." —LAUREN CURRAN

LIFE LESSONS

HOW TO AVOID CYBER SCAMS

It wasn't easy to research **Jeff Petrower '11 (BUS, MS)** in preparation for our interview. Virtually no information about him came up online — which is exactly how the IRS Criminal Investigation special agent who specializes in cyber scams likes it.

On the phone, he did share a few personal details — like how he met his wife on campus.

The Stamford, Connecticut, native whose mother, **Kathy Petrower '80 (BUS)**, also graduated from UConn, was introduced to **Laura Vargo '11 (CLAS)** through mutual friends at on-campus bar the Thirsty Dog. After discovering they both lived in Charter Oak Apartments, Vargo slipped a note under his door, inviting him over for dinner she'd cook and providing three menu options: penne alla vodka, chicken cordon bleu, or "Manwiches."

Petrower, who readily admits being "unsophisticated" at the time, selected the third option. Eight years later, they hung a UConn banner at their wedding and now live in New York City with their 1-year-old daughter, Alice.

After working for a decade as an auditor, financial risk consultant, and forensic accountant with KPMG and later Deloitte, two of the so-called Big Four accounting firms, Petrower joined IRS Criminal Investigation as a special agent in 2022, a dozen years after first discovering the division at an outreach event on campus his senior year.

We asked him to share his top five ways to avoid becoming a cybercrime victim.

#1: Keep more of your personal information, well, personal. "Threat actors are skilled at piecing together different parts of your identity. You might have your birthday, your pet's name, your email address, your location, all on different social media," Petrower explains. "When paired with compromised usernames and passwords on the dark web, this informa-



tion can allow bad actors to re-create a digital version of you to commit identity theft and a host of other scams."

#2: Don't allow your emotions to overcome rational thought. Scammers manipulate two main emotions to extract money out of victims — fear and love, Petrower says. Fear can come in the form of pretending to be a financial institution or law enforcement, even the IRS itself, warning you about fraudulent activity on your account or that you've been the victim of identity theft. Then they ask you to follow their instructions to correct it ... and that's when you actually become the victim of identity theft.

"Most of the time, the scammer will also urge you not to talk to anybody about the situation. This is a major red flag," Petrower warns. "Whenever they tell you not to talk to someone, stop what you're doing and do talk to someone you trust."

The ostensible love component comes in the form of dating apps or websites, two of the most common modern methods for scams. "If you get involved in a chat on a dating app and the conversation turns to something like crypto investments, pick up the phone and call them. Or better yet, suggest a video call. Hear what they

sound like, see what they look like," Petrower advises. "If your love interest refuses, you're probably chatting with a scammer."

#3: Don't invest in anything that you don't understand. "That's classic investment advice," in general, Petrower acknowledges. "But it's more pertinent now than ever, with virtual assets in play. Shady promoters will pitch things with buzzwords like 'bitcoin,' 'crypto,' 'NFTs,' or 'DeFi' [decentralized finance] tokens."

If it sounds cool or innovative, but you don't really get it, stay away.

#4: Be wary of unregulated investments. "These digital tokens can be created by anyone," Petrower reminds us. "They're traded as investments but not registered as securities, nor regulated as such. That creates a risk to the investor of total loss," since there's no financial backstop. If your bank goes under, the FDIC guarantees up to \$250,000 from your savings or checking account. Here, there's no such guarantee.

#5: Protect your data and connections. "Be careful when connecting to public Wi-Fi. Don't conduct any sensitive transactions when on a public network, especially purchases — whether you're at a hotel, airport, shopping center," Petrower warns. "Bad actors have figured out ways to use public USB ports to install malware and monitoring software onto devices that plug into those ports. So use your own charger and USB cable, and plug into an electrical outlet instead."

Indeed, Russian operatives recently made international headlines after tapping into a top-secret German military meeting when a German officer dialed in using an unsecured phone line at a Singapore hotel. —JESSE RIFKIN '14 (CLAS)

BIG IDEAS COME FROM OUT OF THE BLUE



blue.uconn.edu

UConn

among others, are activities added since I moved here. We talk in my synagogue about the men's and women's basketball teams!"

➔ **Josh Krulewitz '92 (BUS)** was appointed senior vice president of communications at ESPN, responsible for leading the communications department and working closely with Disney colleagues to enhance the ESPN brand.



