

# UConn

MAGAZINE

SUMMER 2023



BASKETBALL  
CAPITAL OF  
THE WORLD

PACIFIC OCEAN

CALIFORNIA

KANSAS

TEXAS

KENTUCKY

INDIANA

HORSEBARN HILL

NORTH CAROLINA

UConn

GAMPEL PAVILION

STORRS, CT

BOSTON

LONG ISLAND

ATLANTIC OCEAN

CAPE COD





NCAA  
TWO DIVISION I  
NATIONAL CHAMPION

CONNECTICUT  
44

CHAMPION

CHAMPION

CHAMPION

CHAMPION

CHAMPION





## FEATURES

### 16 BLING IT HOME

How many men's basketball teams in the country have won five NCAA Division I Championships in this quarter century? UConn shares that distinction with exactly no one else. Add in the also unmatched, legendary success of Husky women's basketball and it is clear: Storrs, Connecticut, is the undisputed Basketball Capital of the World.

### 24 FIRST-YEARS

Three UConn medical school graduates take us through year one of residency — with its fast-and-furious rotations meant to teach the finer points of chosen specialties and the broad realities of what it means to be a practicing doctor.

### 32 KICKS

Why everyone — count Lil Nas X, Matt Damon, Alicia Keys, Penny Hardaway — wants to go sneaker shopping with journalism alum Joe LaPuma '05 (CLAS).

#### FIVE!

We couldn't choose just one cover for this issue celebrating UConn Men's Basketball's fifth championship. So we created five. Turn to the back cover to see the others and how to order more. *A note on the making of the covers: This year's championship ring is a stand-in; the real thing will be revealed at a ceremony this fall. The NCAA trophy is a photoshopped representation of one that exists only in our imaginations.*

## SECTIONS

### 1 UCONN NOW

Helping the blind to see, curating art to alleviate pain, raising our voices, teaching financial literacy, cooking next level, nurturing cannabis "seedlings," seeking seashells, and more.



### 38 UCONN NATION

Huskies killing it in the worlds of YA lit, franchise biz (more Moe's!), Pop art food, kitchen magic, renters' revenge, playgrounds for all, and the unearthing of Pixar's next big hit. Plus Class Notes and more.

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**Snap!** Austin Bigoney  
**Table of Contents** Austin Bigoney, Peter Morenus, Perry E. Hall, Peter Morenus

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### FROM THE EDITOR



Stephanie Reitz and son Brady at the "Sneaker Shopping" taping in NYC.

## IT'S COOL

Nobody tells you about the imperceptible transition from young and cool to tragically unhip. It's not the gentle decline I expected meandering into middle age. It's an invisible cliff that I surely tumbled off at some point over the years while changing diapers, cooking chicken nuggets, and signing school field trip forms. Then came the day my son outgrew the world of little boy light-up sneakers and entered pre-teenhood where cool shoes are de rigueur. Cool by today's standards, that is, not my graduated-in-the-last-millennium, blaring-classic-rock-in-the-mom-car standards. Like other middle-aged moms seeking to decode today's trends, I turned to the holy grail of parenting knowledge: podcasts. Listening to an episode of "The Complex Sneakers Podcast," I heard host Joe La Puma '05 (CLAS) casually mention shoes he'd owned as a student at UConn, which set into motion a series of events that culminated in "Kicks," starting on page 32.

Joe graciously welcomed me, my now 13-year-old son Brady, and UConn photographer Peter Morenus to a taping of his online series, "Sneaker Shopping with Complex," in New York City. Amid his busy pre-show preparation, Joe learned that Brady's favorite comedian is Joe Gatto of "Impractical Jokers" fame. With no fanfare, our Joe casually FaceTimed that Joe and introduced them, a moment that struck my shy son speechless at the time, but which he treasures. Though as fate would have it, Brady remains only mildly interested in his now-cool sneaker collection — he'd be just as happy in a pair of well-worn Vans.

Fortuitously, forgoing my Bob Seger playlist for a while in favor of sneaker podcasts landed me not only valuable knowledge but also a chance to introduce our readers to a genuinely nice, interesting, and (yes, I'm going to say it), cool alum.

*Stephanie Reitz*

University Spokesperson and Manager of Media Relations





## 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](http://magazine.uconn.edu), email the editor at [lisa.stiepock@uconn.edu](mailto:lisa.stiepock@uconn.edu), or send by regular mail to *UConn Magazine Letters*, 34 N. Eagleville Rd., Storrs, CT 06269-3144.

Here's a sampling of comments on our last issue, edited for clarity and length. Find more at [magazine.uconn.edu](http://magazine.uconn.edu).



### The Camino

➔ The story and photos on walking the Camino de Santiago provides a real feel of being a part of this unique experience. Three of us brothers, all UConn grads, made the same Sarria to Santiago walk in 2019.

The people we met, the old world paths and buildings, the bonding we did as brothers, all seemed to come from a special energy and adventure that the Camino provided. Experiencing the Camino as a UConn student will provide a valuable perspective that will last a lifetime. Buen Camino!

Joseph Augustyn '69 (ENG), Vernon, Connecticut; Robert Augustyn '70 (CLAS), Westport, Connecticut; John Augustyn '79 (ENG), Guilford, Connecticut, via email

## I was in the band when it first adapted the Big 10 style. Will remember forever marching down the field spelling UCONN.

Charlie Lipson '67 (BUS), Palm Desert, California, via our website

### Besties and Love Stories



➔ Carolee DeVito '74 (PHARM), Terry (Amodeo) Friedman '72 (CLAS)

and I met on the Storrs campus in the early 1970s. "Care" and I lived in Beard B our sophomore year and in Hale Hall junior and senior years, where we connected with Terry. Care and Terry were RAs in the newly opened dorm. We recall the sounds and smells of guitars strumming, bread baking, and apple slices strung out to dry in Care's dorm room. With long hair and bellbottoms, we very much remember being hippies!

After graduation, we turned to careers: Care a college professor, Terry a real estate broker, and I was a public school library media specialist. While Terry and I remained in Connecticut, Care's career took her to Florida. We connected, though, in the summers at Care's beautiful lakefront home in Vermont. And now that Care lives there full time, our get-togethers are more frequent. It's amazing to us that

we share a friendship that spans the decades. Indeed, we met in the '70s and now we're in our 70s!

Betty Ann Russ '73 (ED), North Stonington, Connecticut, via email



➔ I was a freshman nursing student and met my husband Bill

Hacker '52 (ED), '57 MA, a grad student who lived in Manchester Hall, on a blind date. He vaguely remembered my name but called for a second date and soon we were going out regularly, became pinned my sophomore year, and married by my junior year. We have been married for 64 wonderful years. We are proud Huskies.

Jean Krodel Hacker '61 (NUR), Sun City West, Arizona, via our website

### Road Eats

➔ Glad he knows about food safety! Bon appetit Geno!

Linda Trombly Drake '69 (CLAS), '80 MS, via Facebook

### Can Truth Triumph?

➔ Thank you for your efforts on behalf of Truth. I will be looking for your book. I hope that you can make a difference.

Ronald Newlin '71 (SSW), Saukville, Wisconsin, via our website

➔ From your fever dream to God's ear ... or however that saying goes. Thanks for this work and continuing to fight the good fight — particularly since it really shouldn't be an actual fight.

Stacy Pearson, Phoenix, Arizona, via our website

➔ The point of view expressed by a journalism professor that we are living in a "post-truth era" due to "anti vaxxers, flat earthers, and climate change deniers," not only paints those weary of injecting themselves with an unknown medicine with the same broad brush that actual science deniers are painted with, but also embodies the exact "anti-truth" sentiment the professor is claiming to have so much disdain for.

Anthony Miele '11 (CAHNR), via email

➔ I was appalled at [this story's] extreme left-wing bias. I have fond memories of UConn, but it saddens me to see that the school has taken a sharp left turn, and continues to fan hatred of a great president, Donald Trump.

Amy Lamborn '84 (CLAS), El Paso, Texas, via email

➔ I want to thank you for your integrity as a journalist and for standing up against some of the incredible misin-

formation/disinformation that continues to pollute the mindscape.

Thomas Terry, professor 1969–2003, Storrs, Connecticut, via email

➔ The article left me very disappointed due to its obvious liberal bias regarding the culture of disinformation. Are there no examples where disinformation was propagated by liberal individuals and politicians? Of course there are. Unfortunately, no such examples were offered in this article about "truth." We need journalists and other media to question everything without bias to seek the real truth.

Bob Kroll, '96 MBA, Pennsburg, Pennsylvania, via email

➔ We can only hope and pray that education will win out over disinformation. It will be difficult as we see a U.S. representative from New York who is unable to tell the truth about anything being accepted by his fellow party members.

Marvin Horwitz '51 (CLAS), via our website

### #32

➔ Swin Cash inspired so many others on and off the court. General Douglas MacArthur referred to the "long grey line...." of West Point, but Huskies have the long blue line led by the students of the past who excelled on and off the courts and fields and in their classrooms and labs, now inspiring generation after generation of people bettering the world in big and small ways.

Ed Marth, former exec. director AAUP, St. Charles, Illinois, via our website

### Snap!

➔ Your drone shot of Mirror Lake brought back memories of another time and another view of that body of water. On WHUS in 1958 we were doing a marathon fund raiser for the Community Chest and I vowed to swim ML for a certain pledge. I went across the lake with a canoe close by. All I remember is the bottom was full of fallen leaves that made the takeoff rather squishy.

Robert Gregory '59 (SFA, CLAS), Milford, Connecticut, via email

### INSTAGRAM

During the first weekend of May, UConn bestowed 7,707 degrees upon its newest alums, the Class of 2023.



Liked by juliesjazzy and 6,170 others  
uconn Almost time, #UConn23



Liked by townzun and 4,751 others  
uconn Regalia looks good on you, Jonathan #UConn23



Liked by jcote720 and 14,159 others  
uconn Ray Allen #UConn23





CHECKING IN WITH

## NICOLE WAGNER WANTS TO HELP PEOPLE REGAIN VISION

**Sending artificial retinas into space may be the breakthrough she needs**

The first time Nicole Wagner '07 (CLAS), '13 Ph.D. saw a rocket launch she couldn't help but feel a little starstruck. It was a balmy December day at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida, and that afternoon a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket was scheduled to depart on a mission to the International Space Station. As a SpaceX VIP, Wagner had received a personal tour of the center and now had one of the best seats in the house to watch the launch, where she was surrounded by the astronauts who would one day hitch a ride to space on the company's flagship rocket.

The rocket Wagner had come to see, however, wasn't carrying humans. It was loaded with supplies and a trunk full of cutting-edge experiments, including one built by Wagner's company, LambdaVision, and its implementation partner, Space Tango. The shoeboxed container was filled with bags of bright purple fluid designed to grow artificial retinas in microgravity without the need for human intervention.

The experiment may have been small, but it was an important proof of concept that Wagner hoped would lay the foundation for an entirely new approach to manufacturing artificial retinas. If she was right, it would be the first small step toward a solution that could provide relief to the millions of people living with degenerative retinal diseases back on Earth.

These are progressive diseases that ultimately lead to blindness. People who experience them can have difficulty with everyday activities like driving a car or reading a book. And while there's no cure, patients can regain some vision by swapping their decaying retinas for implants. The problem is that most retinal implants are electronic and come

with a litany of technical challenges including a tendency to overheat.