➔ **Tara Curtis Mead '94 (CLAS)**, editor of the Hometown Banker magazine for community bankers, let us know that the publication won the Gold Award from Hermes Creative Awards for its December 2023 print edition. ➔ **Jack McLarney '96 MS**, of Cromwell, Connecticut, wrote "The Book of Batch Scripting: From Fundamentals to Advanced Automation," which he describes as "an entertaining exploration of bat files for seasoned coders or anyone who wishes to automate repetitive tasks on a Windows computer." ➔ **David Watts '96 (CLAS)** recently completed the Chief Human Resources Officer Program at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. He is the senior director of human resources at Alice Peck Day Memorial Hospital in Lebanon, New Hampshire. ➔ **Jeffrey LaPierre '96 (CLAS)**, a senior assistant public defender, writes that he was promoted to brigadier general in the Connecticut Army National Guard after 32 years of service. Congrats!

➔ Teva Pharmaceutical Industries appointed **Matthew Shields '97 (ENG)** as executive vice president of Teva Global Operations, the company's manufacturing and supply division. He's a manufacturing and supply-chain leader with more than 25 years of experience in the biopharmaceutical and animal health industries.

➔ **Bridget Cooper '97 MA** recently published her seventh book, "Unflappable: How Smart People Quit Overthinking, Ditch the Drama, and Thrive at Work." She describes it as a collection of more than 70 game-changing tools, tactics, and frameworks professionals use to improve the way they work and live. She notes that she is the proud mom of **Jessi Cooper '23 (ED), '24 MA**. "We are truly a Huskies family!" ➔ **Scott Wojnarowicz '98 (ED), '99 MA** is

a co-founder of and the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction at Capital Preparatory Schools, a charter school district that serves schools in Connecticut and New York City. ➔ **Sarah (Bussell) Rovezzi '98 (CAHNR)** was recently promoted to East Coast regional sales manager at Allentown. She brings with her 25 years of experience supporting biomedical research, most recently as a deputy program manager overseeing staff and operations for several National Institutes of Health facilities. ➔ **Cara Belvin '99 (CLAS)** was honored at the 2024 New England Women's Leadership Awards, which recognizes remarkable women who meet challenges with confidence, persistence, and compassion. Belvin founded Empower in 2013, inspired by the gratitude she had for all the layers of support her family received after her mother, Kit, died of breast cancer when Belvin was nine. Empower is an international nonprofit with thousands of volunteers worldwide who



➔ A senior project manager for the global Human Rights Foundation, **Adam Kahan '89 (CLAS)** claims to have learned countless lifelong lessons about humanity by listening to old jazz, new jazz, and the words of jazz royalty — royalty like Marshall Allen, 100 years old, a Philadelphia saxophonist and former member of the U.S. Army's 92nd Infantry Division, the Buffalo Soldiers. "Marshall Allen told me, 'I'm not interested in what you know — I'm interested in what you don't know,'" says Kahan. "He does not rest on his laurels. You can apply that to anything."

Kahan had been working as a director of postproduction and operations for AMC Networks when he joined the Human Rights Foundation in 2023, hoping to have a direct impact in the fight against authoritarian regimes and closed societies.

"A lot of the people we engage, they have survived under extreme and inhumane circumstances," says Kahan, who coordinates the Foundation's annual Oslo Freedom Forum. "Hearing their stories and speaking with them are two of the great things about working here."

Kahan says he has no regrets about making the move to the nonprofit world. "I got burned out on the corporate world. My salary got cut in half — but my mind is stimulated. You can't put a price on that." —*BRIAN HUDGINS*

bring life-changing programs to children and young adults affected by the loss of a parent. Belvin began her career as a school psychologist working with children with disabilities before transitioning into nonprofit management and fundraising.

2000s

➔ Congrats to former Pratt & Whitney President **Christopher T. Calio '00 MBA, JD** on being named CEO of RTX. With 180,000 employees and \$67 billion in

annual sales, RTX is one of the largest aerospace and defense companies in the world. ➔ **Wendy Sue Sewack '00 (CLAS)** earned her master's degree from the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University. She lives in Charlottesville, Virginia, where she works at the University of Virginia.

➔ **Kyle J. Eagleson '01 (BUS)** was promoted to president and chief executive officer of Guilford Savings Bank. He formerly served as the bank's chief operating officer. (continued on p. 45)



Giving a TedX talk in Methuen, Massachusetts, in 2022

LIFE LESSONS

WAXING ENTREPRENEURIAL

For Michelle Wax, happiness means embracing the pivot

The first time this magazine considered writing about Michelle Wax '12 (BUS), it was three years after graduation and she had started a successful Boston-area company, Kitchen Millie, baking “two-bite cookies” that she sold at farmer’s markets before branching out to retail stores, restaurants, event catering, online sales, and a subscription service.

The next time Wax came on our radar, it was 2019 and she had left what was now two successful businesses in the hands of the teams she’d built to travel through all 50 states in her Jeep Wrangler. Despite having no film training, she interviewed hundreds of regular folks for “The American Happiness Project,” a documentary she later spun off into a coaching business.

Now, nearly a decade after this serial entrepreneur left her first day job to pursue a dream, she’s still going all in on the next big idea with her multifaceted business Everyday Vibrancy, which offers corporate happiness workshops, private dating and life coaching, networking and social events, and more — all aimed at helping people find themselves and connect with others.

“It took me quite some time to even

have the courage to think about pivoting from the cookie company because I was very stuck in that identity. People knew me as the cookie lady,” says Wax, who in summer 2024 opened The City Retreat, a coworking and event space for paying members of her Boston Babes Social Club. “I was very attached to it. But since then, what I’ve noticed in myself is every few years or so, I have this kind of inner desire to bring something new to life and create something from nothing, which is something I really like doing.

“I’ve identified that pattern now, but at the start I thought something was wrong.”

Who could blame her? Kitchen Millie and The Local Fare, a storefront and commercial kitchen where small food businesses could learn and grow, were turning comfortable profits. She had dreamed of owning a baking business since she was a kid operating an annual lemonade stand with her two brothers, selling little homemade chocolate chip cookies for 25 cents apiece.

“It was kind of what I’d been going after for quite some time,” she says. “And I didn’t really feel the happiness and fulfillment that I thought I would.”

After creating her documentary and developing workshops based on what she learned from neuroscientists and through her interviews, she sold the food businesses.

“The question I always heard was, like, isn’t this what you wanted?” Wax says. Now, she reassures her clients and the student entrepreneurs she mentored as the Werth Institute’s 2022–2023 entrepreneur-in-residence that it’s OK not to know exactly what the future holds — and it’s OK to pivot.

“Everything does come together, everything does interconnect, and it’s often in ways you can’t even predict at this moment,” she says. “Looking back, it makes sense, I can weave the story.” But in the moment, she says, it felt like, “What the hell am I doing?”

True Happiness

Talking to people from all walks of life, who were dealing with many kinds of hardships yet still considered themselves to be happy, showed Wax she was on the right track. She has since parlayed happiness research and takeaways from her cross-country interviews into a framework that helps others map a path to fulfillment, which she has taught to more than 12,000 people at corporations, schools, and in private sessions.

“The biggest theme that came through [in the interviews] is that how you’re interpreting what’s happening to your life is much more important than what’s actually happening. Your mindset plays a huge role,” she says. “The simplest way to put it is, everything is going to be OK. I heard so many stories of people going through the worst possible situations you could think of, and them sitting there having created a happy and fulfilling life — it was like, wherever you’re at today, you can create that. It was really powerful.”

And with her boots on the ground to help others find connection and happiness through her business ventures, Wax is doing the same for herself.

“You can decide to be happy with what you have, where you’re at, where you’re going, or you can decide just the opposite,” she says. “You really have to choose it each day.” —JULIE (STAGIS) BARTUCCA '10 (BUS, CLAS), '19 MBA

➔ **John Sheedy '03 (BGS)**, of Harwinton, Connecticut, published his second memoir, “In My Father’s Tire Tracks,” a city-by-city retracing of a solo road trip his father took in 1959. Sheedy previously published the memoir “Sting of the Heat Bug,” as well as a collection of essays, “Magical Acts in Two Suitcases,” and a poetry chapbook, “The Wanting Place.”



➔ Congratulations to **David Rusbasan '04 (CLAS), '10 Ph.D.**, who was named the new dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Marian University Indianapolis. A professor and scholar at Marian University for more than a decade, he has served as dean since 2023.

➔ **Meg (Noble) Clifton '04 (CLAS), '05 MA**, of Hebron, Connecticut, was named UConn’s Early College Experience Rookie of the Year for first-year instructors. She’s been teaching English at RHAM High School for 19 years after going through UConn’s Teacher Certification for College Graduates program.