In 2009, Wagner co-founded LambdaVision with UConn professor emeritus Robert Birge to commercialize the organic approach to producing artificial retinas that Birge had pioneered in his lab. Unlike electronic retinal implants, LambdaVision's artificial retina is composed of a photosensitive protein called bacteriorhodopsin that replaces rods and cones damaged from retinal degenerative disorders.

To create their protein-based artificial retina, Wagner and Birge have spent the past decade perfecting a laborious process that grows ultrathin layers of protein on a substrate while it's suspended in a solution — and then painstakingly stacking hundreds of these protein layers to create an artificial retina.

The challenge with this approach is that each of the hundreds of protein layers needs to be almost perfectly uniform. Even a small imperfection in a single layer can spoil the entire artificial retina, but the effects of gravity — which impacts the evaporation rate, influences surface tension, and can lead to sedimentation of solutions — make ensuring this uniformity across layers an immense challenge.

If these retinas were to be manufactured in space, however, it could enable the mass production of nearly perfect artificial protein-based retinas by tak-

ing gravity out of the equation.

Wagner admits that manufacturing LambdaVision's artificial retinas in space wasn't an option she had considered until a chance meeting with representatives from the International Space Station Laboratory in 2016.

"I went to the meeting really not knowing what to expect," she says. "But they had a funding opportunity for in-space manufacturing and we needed the money. So Dr. Birge and I said let's

do this — let's build a microgravity experiment."

Wagner and the LambdaVision team soon secured NASA funding for that first in-space experiment, which launched to the ISS

on a SpaceX rocket in late 2018. Since then, the company has flown seven experiments to the space station with an eighth scheduled for later this summer.

Although Wagner never set out to build a low-Earth-orbit biotechnology company, the results from the experiments have buoyed her conviction that in-space manufacturing may be the key to getting LambdaVision's artificial retinas into the eyes of the millions of patients who stand to benefit from them. Her team has successfully managed to create many 200-layer retinas in microgravity while demonstrating that it can adhere to the same types of strict manufacturing protocols in space that biotech companies are held to on Earth. And while the space shots have become somewhat routine for the company, Wagner still savors the thrill of bidding a bon voyage to her technologies alongside an audience of astronauts.

"I'm still starstruck by astronauts every time I meet them at NASA," she says. "I don't know if that'll ever wear off because it's just so cool." —DANIEL

OBERHAUS

**"Let's do this — let's build a microgravity experiment."**

Wagner works to cure degenerative retinal diseases at her Farmington, Connecticut, lab that is part of TIP, UConn's Technology Incubation Program.





The Frank Stella art behind Andre Rochester is among the highest-profile pieces in UConn Health's collection.

ON CAMPUS

# “A MINI MUSEUM”

Andre Rochester wasn't quite sure what to expect when someone he knew from the Greater Hartford Arts Council encouraged him to look into UConn Health's open art curator position.

“I'm glad that I did, because I see an opportunity to exercise this curation muscle that I've been building for these last 15 years in a totally different space than what I'm used to,” he says.

He now finds himself in charge of an art collection that has grown to more than 2,500 pieces in the past four decades.

“It's like a mini museum,” he says. “The fact that we have a Frank Stella

piece, and we have a Sol LeWitt piece here, that gives it some significance. These are not just run-of-the-mill artists who were hobbyists in their life-time. These are people who did actually receive a lot of accolades and were in fact world-famous in their time.”

Directing the UConn Health art collection's future will require study of its past, he says. “I want to understand the story behind UConn Health's collection. What are the commonalities between some of these artists who have donated work?”

Rochester, who lives in East Hartford with his wife, Shawnee, and their infant son, Andre Jr., is an artist himself with a passion for connecting people to the arts.

“I'm going to make it my job to heighten the awareness of the collection and get people more interested in looking around as they walk around

the facilities. There's plenty to look at, so I want to make sure that folks are noticing it, and that they're interacting with the space. I'm also looking at how many blank walls we have and what we could possibly do there.”

His vision is for UConn Health's art to enhance the healing and teaching environment not only for the patients who are trying to get better and visitors who may be anxious, but also for the people who are providing care and those who are learning from them.

“People come here to get better,” he says. “If you're in pain, you want to think about everything but that pain, and I think if there's something beautiful in the room, it might just help out with that.” —CHRISTOPHER DEFRANCESCO '95 (CLAS)

Read more at [s.uconn.edu/rochester](https://s.uconn.edu/rochester).

UConn TALKS

On why they did not choose UConn as one of the “Magic Eight” teams most likely to win the NCAA Tournament:

“Double-figure wins over Alabama, Iowa State, and Marquette prove this team can beat anyone in the country, but winning six straight in March is hard to bet on with how it's played lately.”

Sports Illustrated editors, Feb. 15, 2023

On why he unwittingly declined a call from President Joe Biden congratulating him on an NCAA Championship:

“It doesn't come up on your caller ID like Joe Biden ... I just assumed when the President calls, it would be someone interrupting your call saying, “The President is on the line.””

Dan Hurley, head coach of men's basketball, The Athletic, April 24, 2023

On China depleting Africa's donkey population for the collagen in their hides:

“There is no definitive data in human beings showing that people look younger when they receive donkey collagen or any other form of collagen.”

Distinguished Professor of Pharmacy Practice C. Michael White, Newsweek, Feb. 17, 2023

On underestimating long COVID due to the American emphasis on work ethic:

“Disability is often a secret we keep.”

Laura Mauldin, sociology professor, The Atlantic, April 19, 2023

On CEO Elon Musk being found not liable for allegedly fraudulent tweets about a possible Tesla buyout:

“This is only going to embolden him to act as he sees fit.”

Minor Myers, professor of corporate law, Reuters, Feb. 3, 2023

On Michigan State students who had survived prior mass shootings:

“I really do think that the generation growing up since Sandy Hook has had to wrestle with completely different things that we really can't understand unless we're living it.”

Alyssa Hadley Dunn, professor of education, The New York Times, Feb. 14, 2023

UConn ON WIKI

Born in Augusta, Georgia, and raised in Hartford, Connecticut, **Helen Turner Watson '47 (NUR)**, trained as a registered nurse, became a UConn nursing professor, and worked as an American Red Cross teacher and community health educator. She was one of the first African American women to serve in the U.S. Navy. She enlisted in the Navy Reserve Nurse Corps on April 20, 1945, becoming one of only four Black women to serve in the newly desegregated Navy during World War II.

After the war ended, Watson left the Navy in 1946 and pursued higher education, following her UConn nursing degree, which focused on public health nursing, with a master's of science from Yale University in 1952. Her master's studies focused on mental health nursing in relation to the growth and development of children.

After 17 years working at the Connecticut State Department of Education, she returned to the UConn School of Nursing as a professor, where she taught community and child health for 17 years. A lifelong trailblazer, Watson passed away in 1992. —MICHAEL RODRIGUEZ







COLLECTIONS

## HE SELLS

Dave DeLucia '80 (CLAS) '81 MA, '83 6th Year has been collecting seashells since he was 12 years old. It all began with a trip to Boston with his sisters to buy seashells and, while his family and friends liked it, he loved it. Though originally retrieved from the depths of the ocean in countries like Japan and Portugal, the shells now reside in wooden cabinets and glass displays in his house where they are protected from the harsh rays of the sun. With a collection ranging up to 7,000 shells, he started a shell selling eBay business where he holds weekly auctions of his collected shell of choice: latiaxis. The latiaxis (pictured above, top row, third from left) is a coiled, coral shell with up to 200 subcategories, from which DeLucia can identify any at just a glance!

Read more at [s.uconn.edu/shells](https://s.uconn.edu/shells).

ON CAMPUS

## VOICES RISING

Born from the Civil Rights Movement, UConn's gospel choir finds celebration in sound – and movement



Members of Voices of Freedom say it's the message behind the gospel music that inspires them to sing and to move, to raise their hands, to stomp their feet, to be joyful.

included world-renowned preacher Rev. Claudette Copeland and Grammy-nominated Kurt Carr, who, after leaving UConn, became the pianist for gospel giant James Cleveland.

Livingston says she found a home among the group that last semester totaled about 35 members. After attending high school in Hartford and coming to a place where she's among predominately white classmates who lead outwardly secular lives, Voices of Freedom gave her a place to find comfort.

It has been a "blessing," she says, and is the one activity that has spanned her full college experience. There, on Wednesday evenings in Room 102 of the Music Building, she has found a community of people who understand her background and find value in her beliefs.

"I've been into clubs that feel like work to go to every week," she says. "This has never felt like that. It has never felt like something that's taxing for me. We laugh, we practice, we sing, we joke with each other in that room. It just keeps me coming back."

—KIMBERLY PHILLIPS

"What would I like more of?" Lisa Clayton '00 MM asks Voices of Freedom gospel singers during a recent rehearsal.

"Energy," one student shouts back.

"Altos, use your hands," she implores the vocal section as they sing a refrain from "Island Medley: Turned It Around/Hallelujah."

"All music has special elements, but what makes gospel music different is that it's a message," says Clayton, who's headed the group for 28 years. "I expect you to feel joy and I expect you to share that joy. How do you share that joy? You're going to use it. It's going to be throughout your body and you're going to use your hands, you're going to clap, you're going to stomp your feet, and you're going to share your joy. That's what makes gospel music so different."

Group president Danielle Livingston '23 (BUS) says the message

of gospel music is most inspiring to her because it talks about something larger than life and speaks to everyone, unlike a love song dedicated to a single person.

"When we're singing gospel music, we're singing from here to God," she says. "For me, sometimes the songs take me to a place of adoration and help me to understand more of who God is. It pushes me to sing and to move, to lift my hands, to be happy as I sing, all of that comes from just that message, understanding that message."

The club began in 1969 when founder Lorraine Rose Williams '73 (ED, SFA) and other UConn students were on a bus ride home from a civil rights protest and the idea for a University-sponsored gospel choir was formed.

Originally called the Black Voices of Freedom Gospel Choir, the group's original or early-era members

Read more at [s.uconn.edu/voices](https://s.uconn.edu/voices).





OUR STUDENTS

Aspiring economist Nair has been named a United Nations Millennium Fellow, a Werth Innovator, and a UConn Co-op Legacy Fellow for her research and advocacy.

major. After shadowing the group, she realized she wanted to make a career of helping people achieve economic empowerment. She started right here on campus.

In researching her Honors thesis, Nair learned Connecticut was one of 11 states to receive a failing grade on a recent Champlain College Center for Financial Literacy report card. She conducted her own survey of 400 UConn students and found that fewer than 40% of respondents could answer a set of basic financial questions.

Nair used the data to argue before the state legislature for better lessons in high school — a bill she helped craft requiring courses in financial management and financial literacy had passed the state senate and awaited a house vote at press time. She teamed up with **Bridget Abril '24 (CLAS)** to create Financial Literacy Week. Funded by a UConn Co-op Legacy Fellowship Program Change Grant, the week of events teaches students crucial concepts like budgeting, credit, financial planning, and investing.

“What I’m hoping to do is start a research and advocacy organization, after I graduate, that does experiments at a local level, trying to change small things about neighborhoods. If you reduce the distance to a school by a certain number of miles, do those kids end up earning more in the long term? Does access to books at home or at a local level change educational levels or developmental indicators?” Nair says.

Since economic mobility rates are so diverse from city to city, “we should be using that data to suggest policy solutions that are tailored towards those communities.” — JULIE (STAGIS) BARTUCCA '10 (BUS, CLAS), '19 MBA

Hear Nair on the UConn 360 podcast at [s.uconn.edu/nidhi](https://s.uconn.edu/nidhi).

## MUTUAL FUNDS

**Nidhi Nair wants to share financial literacy with the world – starting with her UConn classmates**

Establishing on-campus programs, conducting research alongside professors, and earning a laundry list of prestigious fellowships and awards doesn't leave a ton of time for amusement, but late on Saturday nights, **Nidhi Nair '23 (CLAS)** lets loose behind the microphone at WHUS.

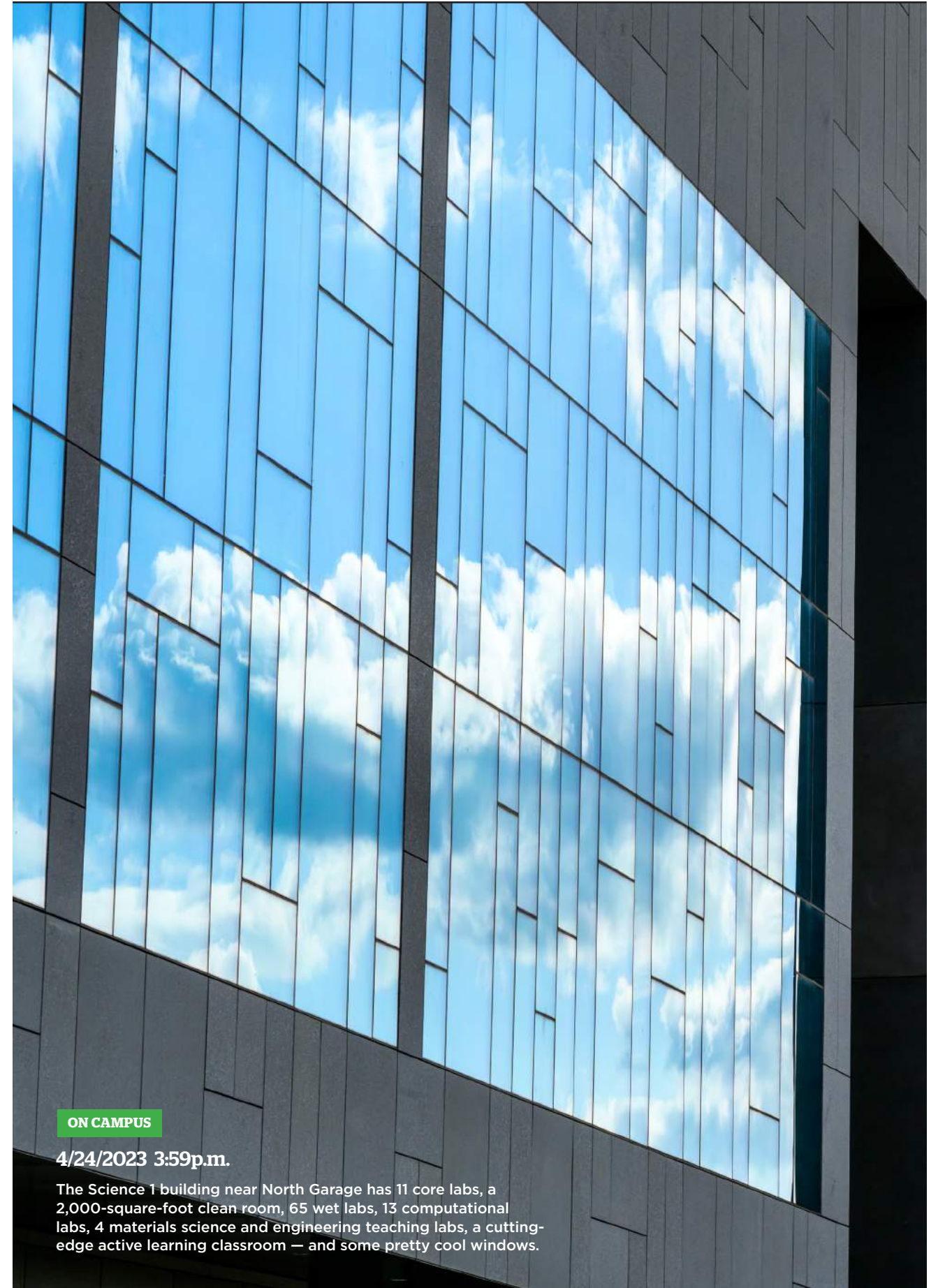
“Oh, I just rant,” a cheerful Nair says, laughing into another microphone, this one for a “UConn 360” podcast recording. “It’s so fun.”

Having a radio show is one of many opportunities the recent grad grasped during her four years attending UConn, which she calls “the best decision I ever made.” This fall, the University’s first Schwarzman Scholar heads to Tsinghua

University in Beijing to pursue her master’s degree, with a goal of working to increase economic mobility in low-income countries and communities.

Growing up in India, Nair was fascinated by her grandmother’s savings group, where members would pool their savings to use as collateral for bank loans since laws prevented women from having their own assets and, thus, accessing credit.

“They usually started their own businesses, and they were able to rise above their income levels and put their kids through school, and I thought that was really impressive,” says Nair, an economics and mathematics-statistics



ON CAMPUS

4/24/2023 3:59p.m.

The Science 1 building near North Garage has 11 core labs, a 2,000-square-foot clean room, 65 wet labs, 13 computational labs, 4 materials science and engineering teaching labs, a cutting-edge active learning classroom — and some pretty cool windows.





COVETED CLASS

## SPSS 3680 ADVANCED CANNABIS HORTICULTURE: CANNABIS PRODUCTION

Matt DeBacco wants each of his students to come out of this class with the chemistry, horticulture, and business know-how for a successful grow-out

### The Instructor:

A squash sprouting in a compost pile started Matt DeBacco '07 (CAHNR), '11 MS, '14 MS on a life of horticulture. Inspired by that compost volunteer, and never one to do anything by halves, he started growing giant pumpkins in high school. Over the subsequent 23 years he's analyzed the plants' genetics, presented at giant pumpkin research conferences, and broken the state record for biggest cucurbit (a type of gourd) twice. His personal-best

*DeBacco and students work in the laboratory greenhouse perfecting hands-on skills, like cloning.*

pumpkin weighed in at 1,885.5 pounds.

"Anything I do, I tend to take all the way," he says.

DeBacco double majored in pathobiology and horticulture and minored in molecular and cellular biology. He pursued a master's in agronomy with a focus on suppressing powdery mildew on pumpkins, and after a short-notice stint at teaching (someone retired unexpectedly and he was pulled in from the research lab) he decided to take classes in education. He earned another master's from UConn — this time in education — and then a Ph.D. from Ashford University (now The University of Arizona Global

Campus), while teaching science at Rocky Hill High School, something he still does.

He also kept up his pathobiology research at UConn, developing expertise in powdery mildew, a family of fungi that covers plant leaves with a white, powdery film when the weather turns cool and wet. Cannabis plants grown in greenhouses are also susceptible to powdery mildew. One day a colleague called him in for a consult, and DeBacco made the leap from cucurbits to cannabis.

"The basics are the same, whether pumpkin or cannabis. Total weight wins."

### The Class:

This class is part hands-on horticulture, part business analysis, and part plant chemistry tutorial. Cannabis went from being an illegal plant that could get your real estate confiscated by the government to a lucrative business opportunity in a few short years. DeBacco wants every student to come away understanding what it takes to have a profitable grow-out, whether field-grown hemp or hothouse marijuana.

Most students come from CAHNR, but a significant minority are in other majors, most commonly business or pharmacy. Because they have different goals for taking the class, it has to cover a lot of ground. DeBacco does it in five units. He begins by examining the cannabis plant itself: its anatomy, species, naming system, the difference between hemp and marijuana, the different pharmaceutical chemicals cannabis can contain, and the legality of it on the federal and state levels. Cannabis genetics are discussed, as well as the difference between genotype (genes possessed by a plant), chemotype (what chemicals it makes), and phenotype (how it looks and grows). The second unit covers breeding cannabis and growing and propagating plants from seed or clone, and the third unit focuses on plant hormones, indoor versus outdoor growing, and producing the all-important flowers. Unit four focuses on drying and processing the raw plant material, and unit five on potential products and how to extract them, as well as various jobs in the industry, from growers and lab workers to salespeople and legal advisors.

### Teaching Style:

DeBacco says he teaches the class choose-your-own-adventure style. First, students choose a hypothetical scenario to pursue. Since they cannot legally grow cannabis themselves, this can be anything from a single plant in a home greenhouse to 40-plus acres outdoors. The class is then divided into groups of students, who choose

### GOOD TASTE

## CHEF ZADDY



Seems Chris Spinosa '20 (SFA) doesn't pay as much attention to his @ChefZaddy Instagram account as his thousands of followers do. It was two months after "Next Level Chef" producers slid into his DMs that Spinosa noticed the missive and responded. Six months later he was filming in Las Vegas with Gordon Ramsay, whom he calls "the Michael Jordan of cooking," and ended up in the finals, one of three chefs standing in a field whittled from 18.

His risk-taking and fiery personality got him through four weeks of 12-to-14-hour shoots, where he says the stress was so noticeable that by the end of the competition, the makeup artist was "caking on foundation." On that final day, he made his peace with the show, considering himself a winner just for having gotten to the end.

A music major at UConn, he spent summers and breaks doing restaurant prep work and realized "cooking scratched my brain in a way music didn't." After earning a certificate at the Culinary Institute of America, Spinosa spent seven years cooking in high-stress restaurants in New York City, before the COVID pandemic spurred a move to Florida, where he now works as a personal chef. Regardless of how many exceptional coconut tarts he makes or Major League Baseball clients he has, Spinosa attests, "I'm humble because I know that I'm always gonna be a student no matter what."

—VALERIA DIAZ '25 (CLAS)

Chef Zaddy shares recipes at [s.uconn.edu/zaddy](https://s.uconn.edu/zaddy).

from two or more modules at each decision point. Will you grow from seed or clones? If from seed, will you direct seed in the field, or start transplants? If from clones, which variety and how will you propagate it? Will you grow indoors or out? The former requires a great deal of climate control and lighting; the latter requires soil analysis and fertilization. In both cases, the grower must minimize costs and maximize output.

The students track their choices, describe what they're going to do, and then justify those choices in a grower's log, which is part of their final grade.

"The grower's log can be a great artifact to show potential employers,"

since you aren't able to have grown cannabis before, DeBacco says.

### Why We Want to Take It Ourselves:

DeBacco's leap from squash to cannabis shows that horticultural skills are transferable. Learning to clone a plant, calculate the business case for a greenhouse, and understand how light affects plant hormones is widely applicable, even if you have zero interest in growing cannabis. His teaching style means you can tailor the class to your specific interests.

"It's the info age, you can look anything up. But can you apply that to a situation?" DeBacco asks. —KIM KRIEGER





# Basketball Capital of The World

05

Connecticut is not a big state. Our population is less than half that of New York City, and our square mileage could comfortably fit inside some national parks — with plenty of room left over for Rhode Island.