➔ **Jonathan Longobardi '04 (CLAS)** joined Halloran Sage as a partner in the firm’s New Haven office. With more than a decade of experience in insur- (continued on p. 47)



Support the Opportunity Fund Project at s.uconn.edu/opp.

Mom Would Be So Proud

Working as the head of an investment management firm for 19 years, Steve Wilson found himself frustrated by the gender disparity he saw in the field. He wanted to hire women as investment professionals but struggled to find enough who were trained and qualified.

“I realized that colleges weren’t preparing enough women to enter the field,” Wilson explains. “I think it was a combination of a lack of awareness of career opportunities and perhaps, to some degree, self-selection — with too many fully qualified women thinking ‘I’m not good enough, so I’m not going to try’ or ‘It’s a hostile space, so why would I put myself out there?’”

So he decided to tackle the problem head on and launched a second career as a UConn School of Business faculty member. Last fall, he started an experiential learning program called the Opportunity Fund Project. The multi-semester program is open to everyone in the School of Business and particularly targets three groups: women, younger students, and underrepresented communities.

“We learn the basics in an introductory class covering accounting, economics, finance, and capital markets,” Wilson says. “Once students complete that, they take the next course, where they actually manage a sliver of the University endowment by buying and selling stocks they have uncovered and vetted.”

Besides teaching students the technical material, the program also helps them develop the soft skills and self-confidence critical to getting coveted internships and career-building entry-level jobs in finance. Wilson took a group of students to London last spring break to visit companies and investment shops to further broaden their perspectives and build their confidence. “We’re the bridge between Storrs and Wall Street,” he likes to say.

To widen and deepen student participation, Wilson teaches an “everybody” cohort that is open to all, as well as a women-only cohort. He also encourages all students to start the program earlier in their college careers, welcoming first years, sophomores, and juniors into the student-managed fund domain that traditionally recruits seniors.

The program proved successful in its first year, growing to 42 students by the spring semester, including 22 women and 37 non-seniors. More than 30 percent of the program’s students were from underrepresented communities.

Wilson says he was inspired to start the Opportunity Fund Project to honor his mother, Barbara B. Lapides Wilson '55 (BUS), who overcame great odds to get a college education. She lost her father during WWII. Her widowed mother, who had a 6th-grade education, worked hard to support Barbara and her sister. Despite being an excellent student, Barbara didn’t think she could afford college — until she was offered a scholarship to UConn. That opportunity changed her life, allowing her to graduate and build a career in social work and educational guidance. The Opportunity Fund Project, he says, is his way of paying it forward at the place that gave his mother the chance to build a better life. —GRACE MERRITT

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▲ UConn Engineering Ph.D. candidate Alaa Selim presents his work on cybersecurity defense control for smart grids.

TOM'S TRIVIA ANSWERS

- 1: B With no true "front door" for visitors, UConn Storrs campus tours for new and prospective Huskies in pre-Lodewick days typically began at the Student Union, although occasional visitors would find themselves at Parking Services.
- 2: A Downloading songs to iPods was cutting-edge stuff in 2008, and along with that, the website featured downloadable wallpaper and screen savers, short video clips, and the chance to join networking groups.
- 3: A By the 1930s, a large orchard was flourishing in the center of campus, approximately where Gampel Pavilion is located today. As the University grew in size, the orchard was moved to the Cold Spring site in Mansfield by the 1950s.
- 4: C After winning gold in Tokyo in 2021, UConn greats Taurasi and Bird had five gold medals each. When asked if she planned to be at the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles, Taurasi said she did. "With a beer, sitting on the beach next to Sue."

ance defense, Longobardi also practices personal injury, transportation, medical malpractice, and commercial litigation work. In addition, he serves as vice president of the board of directors of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater New Haven and is an avid runner — he just completed the Hartford Marathon. ▶▶ **Reema Narang '06 MBA** recently joined Lee Health as its new chief strategy and innovation officer. She has more than 20 years of leadership experience in



▶▶ **Kirsten Hawkins '00 MD, Beth Rackow '00 MD, Julie Cron '99 MD, Anne Dixon '01 MD, and Gerin Stevens '01 MD** got together for a 50th birthday party. "It was a great gathering of great UConn medical school women in NYC," Cron says.