When Connecticut residents travel overseas, we're prone to offering a half-apologetic, "Between Boston and New York" when someone asks where we're from, because why would anyone in Dublin or Tokyo or Lagos or Santiago or Jerusalem know where Connecticut is?

We're not especially famous for the things that draw huge crowds of tourists: no colossal statues, no splendid ruins, not even a really big canyon. It's honestly a little weird how much we go on about pizza. Decades ago, we were known for the things we made. Now the only traces of those things are the nicknames for towns where mills and factories once hummed with activity: Silk City, Thread City, Brass City, the Hat City of the World.

There is one thing we do have, though: college basketball.

Over the last 35 years, we've been

better at that, on both the women's and men's sides, than any other college or university in the country.

You know how many schools have men's and women's teams that have won championships in the same season? Just one. And we've done it twice (in 2004 and 2014).

In the winter of 1995, for the first time the UConn men's and women's teams were both ranked first in the national Associated Press poll. The *Daily Campus* ran a headline: THE BASKETBALL CAPITAL OF THE WORLD. Of course it was half-joking, the kind of self-deprecation Connecticut people deploy whenever it starts to feel like we should perhaps be proud of something. But it was four years after that headline that the men won their first national championship. The year after that, the women won their second. Over the next 20 years, they'd combine for another 12. This April made the total 16.

That matters to people here, because UConn's success belongs to everyone in the state. We started as a farm school in an orphanage with fewer than a dozen students. The people of Connecticut

**The 1999 men's national champions bonded during a summer 1998 trip overseas, where they played six games against professional teams. Which two countries did the Huskies visit on that trip?**

- A: The United Kingdom and Israel
- B: Italy and Israel
- C: Spain and the United Kingdom
- D: Germany and France

**Beat the Buzzer with Tom's Trivia!**

See [s.uconn.edu/summer23trivia](https://s.uconn.edu/summer23trivia) or pg. 46 for answers.

**Photography by Austin Bigoney**

*Photo IDs pg. 22*



built this place, over 140 years, into a great public university.

On the Sunday after the win over Miami in the Final Four this year, the priest at my parish in Manchester stood out front after Mass and said, "Have a blessed week and go Huskies!" to everyone. A waitress scrawled "GO HUSKIES" on my check at lunch, a silent fist-bump for the UConn hoodie I was wearing. People hung UConn flags on their houses and put new bumper stickers on their cars. Expat Nutmeggers in Georgia, California, Texas, and Japan messaged me with nervous excitement ahead of the championship game. When the team clinched the win that Monday night, a big party next door erupted in cheers. One of my neighbors drove up and down the street, honking his horn like a lunatic.

Connecticut people know a basketball game isn't going to fix any of our problems. It won't bring back the mills, it won't make the cost of living cheaper, it won't give us a really big canyon for tourists to visit.

Even so, that week in April, strangers had something new to talk to each other about. People wore UConn gear to their jobs. No one was being self-deprecating. No one was apologizing for being from Connecticut.

And that weekend, on a perfect spring Saturday, tens of thousands of us gathered for a parade to cheer on the national champions. It didn't take place "between Boston and New York." It happened in the capital city of the state of Connecticut. You know: The Basketball Capital of the World.

*Tom Breen '00 (CLAS)'s connection to UConn began when he was an infant, and his mother would bring him to campus while she took classes for a master's degree, leaving him at the office of his father, who taught journalism from 1968 to 2004. As a student, he took classes with members of the men's 1999 national championship team and the women's 2000 national championship team; as an expat Nutmegger, he was almost thrown out of a bar on the night of the 2011 men's championship for arguing with a group of Butler fans. He's watched four women's and two men's teams win national titles since coming to work at University Communications.*

04

**After the UConn men and women won national titles in 2004, a Hartford restaurant created new lunch specials in honor of some of the players. Which of these was one of the specials?**

- A: The Diana Taurasi Parmesan Grinder
- B: The Okafor BBQ Pulled Pork
- C: The Maria Conlon Grilled Chicken Wrap
- D: Josh Boone's Really Big Sandwich

TOM'S TRIVIA



## Sights Set

The morning of the championship game, Dan Hurley set his focus on the last cardboard trophy standing. He'd had staff cart trophy facsimiles to and from arenas and practices all season long. Some transmuted to the real thing, others evaporated. Paper motivators.

"When you're looking at that trophy, it's like, 'We could have the real one, not a picture of it,'" freshman center Donovan Clingan told reporter David Borges at the start of

the Final Four.

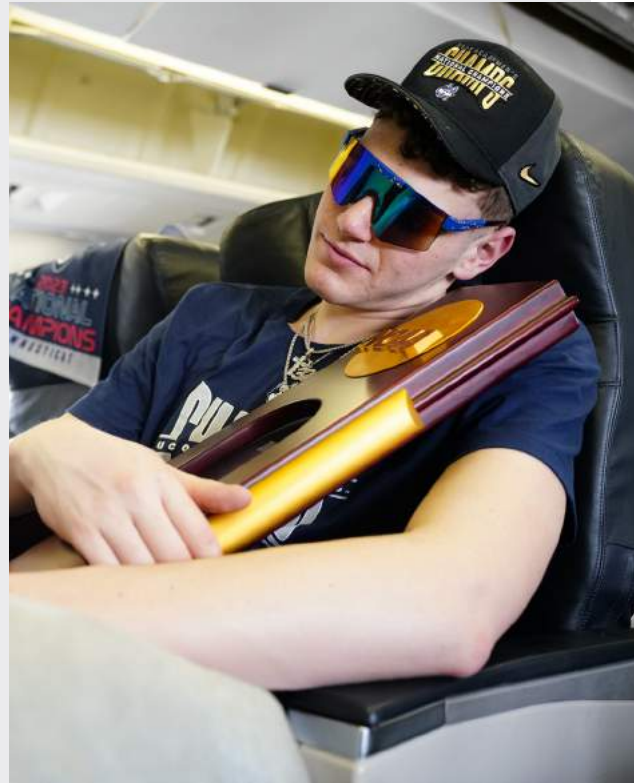
Hurley also inspired his players by removing the previous four national championship trophies from team facilities, saying, "...We don't want any trophies in here until we've got our own."

After the Huskies beat San Diego State 76-59 and Hurley, his staff, and team passed around the real thing, Hurley told the crowd, "We've been striving for five and now we've got one of our own."



*We showed off.  
You showed up.*





02

In 2014, the UConn men's team won games in the Sweet 16 and Elite Eight in Madison Square Garden, a home away from home for the Huskies. Who was their opponent in their very first NCAA tournament game at the world-famous venue?

- A: Providence College
- B: Yale
- C: St. John's University
- D: Kentucky

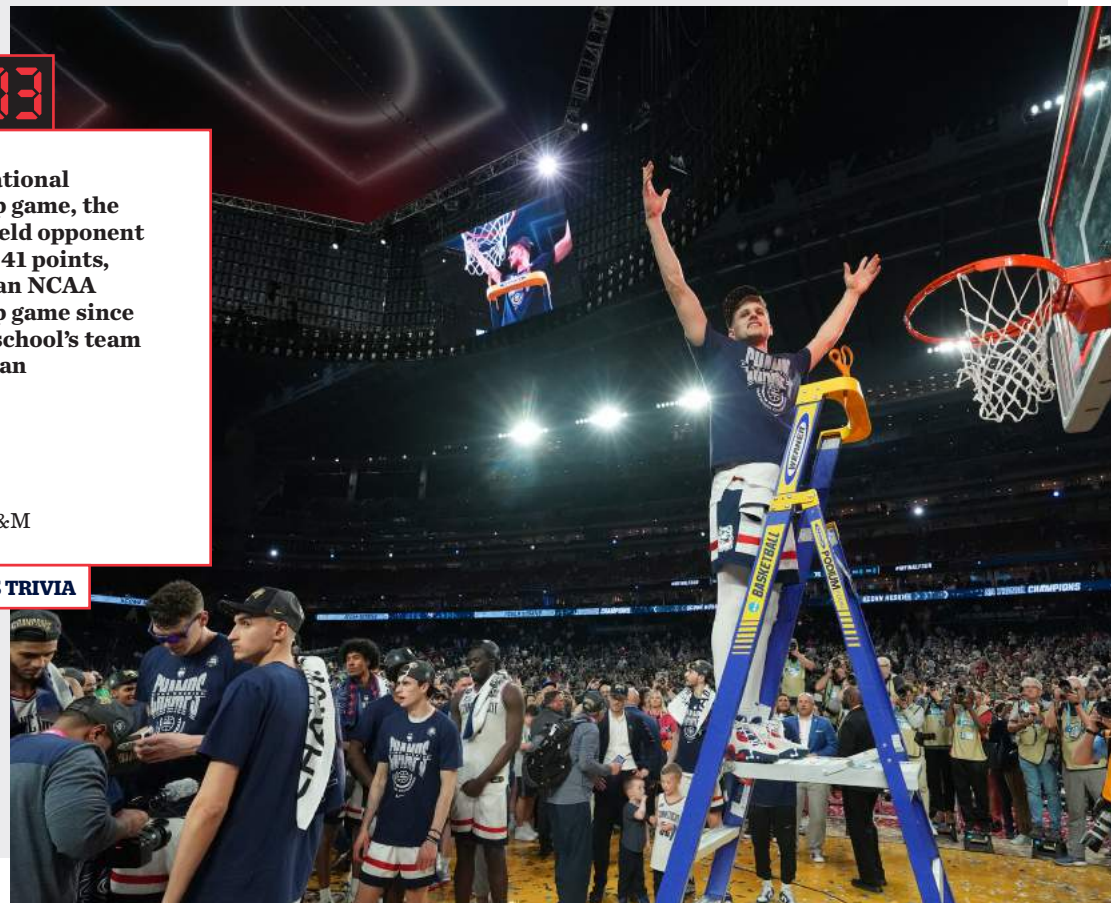
TOM'S TRIVIA

03

In the 2011 national championship game, the UConn men held opponent Butler to just 41 points, the lowest in an NCAA championship game since 1949. Which school's team scored less than the Bulldogs?

- A: Yale
- B: Oregon State
- C: Wyoming
- D: Oklahoma A&M

TOM'S TRIVIA



**Hurley:**

*“ We strived for five, and we got you that fifth. I promise you — just let us get a little bit of sleep — and we’ll start working on number six! ”*



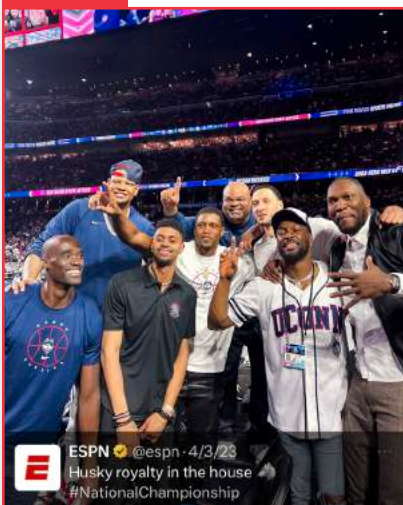
01

When the 2023 men's team cut down the nets in Houston, it was the fifth championship for the program — and the fourth title game won in the state of Texas, with prior wins in Arlington (2014), Houston (2011), and San Antonio (2004). What was the only non-Texas venue to host a UConn championship?

- A: RCA Dome
- B: Georgia Dome
- C: Tropicana Field
- D: Lucas Oil Stadium

TOMS TRIVIA

### Top Dogs



### Thanks, Obama



# BUZZ

### Cousin Connection



### Turning Point



### #UConnTwitter



### Brotherly Love



### Celebrity Sighting



### The 6th Borough



### Photo IDs

Pg. 16 Andre Jackson Jr.  
Pg. 19 Adama Sanogo, Jackson Jr.  
Pg. 20-21 From top left: Alex Karaban and AD David Benedict, Donovan Clingan, Coach Dan Hurley and Jordan Hawkins, Joey Calcaterra



# Five *Shining* Moments

**CBS Sports' Jim Nantz**, a former Connecticut resident of more than 20 years, reflects on the 2023 champions, the legacy of the UConn program, and calling his last Final Four.

If there's one thing that the 2023 national championship pushed through, it is the idea that UConn basketball needs to be considered as a blue blood and elite — and that is maybe not even putting enough superlatives behind it.

For whatever reason that I can't explain, I don't think UConn got its due for what it had accomplished since its first title in 1999. That's why we tried to emphasize in our broadcast this year what the context of five national championships represents. It puts UConn on an even level with Duke. People don't say Duke and UConn in the same sentence often enough, but they really need to now.

In this age of college basketball where the sport is more transient than ever, it's hard to form a nucleus. Dan Hurley was able to get this team to come together and jell

to a level that would have been competitive in many past years, maybe even decades.

It was an extremely well-coached basketball team with interchangeable parts. The guys that came off the bench were impressive and to see the perimeter passing game of the first five — everything was snappy, it was a clinic.

**“ People don't say Duke and UConn often enough in the same sentence, but they need to now. ”**

You don't have teams today in college basketball that you can compare to the past, but this one you could.

Jim Calhoun built UConn into a national powerhouse and to have three-straight coaching administrations win national championships, including three by the father of the dynasty, is a

pretty amazing achievement.

I got to see it start from scratch, rise to the top in 1999, and see it repeat, and repeat, and repeat, and repeat one more time. I didn't really put it into context until it was all over, but I called the NCAA tournament for 32 years, and UConn won five of those championships. As a resident of Connecticut for 25 years, it was fitting that I had a front row seat for all that success.

There is nothing I like more than a good story to tell — and documenting about good people.

That is what UConn has given me. They have given me the perfect canvas to try to put into words what excellence represents in college basketball. It was an honor to see all of it unfold and it was a privilege to be able to see UConn win their latest championship in the last basketball game I will ever call. —AS TOLD TO MIKE ENRIGHT '88 (CLAS)



# FIRST-YEAR

Three UConn School of Medicine graduates take us through year one of residency – with its fast-and-furious rotations meant to teach the finer points of chosen specialties and the broad realities of what it means to be a practicing doctor.

BY JACLYN M. SEVERANCE / PHOTOS BY PETER MORENUS

**It's both an ending and a beginning: Match Day – when soon-to-be doctors find out where they will go for their residencies.**

Moments before noon on March 18, 2022, three fourth-year medical students count down the seconds along with their classmates. They've known for four days that they've been paired with a program, but they are about to learn which. Is it their top choice? Where will they be living in just four months?

**Dr. Francine Zeng '18 (CLAS), '22 MD** watches the clock from her home in South Windsor, Connecticut,

her sights set on an orthopedic surgery specialty at UConn Health. A dentist's daughter, Zeng always knew she wanted to enter a medical field – though, no offense to her father, she just doesn't love mouths. She discovered orthopedic surgery early in the program, when she had her first clinical and operative experience with an orthopedic surgeon who became a mentor. It was there that she fell in love with the OR.

"I love how operating works," Zeng says. "It is a very intimate, very intense procedure. But what I love about it is that you can actually just go in there and fix the problem that you've identified, and hopefully that's ultimately going to be what makes the patient feel better and helps them reach their goal of achieving their function back."

Fifty-some miles south, at home in West Haven, **Dr. Nurudeen "Lucky" Osumah '21 MBA, '22 MD** waits with his family by his side, hoping that he will be able to pursue emergency medicine at UConn Health. Osumah's path to the white coat has been untraditional – he took a year off from medical school to earn an MBA from UConn after attending a medical conference during his third year.

"They were talking about quality assurance metrics or something, and all I remember is how the back-and-forth between the doctors and the admins was going," he recalls. "They both wanted the best for the patient, but both had different ways to go about it, and it created conflict."

Osumah decided he wanted to learn



Hear from the residents at [s.uconn.edu/residents](https://s.uconn.edu/residents).

What is Match Day? During the fourth year of med school, students choose a specialty, apply to programs, interview, and rank their top choices. The programs rank their favorites, too, and an algorithm decides who goes where.





THE ER DOC: DR. NURUDEEN "LUCKY" OSUMAH

“

**I don't want to get overly confident. Because at that point, you start missing the finer details, and you start regressing a little bit.**

—Dr. Osumah

how to bridge that gap between health care administrators and health care providers so that, somewhere down the line, he can sit at that crossroads and play the role of mediator, understanding where both sides are coming from and reaching a shared goal: better health care for the patients they all serve.

**Dr. Jessica Mary '18 (CLAS), '22 MD**, wants to stay at UConn, too, to practice internal medicine. She's anxiously waiting to learn whether she'll be signing the lease papers for a new apartment in New Britain later that afternoon — she's been pushing off the landlord until she knows for sure where she's matched.

The daughter of chemists, Mary grew up steeped in science but always knew she was more drawn to the human side than the lab bench.

"I know that I'm a much more cerebral person, and I wanted to do something that was more thought-based than procedure-based," she says. "What I really love about internal medicine is that you do get to think about the body as a whole. You get to think about how everything inter-plays."

As an undergraduate Mary en-

rolled in UConn's Special Program in Medicine, a four-year pre-med track, but it was a trip to the Dominican Republic with a pre-medical society — shadowing physicians in hospitals and contributing to medical care in a rural community on the island country — that cemented her desire to become a doctor.

"I had looked at different parts of health care, thought maybe nursing for a while," she says, "but after that, I was totally sold on it. Yes, this is definitely what I want to do, and I knew I wanted to do it at UConn."

At 12 p.m., each of the three students checks for the email that will reveal their fate.

#### **First Date**

In one of her early rotations as a UConn Health resident, Zeng finds herself running the surgery floor of a partner hospital alone when a full trauma comes in. Someone has been stabbed in the neck, and the more senior surgeons on that shift are already busy in operating rooms.

"I was definitely scared, because you see that and you just don't know

how unstable or stable the patient can be," she says later. "Knowing that a lot of people were going to be watching me, or listening to what I had to say and what my suggestion was, that was intimidating. But I feel like, in the process of it, it just kind of clicked. Like, 'Oh, I was trained for this.'"

Every day of residency feels like going on a first date, Zeng says — something she had heard from another doctor while she was a med student that rings true now. "You don't really know what to expect, you just know you want to impress," she explains. "But you have to be adaptable, because you never know what the other person is going to be like — what the day is going to hold, what the attending or co-residents are going to be like, what the patients are going to be like that day."

While on a general surgery rotation, she performs procedures with a surgeon who specializes in hands. On a plastic surgery rotation, she fine-tunes her suturing and hones her more technical skills. During a pediatric surgery rotation, she assists with an exploratory laparotomy on a 12-year-old boy with a malrotated bowel.

"I was just holding his intestines in my hand," Zeng says. "It was honestly terrifying."

And while the word she uses most to describe her first year is "overwhelming," residency is rewarding and full of experiences that affirm her decision to pursue orthopedic surgery, like when, on an ortho rotation in December, Zeng gets to assist on a total hip replacement for a young patient with sickle cell disease. "His sickle cell is pretty bad, he's had a ton of pain throughout his entire life, and he's,

94% of medical students match nationally; 99% of UConn med students matched in 2022 and 2023



like, 30, getting total hip.”

She spends the week before surgery studying extensively to get ready for the procedure, poring over academic articles about sickle cell, the challenges these patients face during surgeries, and the steps surgeons can take to mitigate those. “It was really cool preparing for a surgery like that and actually seeing it come to fruition in the OR, recognizing why it is happening, and then being able to follow the patient post-operatively. It made me feel more like a physician,” she says.

“The surgery took a while, because we just wanted it to be done right, but the radiographs after look really, really good. I’m excited to check on him tomorrow morning and see how he’s doing.”

#### Boot Camp

Less than two months into his UConn Health residency, Osumah is signing his first death certificate. He’s on an overnight rotation in the intensive care unit when, despite all efforts to help a

man with chronic lung disease who is struggling to breathe, the patient dies.

“On my week of nights, it was the first time that my senior said, ‘You have to go pronounce your patient dead,’” says Osumah. “It’s really weird, because instead of just watching someone do it, I have to do the exam. I have to say to the nurse, ‘at so-and-so time, this patient, unfortunately, expired.’”

It wasn’t the first time he’d seen a patient die — he’d witnessed death in medical school, holding patients’ hands while they passed, and it’s something he’s come to accept. Part of the grim reality of medicine is that not all people will make it.

But his desire to uplift other people keeps him going, even when some nights are tough.

During his rotations through various hospitals in the state, Osumah, with his bright smile and soft, measured voice, is often the first doctor a patient encounters when they go to the ER. He’s learned how to ask more thoughtful questions, to really get to the root of their emergency or illness — figuring out why a patient has a fever, why

they’re having chest pains, the extent of a trauma they’ve experienced — before either admitting them for further care or sending them home with medication and instructions.

“The first six months is a boot camp of sorts,” he says. “You wake up every day, and you go in. You probably make one or two good impressions, but the rest of the time you’re just learning. I think it’s a huge improvement from then until now. But I think it’s a ways for me to go before I feel remotely confident in myself.”

He’s comfortable in the ER, though, where doctors don’t focus on one type of pathology, or one part of the body — they have to know a little bit about everything, something that he enjoys. To him, being a good doctor is about not only trying to do right by your patients, but also being their advocate.

“At the end of the day, patients remember their doctors not because they’re smart, because everyone who got through medical school is smart,” Osumah says. “They remember the compassion and empathy that was shown to them at their darkest times.”

#### A Good Doctor

For Mary, the first few months of her UConn Health residency are a bombardment of learning — figuring out how the hospital runs, how to put in orders, how to do shift summaries — but while the shifts are busy, her schedule is fairly regular. On an outpatient rotation, she works days, is home in the evenings, and has weekends to spend time with her partner or her friends.

By fall, though, she has moved to the ICU, and life is getting more complicated. The tiredness builds. The patients are sicker, the shifts feel longer, and

“  
I would very happily  
recommend, before I had  
that title, to anyone with a  
headache, just take some  
Tylenol. But now, it’s like,  
doctor’s orders, right?”

—Dr. Mary







“  
**Every day I feel every spectrum of emotion. Feeling happy, grateful, and then it can immediately go to feeling embarrassed or a little dejected.**

—Dr. Zeng

the cases are more intense.

The patients in the ICU come in waves. On one shift, it's a series of patients who are experiencing strokes. A certain medication to break up blood clots can cause excessive bleeding, and three of them end up needing critical care. On another shift, it's seizure cases. On yet another, it's a wave of patients with gastrointestinal bleeding — one man has a procedure to try to stop his bleeding, but it fails.