the health care industry. ▶▶ **Frank Murphy '07 (BUS)**, an assistant professor of accounting at UConn's School of Business, won the American Taxation Association's Outstanding Tax Manuscript Award for his significant contributions to tax literature. Before joining UConn's faculty in 2017, Murphy worked at Deloitte in Hartford. ▶▶ Congrats to **Zoe R. Riccio '08 (CAHNR)** and **Robert A. Riccio '10 (BUS)**, '15 MS, whose Athletic Brewing Company was named to Inc. Magazine's list of the fastest-growing private companies in the Northeast region. ▶▶ **Sarah Masterson '08 MA, '11 Ph.D.** shines a light on the life and musical compositions of Philippa Schuyler, a child prodigy, composer, concert pianist, and war correspondent, in her new book, "Snapshots of Forgotten Adventures."

▶▶ **Aaron Frankel '09 (CLAS), '19 JD** joined the business law firm of Scott B. Franklin & Associates in West Hartford. ▶▶ **Sam Reich '09 LL.M.**, of the Laffey Bucci D'Andrea Reich & Ryan law firm, was named a 2024 Pennsylvania Super Lawyer and Rising Star.

2010s

▶▶ Kudos to **Lt. George Philbrick '10 (ENG)**, U.S. Navy, Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division, Naval Test Wing Atlantic, on being named Test Naval Flight Officer of the Year. After UConn, Philbrick went on to graduate from the Naval Officer Candidate School, the U. S. Naval Test Pilot School, and the Naval Postgraduate School. He's currently stationed at Naval Air Station Patuxent River in Maryland.



▶▶ **Samantha Wiegel '12 (SFA, ED)** received the prestigious Kellogg Award, recognizing Rectory School employees for their dedication and commitment to the school through their many years of service and their special assistance to the school and students. Wiegel has been at Rectory School in Pomfret, Connecticut, since

SHARE YOUR NEWS!

➔ To submit a Class Note, send an email: alumni-news@uconn.alumni.com

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Submissions may be edited for clarity and/or length.

2012 as director of instrumental music and private lesson coordinator and has served as a coach for many sports, most notably volleyball and fencing. Wiegel also reports that she and her husband, Alex, and daughter Nell welcomed a new addition to their family, Molly Ann Wiegel, who was born in March. “Mom looks forward to taking both girls to rub Jonathan’s nose on campus as soon as spring arrives!”



➔ **Abbey Forbes '12 (BUS)** shared her engagement photo: “I got married to my college sweetheart **Matt Molgan '11 (ENG)** on

Sept. 16, 2023, in Westbrook, Connecticut. I met my spouse freshman year at UConn. We’ve been together 15 years!” ➔ **Ryland Costello '14 (BUS)** was named channel partnerships director at DailyPay, a company he joined in 2019. Forever a Husky, he says he supports the UConn men’s and women’s basketball teams whenever they come to New York City, where he now lives.



➔ **Zoe Kaplan '16 (CLAS)** writes that she and **Phil Case '15 (ED)**, **'16 MA** were married in September 2023. “We met 10 years prior while playing for the men’s and women’s UConn Ultimate Frisbee teams. We celebrated with all our fellow Ultimate and Neag alumni friends. We now live in Philly but come home to catch UConn basketball games whenever we can!”

➔ Specialty staffing firm Alku promoted marketing director **Rebecca Crossley '15 (CLAS)** as its first director of corporate affairs and media relations. Crossley, who started as an intern at the Andover, Massachusetts, company, was one of the founding members of the company’s Diversity Equity and Inclusion Council. She also serves on Alku’s Gives Back Committee, scholarship board, and strategic decision-

making team and is a mentor for the Alku Futures Program. Outside the office, she serves as an election poll worker and participated in the Rodman Ride for Kids, the Falmouth Road Race, and the 2023 Boston Marathon. ➔ **Juanita Austin '16 (SFA)** produced the third annual DiasporaCon, a graphic novel conference, at Southern Connecticut State University in May. The conference, highlighting opportunities in the industry for creators of color, brought together graphic novel enthusiasts, creators, artists, filmmakers, and industry professionals for a day of panels, discussions, and workshops celebrating the dynamic world of graphic storytelling. ➔ **Holly Linder '17 (ENG)** and **Dennis Gehring '17 (ENG)** married in April, surrounded by plenty of fellow alums.



2020s
 ➔ **Eddie Vitcavage '20 (SFA, CLAS)**, a fourth-grade teacher at the Israel Putnam Elementary School in Meriden, Connecticut, was one of 12 educators accepted to the 2023–24 Scholastic Teacher Fellow program.

➔ Congrats to **Nicolette Naya '21 (ENG)** on winning the Charles Lewis Tiffany Award for Excellence. Naya interned with Tiffany & Co. as part of her engineering program at UConn. Upon graduation, she accepted a position at Tiffany and has already spearheaded the launch of an innovative manufacturing system that led to improved processes and cost savings.



➔ VOSH-CT (Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity) recently completed its 20th mission to San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua, led by Torrington optometrist **Matthew Blondin '20 MPH** and attorney **Audrey Blondin '20 MPH**. Over four days the clinic’s 38 mission members saw 3,743 patients from throughout southern Nicaragua, providing not only eye exams; eyeglasses; sunglasses; and medicine for glaucoma, eye allergies, and dry eyes as needed but also donated hats, clothing, and toys.



Peter Morenus

JOB ENVY

An Edible Surfboard? Almost!

Contemplating a Haiti beach utterly covered in trash was “traumatizing,” says avid surfer **Amelia Martin '23 (CAHNR)**. But she didn’t want to clean it up.

“My first thought was — let me try to make a surfboard out of trash, because what if I could clean up the ocean and give a surfboard back to people?”

Martin started an independent study with her environmental sciences professor Morty Ortega to do just that, but she soon realized making a trash surfboard just wasn’t a good idea. “You’re melting plastic, which creates air pollution, and when the surfboard breaks, you’d just throw it away again and put it right back into the cycle.”

While crafting boards in her garage to learn the process she found that most are 95% styrofoam, which takes 500 years to decompose, generating microplastics that enter the food chain. “At least 200,000 surfboards are thrown away every single year. There’s got to be better material to make surfboards out of.”

A UConn Co-Op Change Grant provided \$2,000 seed money, and industrial arts professor Chris Sancomb became a mentor. “He said, ‘Why don’t you look into mycelium? Just use mushrooms.’ Mycelium is the vegetative, root-like structure of a mushroom. We were growing them in my apartment.” She tested, tweaked, made progress.

“Mycelium bonds to whatever substrate you’re using. To make super squishy foam, you just use pure mycelium. If you grow it on sawdust and bake it, the end product is like a rock, where the mycelium is the glue and the structural support.”

Martin’s company Mud Rat is devising the “blanks” from which anyone can make an eco-friendly board. She’s now getting support from the nonprofit Eco Board Project and is still working to find the perfect bio materials to use as substrate, 100% committed to a 100% biodegradable board and on track for a first prototype in 2025.

“My goal is to have a full-sized prototype,” she says. “We’re still about two years from that.” —PETER NELSON

Martin this summer at a workshop at Mystic Seaport Museum that she uses to shape surfboards. She says she hopes to someday soon be using the space to shape prototypes.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF TO TOM'S TRIVIA!

Go to s.uconn.edu/fall24 or p. 47 to see if you know as much as King of UConn Trivia Tom Breen '00 (CLAS).

- 1. Before Lodewick Visitors Center opened in August 2000, where did UConn Storrs campus tours begin?**

A: Parking Services
B: The Student Union
C: Gampel Pavilion
D: Wilbur Cross

- 2. In 2008, UConn launched a social networking site Always Part of U, which offered users the chance to do what?**

A: Download UConn's fight song to an iPod
B: Superimpose a selfie into campus scenes
C: Send an email to Jonathan
D: Join a web forum for alumni called the Cyber Jungle

- 3. Extension educator Evan Lentz '19 (CAHNR), '22 MS is reestablishing fruit orchards at UConn after a long hiatus. From the 1950s to 2000, Cold Spring Orchard in Mansfield was the site of research projects, teaching, and commercial fruit sales. Where was UConn's main orchard prior to that?**

A: Where Gampel Pavilion is located now
B: Horsebarn Hill
C: North Campus, before residence halls were built there
D: A field on campus that eventually became the site of Hawley Armory



The new Sue Bird Barbie

- 4. In August, Sue Bird's record as the winningest basketball player in the history of the Olympics, with five consecutive gold medals, was surpassed by which player on Team USA's winning Paris squad?**

A: LeBron James B: Breanna Stewart C: Diana Taurasi D: Brittney Griner