“He had another procedure that they thought was going to stop the bleeding, and it didn't work,” Mary says. A third procedure finally does the trick. “But you're on that roller coaster. There's definitely more emotions — like, I have dreams about my patients now every night. They're on my mind a lot more.”

In December comes a grueling full month of night shifts, something Mary won't experience again until her third year of residency. It tests her endurance, but also shows her just how capable she has become.

“Overnight, sometimes I'm the first one who's really there — I'm at least starting the process of dealing with the emergency on my own,” she says. “It's nice to see that I can do it more than I thought, and that gives me hope that going forward I'll only get more confident with dealing with those kinds of situations.”

Being a good doctor, to Mary, means thinking about patients as whole people living complex lives. “As a hospitalist, you're the primary doctor while the patient is in the hospital. You're

the one talking to the family. You're the one organizing the more social factors affecting the patient,” she says.

“I think you forget that, as much as this is just another day for you and just another case of this disease or condition, this may be the first time they've been in the hospital. Or maybe this is the many-th time they've been in the hospital, and that also impacts how they're looking at it and how they're feeling about it. Who else is in the room? Who's coming to visit? Who are you calling? What are those relationships like?”

“I think that's what I love about medicine, and I think that's also what makes you a good doctor — not forgetting about those things. They're important.” ☺





# KICKS



Why does everyone — count Lil Nas X, Matt Damon, Alicia Keys, and Penny Hardaway — want to shop for sneakers with Joe La Puma?

**T**he sneakers are eye-catching, pitch black accented by crimson on the stripes, soles, and iconic Adidas trefoil logo. Overhead lights catch a subtle paisley design in the black leather, a nod to the ubiquitous bandana sported by the platinum recording artist and YouTube who designed the footwear with Adidas.





**Joe La Puma '05 (CLAS)** catches the understated but symbolic paisley touch. He and another sneakers enthusiast consider the design's attention to detail, right down to the celeb's tagline — "Underestimated" — on the ankle straps. Pretty sick, they agree.

Roll the clock back 20 years, and La Puma could have been having a similar discussion with friends in his UConn dorm room, the South Campus dining hall, or Gampel Pavilion's student section. Known to friends for his ability to cop some of the latest sneakers on the market, La Puma's newest pair surely would have generated intense interest among his fellow Huskies.

But this isn't 2003-era Storrs, not by a long shot, and the black and red Adidas aren't on La Puma's feet.

It's a temperate February evening in the heart of SoHo, and La Puma is in a high-end sportswear store Stadium Goods, with its walls of pristine sneaker

ers of all makes and colors on display around him.

This pair — the hard-to-find KSI X Adidas Forum Hi model — was specially flown to New York City, and is now displayed in a glass case in the store's center aisle.

And it's KSI himself who's walking La Puma through his design choices with Adidas while a production crew captures their conversation from cameras at various angles. After seven efficiently orchestrated takes, they're ready to take down the lights and wrap up the latest taping of "Sneaker Shopping," the Webby-Award winning YouTube show that La Puma originated and hosts for Complex Networks.

It's garnered more than 1 billion views over 250-plus episodes since it launched in 2014, during which time he's welcomed Grammy and Oscar winners, Hall of Fame athletes, Vice President Kamala Harris, and sneaker connoisseurs as diverse as Bill Nye the Science Guy and billionaire entrepreneur Mark Cuban.

Using his UConn education and his Complex connections, La Puma

has carved out his own career path to become the network's senior vice president for content strategy and one of the nation's — if not the world's — foremost experts on sneaker culture.

Pretty sick, indeed.

A pop culture and sneaker enthusiast since youth, La Puma has made "Sneaker Shopping" the must-watch show for established and aspiring sneakerheads. The high-profile personalities who join him come from all walks of life, but share his passion for the industry's history, creativity, and cultural significance.

La Puma literally could not have known at UConn how his passions would lead to his profession — YouTube wasn't even launched until a few months before his 2005 graduation. And sneaker culture, while having a rich history dating back decades, was still viewed then as a niche interest driven by — and catering to — pro basketball players, skateboarders, and others with big closets and disposable incomes to match.

Those early days are highlighted in this spring's movie "Air," which chronicles the origins of the original Air Jordan 1, considered the most influential sneaker since Converse's Chuck

#### Walking on air:

La Puma built "Sneaker Shopping" from the germ of an idea to one of Complex Network's most popular shows. So far this season he's shopped for kicks — and talked trends, career paths, childhoods, and more — with guests that included KSI (above), Matt Damon, Ben Affleck, and Chris Tucker (above left), Penny Hardaway, and Stephen A. Smith.

Shoes can be transformational. There's art in their design and details. They can help you fit in or stand out, your choice. They can change your mood or, if you're Cinderella or Carrie Bradshaw, perhaps your life.





**EGOT** (Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and Tony-award winner) Whoopi Goldberg told LaPuma she decides which mismatched sneakers to wear by considering “what will be most interesting for me if I look down.” Soccer icon David Beckham talked about customizing his kicks since childhood.



Actor Jeff Goldblum was a Keds-wearing kid but ended his “Sneaker Shopping” episode with a bag of Yeezys for his own kids. Actor/musician Idris Elba told La Puma he spent his hard-earned youngster money on clothes, shoes, and records.



Taylor All Stars became the first celebrity-endorsed sports shoe in the 1920s. Chicago Bulls rookie phenom Michael Jordan’s eponymous Air Jordans were released to the public in spring 1985, launching an industry that combined the star power of athletes with the design expertise of top shoe brands.

What they saw, and what La Puma and other sneaker enthusiasts instinctively knew, is basic: Shoes can be transformational. There’s art in their design and details. They can help you fit in or stand out, your choice. They can change your mood or, if you’re Cinderella or Carrie Bradshaw, perhaps your life.

Not that La Puma expected shoes to change his life when he came to UConn, planning to follow the business track favored by many of his friends back home in Bay Shore on Long Island. But business school wasn’t a fit: “I was coming home at the end of the day stressed out, head in my hands, knowing I was doing something that I wasn’t really interested in,” he recalls.

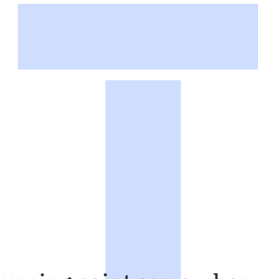
A professor suggested he try communications, specifically journalism, which could provide an avenue for him to explore his interests in a more creative and flexible way.

So he mastered the “who, what, when, where, and why” of stories by joining the *Daily Campus*, eventually convincing his editors to let him write album reviews and other pop culture stories. It was an ideal fit. Just like now, he had a knack for spotting culture and music trends, such as being among the early fans eagerly awaiting the 2003 debut studio album of a buzzed-about new rapper on the mixtape scene who called himself 50 Cent.

On UConn college breaks and during summers, La Puma returned to Bay Shore, selling sneakers at the Finish Line store where he’d started as a teen. After graduating in 2005, he went back to the store full time, working his way up to becoming a manager.

“I kept writing, though. I was writing for whoever I could, usually for free,” La Puma recalls. “A lot of them were

websites that don’t even exist anymore, but being back in New York, finding journalism jobs was tough for everyone at the time.”



The turning point came when an internship was posted at *Complex Magazine*, which he’d bought religiously from the UConn Co-Op as a student, taping pages from one copy to his dorm room wall and keeping a second fresh copy tucked away.

“The HR person had a stack of resumes when I went in, and I thought, ‘I’m never going to get it. Not a chance.’ But then I got the call and now I’ve been there 17 years.”

For the first two years, La Puma was working full-time at Finish Line while interning at Complex, putting in the kinds of long days that become an alternating blur of adrenaline and exhaustion. Coming into Complex full-time as an online editor in 2006, when magazines were just starting to grow their online audiences, La Puma also wrote for the print version, where his ability to peer around life’s corners in terms of trends served him well.

It’s a skill he carries today into “Sneaker Shopping,” which started with the need for more online video content and the chance in early 2011 to meet up with rapper Jim Jones at Flight Club, New York City’s biggest sneaker shop. A few years after that first foray, the show became one of Complex’s regular features, and is now among its most popular.

La Puma has traveled the world for the show. Working with producers who are also adept at spotting talent on the rise, several guests have gone on to international acclaim shortly after their appearances, such as Lil Nas X, who came to his 2019 shoe-shopping taping directly from shooting the video for his

soon-to-be breakout hit, “Old Town Road.” Many of his other guests — including 50 Cent, Whoopi Goldberg, New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft, and UConn hoops legend Kemba Walker — were already comfortably established.

In building “Sneaker Shopping,” La Puma tapped into a simple truth: Wearing and shopping for shoes is nearly universal, but doing it with a seemingly unlimited budget isn’t. La Puma and his celebrity guests let viewers go along on those journeys.

He guides the conversation so that it feels like a chat between friends as the guests reminisce on the childhood shoes that were special to them — including those they couldn’t afford, but admired — why certain types hit a chord with them, and often share personal details and anecdotes.

On a recent taping in Austin’s Sneaker Politics store, La Puma’s easy banter with “Air” stars Ben Affleck, Matt Damon, and Chris Tucker is interspersed with questions that show how deeply he researches his guests’ backgrounds to learn about their sneaker journeys. Damon and Affleck talk about being teenagers working at a movie theater in Cambridge, Massachusetts, when they first coveted Air Jordans. Tucker recalls working for his dad at a janitorial service and spending a week’s salary on Jordans: “He was the man!”

By the time Affleck pulls out his credit card to pay for the trio’s selections — 17 pairs of assorted Nike styles and four Atlanta Braves hats totaling \$3,065 — the audience feels like it’s cheering on friends, encouraging them to treat themselves.

Speaking of treating one’s self, the record spent on the show so far was \$42,032.28 in shoes and clothes by the late rapper Juice WRLD in 2019, beating the \$38,971.85 spent a few months earlier by fellow rapper Future. But we digress!

Aside from the cellphone full of celebrity friends’ numbers, La Puma remains much the same as he was at Storrs: an avid Husky who bleeds blue for his alma mater, sometimes sharing college memories on “The Complex Sneakers Podcast,” which he co-hosts for the network.

At heart, he’s the same Joe who tiptoed through heavy snow to Gampel in 2002 to protect the new Jordan Ginger XVIs he’d just gotten over winter break — surely the only ones in the region, if not the state, given that Michael Jordan had just introduced them.

But what he had then and now in abundance in sneakers, La Puma lacks in ego; friendly and welcoming, he remains extremely close with his family and several college friends, occasionally returning to the hometown mall where he logged so many hours at Finish Line and so many frenetic Black Fridays.

“I’ll just walk the mall and take it all in, and it’ll give me inspiration. It’s the same way I feel thinking about my time at UConn, like when I remember going down the staircase and waiting at the back door at Towers for the Wings Over Storrs delivery guy to come up the hill with my DC-3 Wings order,” he says.

... several guests have gone on to international acclaim shortly after their appearances, such as Lil Nas X, who came to his 2019 shoe-shopping taping directly from shooting the video for his soon-to-be breakout hit “Old Town Road.”

“I’m a very nostalgic and sentimental person. I think of how far we’ve come, from \$5.50 an hour at Finish Line in Bay Shore, to going to Buckland Hills Mall from UConn trying to figure out a way to get the new releases, to now dealing with all of these pop culture icons from different sections of entertainment and the young stars on YouTube and Internet personalities.

“Coming from those days to where I am now — it’s just surreal, and I never take any of it for granted,” he says. ☺





Listening to music from her youth — Spice Girls, anyone? — transports Maldonado to the headspace of her semi-autobiographical, young adult heroines.

### Hey Girl

▶ **Crystal Maldonado '10 (CLAS)** remembers feeling alone in her teenage struggles with identity, relationships, and body image because she didn't see "fat, brown girls" like her represented in the media she was consuming. So when the higher ed marketing pro decided to pursue her dream of getting published, she took a semi-autobiographical approach to creating a "welcoming, wholesome, 'hey girl, it's not just you out there who's stressed about what you look like or sound like' feeling with my books."

"The biggest part of why I write about marginalized communities is really for validation. I want to remind teenagers that they're not alone in their experiences and remind them that they matter," says the buzzed-about young adult author. She's following up "Fat Chance, Charlie Vega," 2021 New England Book Award winner, and "No Filter and Other Lies," named Best New YA by *Seventeen* and PopSugar, with "The Fall of Whit Rivera," out in October.

### CLASS NOTES

#### 1960s

▶ **Thomas B. Roberts '67 MA**, a native of Storrs, Connecticut, has published a book called "MindApps: Multistate Theory and Tools for Mind Design." It's described as an exploration of "mind design" technologies and practices that boost intellectual capacity and enable new ways of thought and action.

#### 1970s

▶ **Jon Cipes '72 (CLAS)** was named chair of the board of directors of Adaptive Sports at Mount Snow. He's been on the board since 2017, heading up the marketing committee. The organization provides adaptive sports, recreational opportunities, and educational experiences that help individuals with disabilities develop skills and confidence. ▶ After devoting

46 years to the education field, **Doug Melody '72 (CLAS), '90 Ph.D.** reports that he has transitioned to personal fitness coaching. For the past five years, he has helped others become more functionally fit and just wrote a book called "How to Die Young as Old as You Can."

▶ **Mariann (Valenti) Hunter '73 (CLAS)**, wrote in to say that she and her husband, **Ian D. Hunter '72 (CLAS), '73 MBA**, just celebrated their 51st wedding anniversary. After graduating from UConn, where they first met in 1969, Ian went on to earn a master's in criminal justice from the University of New Haven and then became a stay-at-home dad in 1979. Mariann became a fellow in the Society of Actuaries and worked at Cigna for 33 years. They have two children, who both live in New York City. Mariann says she and Ian are retired and enjoying the beautiful weather in Venice,

Florida. ▶ In other retirement news, **John Burrell '74 (ED)** writes that he has retired from Columbia Environmental Laboratory, which he started in 1983. He lives on Columbia Lake in Columbia, Connecticut, with his wife, Janet. "All the chemistry, biochemistry, and microbiology at UConn paid off," he says.

▶ Molecular biologist **Lynne Maquat '74 (CLAS)**, a professor at the University of Rochester School of Medicine, recently was awarded the 2023 Gruber Prize in Genetics for her contributions toward identifying and describing the mechanism of nonsense-mediated mRNA decay.

▶ After spending her career working in primary care, hospice, and palliative care, **Patricia O'Connor '78 (NUR), '96 MS** has written "Navigating Life's Final Journey — Conversations, Choices, Resources." The book, available through her website, patocwriter.com, sheds light on the medical maze that often accompanies illness, particularly end-of-life issues, to help readers clarify and take control of their health situation. ▶ After 37 years, **Dan Lemire '78 (CLAS)** has retired from his full-time law practice. He and his wife of 40 years, Karen Sullivan Lemire, live in Brookfield, Connecticut, where they enjoy life together with their three children and three grandchildren. He reports that the family has outposts in New York, Massachusetts, and southern Maine.

#### 1980s

▶ **Greg Ellner '82 (BUS)**, a member of the Delta Chi fraternity at UConn, was elected county legislator for Putnam County, New York, receiving 64 percent of the vote.

▶ **Leigh M. Skipper '83 (BUS)**, a partner at Duane Morris LLP, has been appointed to the U.S. Sentencing Commission's Practitioner Advisory Group, where he will consult and comment on the

commission's priorities and practices.



▶ **Lisa Mendillo Kulhanek '83 (SFA)** and her cousin, Terese Wallack Waldron, have collaborated on "Sophie and Her Sisters Decorate Eggs for Easter." The book — dedicated to their Ukrainian grandparents who immigrated to New Britain, Connecticut, in 1923 — is filled with colorful illustrations of egg-shaped characters. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to the St. Jude's Global-SAFER Ukraine initiative to support Ukrainian children battling cancer. Kulhanek is a senior graphic designer at The Toro Company and lives in Saint Paul, Minnesota, with her husband and family.

▶ **S. Kent Butler Jr. '85 (CLAS), '94 MA, '99 Ph.D.** was the keynote speaker for the Virginia Counselors Association's 2022 Annual Convention in Williamsburg, Virginia, in November.

▶ **Cheryl (Turano) Ritacco '85 (CLAS)** was named chief operating officer of Overabove, a Chester, Connecticut-based strategic marketing firm, where she has worked since 2006. She also recently joined the board of directors for the Norwich Free Academy Foundation.



▶ **Pamela Mead '87 (CLAS)** quite literally fell into yoga after she broke her



▶ Team members from UConn's Feel Your Best Self project upon winning the "Best Web/App Series — Original" category at the Kidscreen Awards in Miami in February. From left: Kidscreen awards show host Fluffy Soufflé; Sandy Chafouleas, Feel Your Best Self co-founder and Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor in the Neag School of Education; show host Fay Slift; Emily Wicks, Feel Your Best Self co-founder and director of puppetry education at the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry; **John Cody '17 (SFA)**, lead puppet builder; and **Sarah Nolen '16 MFA**, creative director.

Find more on the project that helps children and teachers face emotional challenges at [s.uconn.edu/bestself](https://s.uconn.edu/bestself).





TRAJECTORY

## TENACIOUS 2

### Former UConn athletes and roommates focus their competitive streaks on the franchise business world

Brian Krause '03 (CLAS) is behind the counter at Moe's Southwest Grill in Downtown Storrs, trying to create the perfect stacked taco without getting queso on his white shirt, which he needs for a business meeting later in the day.

"Oh, that was close!" he hollers to his longtime friend and former UConn college roommate Mike "Woody" Woodward '03 (CLAS).

As a young man walks through the restaurant door, Woodward bellows the company's hallmark slogan, "Welcome to M-o-o-o-o-e's."

Krause and Woodward are senior executives at Focus Brands, the um-

*Krause (left) and Woodward are execs at Focus Brands, whose seven companies include Moe's. "I would eat at Moe's every day if I could," says Krause.*

brella company of Carvel, Cinnabon, Moe's, Auntie Anne's, Jamba, McAlister's Deli, and Schlotzsky's. The two stopped in Storrs recently as part of an eight-state road trip to see some of their most successful franchises — Focus has more than 6,800 — and eagerly stepped behind the counter to prepare a few lunch orders.

**"Surround yourself with those who will help you succeed."**

The success of Focus Brands isn't hard to understand, says Krause, the company's chief development officer. "People want to work for themselves and live the American dream. People love owning our franchises because they are beloved brands that have proven track records of success."

Careful matchmaking is the key to

a franchise's success, he adds, especially finding the right location for a new business and the best team to run it. "We love people who already know restaurants and those who are super passionate about what they do."

Woodward, who is senior vice president of franchise development, agrees. "My dream was always to be a coach and, in an unexpected way, that's what I'm doing. But instead of coaching athletes, I work with people who have an entrepreneurial spirit."

The two also worked together at another franchise company, Wyndham Resorts. Krause joined Focus Brands in 2020 and, after two years of persuading, convinced Woodward to join the company in 2022.

At UConn, Krause, a sociology major, and Woodward, an economics major, were student-athletes and sophomore roommates in Hilltop Apartments. Both say their athletics experience fostered

competitive streaks that serve them well in business.

Krause, a native of Florida, played football at UConn for two years and, prophetically, funded the rest of his college tuition by working at Chuck's Steak House and Margarita Grill in Storrs. Woodward, who grew up in Cleveland, played on the men's basketball team.

"Competitiveness is part of it. When you're on a team, whether it is a sports team or a business team, you really need the ability to work as a team," Krause says. "You look at people and figure out how to surround yourself with those who will help you succeed. You can see an individual's character every day. Who whines? Who is a self-starter? Who helps others? Both Mike and I bring tenacity in everything we do."

Beyond their friendship, the UConn roots run deep. Woodward's father is Walter Woodward, Connecticut State Historian emeritus and a retired UConn history professor. His wife is former women's basketball player Ashley Valley Woodward '05 (CLAS), and his sister-in-law is UConn Women's Basketball assistant coach Morgan Valley '05 (CLAS). Krause also met his wife, Melissa Bennett Krause '02 (CLAS), at UConn.

hip while visiting family in Sweden. After surgery and a long recovery, she had to relearn how to walk because one leg was a quarter-inch shorter than the other. Her surgeon suggested she try yoga to rebuild her strength and balance. "Yoga was a game changer, particularly once I discovered hot yoga," she says. She's now the owner of Manipura Power Yoga, a hot power yoga studio in Brookfield, Connecticut. ➔ **Chlora Lindley-Myers '88 JD** was elected president of the National Association

**"There are a lot of sharks out there."** During their trip to Storrs, Woodward and Krause spent half a day meeting with entrepreneurs and athletes seeking to build their personal brands at UConn's Championship Labs.

"It was fantastic, to see how the program is being built for students," says Krause, who has informally mentored many friends over the years. His advice to students was to surround themselves with people of high integrity.

Woodward also says he was impressed by the talent of the UConn students and alumni. "UConn has a lot to offer them and is eager to help student-athletes see the pros and cons that get you into trouble when you monetize. We were happy to share our knowledge about brands with the students. We aren't looking to fund them or get a cut. We know there are a lot of sharks out there, and that is awfully scary for an 18-year-old."

**"If you're not looking forward, you're failing."**

Anyone who is going to succeed in business has to be flexible and receptive to change, Woodward and Krause told students.

"The pandemic was the ultimate pivot. Everything we'd done before

went out the window," Krause says. "We had to be vulnerable, learn together, and lean on each other."

Since then, the company has seen a surge of food orders made through apps and more customers taking their food to go. It has found creative ways to market its products. Cinnabon, for example, now has products at Harry & David and the Cheesecake Factory and has developed specialty cookies for Walmart.

"Business changes no matter what. If you're not looking forward, you're failing. You have to know how to adapt and how to evolve," Krause says. "You need people who don't get flustered in the heat of battle, who know how to keep business afloat and perform."

To offset the caloric risk of their careers, both men keep fit with regular exercise. Woodward runs, works out in the gym, and helps coach his daughters' volleyball and basketball teams.

Krause, who stays active raising three boys, primarily prefers healthy foods but allows a few treats with minimal guilt.

"I am an ice cream fanatic," Woodward admits. "I love Carvel soft serve, more specifically a Carvel Oreo Cookie Sundae Dasher."

"Late at night, I'd grab anything Cinnabon," Krause says. "In the Atlanta office, we have an incredible innovation kitchen. I recently tried the Cinnabon churro that we're introducing. Oh, was that good!" —CLAIRE L. HALL

of Insurance Commissioners for 2023.

### 1990s

➔ **Eileen Meskill '91 JD** was appointed Connecticut's deputy attorney general.

➔ Congrats to **Michael L. Cornell '92 (CLAS), '01 JD**, who was recently promoted to brigadier general in the National Guard. Cornell, who spent 20 years practicing law, recently accepted an active-duty position at the Pentagon, leading the 2,500-person agency respon-

sible for IT and cybersecurity services for the U.S. Department of Defense. ➔ **John Ho '92 (CLAS)**,



an attorney with Cozen O'Connor, was appointed management vice-chair of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion of the Legal Profession Committee of the American Bar Association L&E

Law Section. ➔ Congrats to **Donna Hayward '98 6th Year** on being named 2023 National Principal of the Year. She serves as principal of Haddam-Killingworth High School in Higganum, Connecticut. ➔ **Peter Horman '99 (CLAS)**, of Needham, Massachusetts, was named to the board of trustees of William James College, a private college of psychology in Newton, Massachusetts. Horman is the owner and consulting chief actuary of Horman Mathematical and Actuar-





➔ **Mark T. Basile II '15 (PHAR), '17 (Pharm.D.)** and his wife, Sarah, welcomed their son, Mark T. Basile III (“Trey”), in June 2022. Trey was born into a long legacy of Huskies that began with his great, great grandfather, Daniel Graf, who graduated from the Connecticut Agricultural College in 1921. Trey would become the 5th generation in this legacy family — should he choose to become a Husky.

ial Solutions Inc. ➔ **Mara Reisman '99 MA, '06 Ph.D.**, an English professor at Northern Arizona University, shared the news that she has recently published a new book, “Moral Complexities in Turn of the Millennium British Literature.”

**2000s**

➔ **Natalie Braswell '00 (CLAS), '02 MPA, '07 JD** was named Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont’s general counsel. She previously served as Connecticut’s comptroller. ➔ **Johannes Neuer '00 MM** was recently appointed director of the German National Library in Leipzig, Germany. “My time at UConn and in Connecticut was instrumental in developing a passion for working in the arts, media, and culture sector, where I have spent most of my career so far and learned much of my craft that I still put to use every day.” After earning a master’s in music at UConn, Neuer worked

as an audience development manager at the Hartford Symphony Orchestra and as managing director at Chamber Music PLUS. He went on to earn a master’s in e-media at Quinnipiac University and served on the board of the Justice Dance Performance Project. He later moved to New York City, where he held several leadership positions at The New York Public Library. ➔ **Marisha Chinsky '00 (CLAS)** was promoted to vice president of The Bliss Group, a marketing communications firm. ➔ **Nathan Quesnel '01 (ED), '02 MA, '22 Ed.D.** was appointed head of Norwich Free Academy. He most recently served as superintendent of East Hartford Public Schools. ➔ **Ronelle Porter '02 JD** was awarded the 2023 Ruth Bader Ginsburg Beacon Award by the New York State Bar Association’s committee on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Porter, a partner and assistant deputy chair of the capital markets and corporate department

at Loeb & Loeb LLP in New York City, was president of the Black Law Students Association when she was at UConn School of Law. ➔ **Michael A. Pascucilla '02 MPH** reports that he and **David Knauf '74 (CLAS), '99 MPH** have been working together on a pioneering water quality public health project since 2017. Their project — Microbial Source Tracking in the Sasco Brook, Lower Farm River, and Goodwives River Watersheds of Long Island Sound — was recently featured as the cover story in the *Journal of Environmental Health*. ➔ **Allison Cantor '04 (CLAS), '10 JD** reports that she’s been promoted to assistant chief counsel at ESPN. ➔ **Tyler Rhodes '04 (SFA)**, the director of sales for small businesses at the Boston-based software company, Hubspot, says his company tries to be as involved as possible with UConn by judging sales competitions and working with recruiting to help place seniors in jobs. Nice going!



➔ **Amy Lynch '05 (CLAS)** was recently promoted to president of Comcast Cable’s Northeast Division, where she is responsible for all cable operations in 14 northeastern states from Maine to Virginia. Lynch, who has more than 25 years of experience in telecommunications, media, and technology, has been named a *San Francisco Business Times* “Most Influential Woman” as well as one of Seattle’s “Women to Watch.” She serves on several boards and committees, including Girls Inc. of Metro Denver, The Women’s Foundation of Colorado, and Colorado Community Colleges. ➔ **Chloe Mickel '07 (CLAS)**, a lawyer in Brown-

stein Hyatt Farber Schreck’s litigation department, was promoted to a shareholder of the company. ➔ Congrats to **Kristina Allen Reliford '07 (BUS)**, a litigator and trial attorney, who was made partner at Bradley Arant Boult Cummings LLP.



➔ **Michael Smith '08 MS**, who was featured in “Building Futures,” in this magazine’s Fall 2019 issue, writes about continued success teaching in Pennsylvania: “I wanted to share with you that my Future City Middle School team won the World Championship in Washington, D.C. in February. We now have won back-to-back international titles and for the third time in five years. My team is now the winningest team in the history of this prestigious STEM competition. Since I have coached our team over the last 17 years, we have won the regional competition 12 times and been nationally ranked 1st (three times), 2nd, 4th, 6th, 11th (twice), 12th, and 13th over those years. This year’s team created the future city of Odessa, Ukraine, and presented the project to diplomats at the Ukrainian embassy in D.C. While the competition is heavily dominated by engineering schools and science academies, our public school now tops the international ranks. I attribute a good deal of that success to my Neag School of Education degree and Confratute experience at Connecticut. I remember my first summer there, when I got a call from Warwick offering me the gifted support job at Warwick Middle School in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. While I (continued on p. 45)

**LIFE LESSONS**



**THE ART OF THE LABEL**

Behind every box and can in your grocery store is a UConn nutrition and arts degree

Andy Warhol, the Pop artist who turned soup can labels into art, might have admired the work of **Jerry Mande '78 (CAHNR)**. As an FDA policy analyst in the early 1990s, Mande, who majored in nutritional sciences and minored in art, played a key role creating the uber-ubiquitous “Nutrition Facts” label.

His interest in health began as a junior in 1976. He was puzzled why the FDA, fearing a cancer-causing food dye, had banned red M&Ms. “I took a nutrition class to learn more about it, and it snowballed from there,” says the Westport native, who is now CEO of Nourish Science, a Bethesda, Maryland, nonprofit that works to solve the nutrition crisis.

Mande was a legislative aide to Sen. Al Gore in 1990 when Congress passed the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act giving the FDA a comprehensive strategy on food labeling. Now all foods, with few exceptions, would carry a standard ingredients label to fight diet-related woes. While in Gore’s office, Mande had helped the then-congressman enact the National Organ Transplant Act, which created a national system to fairly allocate donated organs. But it was Mande’s interest in graphic design that caught the attention of former FDA commissioner David Kessler, who brought him on board. “Had it not been for Jerry’s efforts, we would not have the current food label,” says Kessler. “He was an intellectual giant, a visionary about how the label should look.”

In his book “A Question of Intent,” Kessler writes “Jerry took on the food label format as his personal mission, displaying a dogged focus that sometimes infuriated his colleagues. ...He was convinced existing information

was being ignored by consumers for two reasons: it was confusing and hard to read, [and] Jerry reasoned we should make sure it could be read.”

Working with the in-house art team, staffers, and social science experts who ran focus groups, Mande oversaw creation of versions of a possible label. But something was missing — pizzazz. Outside help came from designer Berkey Belser. He had created the yellow and black Energy Guide stickers for appliances in 1978 and agreed to work pro bono on the job.

Soon bold face type highlighted key terms. Tooling lines of different thicknesses separated items, making them easier to focus on. Words were justified and ran with the label’s margins to create more order. All punctuation was deleted, simplifying the look. Mande estimates the FDA considered three dozen preliminary versions.

He learned to be wary of focus groups. Consumers loved “prettier” designs with charts and graphs but disliked the stark version the FDA favored. “The problem was consumers liked more graphic versions, but had less understanding of what they communicated,” says Mande. “We faced this choice — do you go with one consumers like, or do you go with one they can best use?”

Opposition arose from the Agriculture Department, which had a competing label. President George H.W. Bush picked the final design, becoming the first occupant of the Oval Office to personally intervene in an FDA policy matter since Theodore Roosevelt in 1908 overturned a ban on saccharine.

From the moment the label hit grocery stores in 1994, it became an icon. “There is a masterpiece of information architecture printed on



UConn alum Jerry Mande and designer Berkey Belser created the new nutrition facts label in the early 1990s. They wanted something easy to understand — with a bit of pizzazz.

every food package sold in the United States,” wrote Italian designer Massimo Vignelli in *AIGA*, the journal of the Professional Association for Design. He hailed it as “a clean testimonial of civilization, a statement of social responsibility, and a masterpiece of graphic design.”

The National Endowment for the Arts honored the label in 1995, the same year it received a Presidential Design Award along with honorees that included the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

“In the end, its success is due to its simplicity,” says Mande. —*GEORGE SPENCER*

Find labels Mande made for parenting and marriage at [s.uconn.edu/labels](http://s.uconn.edu/labels).





TRAJECTORY

## IN AMERICA'S TEST KITCHEN

This alum's dinner parties were so buzzy, they got him cast on a next-big-thing cooking show

Garrett Schlichte '15 MA, an upbeat copywriter from San Francisco, has never backed down from a new adventure. So when he saw a casting call on Instagram for a new television cooking competition, he thought "Why not?"

He was not only cast in "America's Test Kitchen: The Next Generation," but made it to the finale, beating competitors with such dishes as lemon ricotta dumplings and pavlova with key lime lemon curd.

Each episode challenged the home cooks to make and present meals for the chance to win \$100,000 and become the next on-air chef on the PBS series "America's Test Kitchen."

Since this was the first time "America's Test Kitchen" had produced a cooking show, the cast had no idea what

to expect. They weren't sure whether it would be a cutthroat competition like "Top Chef" or a more wholesome, collaborative show like "The Great British Baking Show." It ended up being more wholesome and educational.

"None of the challenges were like, 'Here's gummy worms and tree bark. Now make a meal out of it.' There were never really any big we're-trying-to-make-you-look-ridiculous moments."

For the finale, Schlichte and two other finalists prepared two dishes, produced a photo shoot of the food, then demonstrated how they made one of the dishes on camera. Schlichte — spoiler alert — ultimately lost to Antoinette Johnson, but loved the experience.

"I gained a lot of self-confidence doing it," Schlichte says. "I didn't even

Watch Schlichte's season of "Test Kitchen" on FreeVee or Amazon Prime. Find more recipes like these dumplings in his newsletter "I promise I can cook, please love me."

unpack my bags until the second or third challenge because I was so afraid that I was going to go home. I think that I come across as very bubbly and excited, but I think we all deal with a lot of self-doubt. It really helped me to believe in myself."

**"None of the challenges were like, 'Here's gummy worms and tree bark. Now make a meal out of it.'"**

He also formed strong friendships with his castmates during the shoot in Boston last summer. "We all talk almost every day." Growing up in Florida, Schlichte developed a love of cooking from his father. "I was just always in the kitchen with him. Everyone always called me his little sous chef."

He came to UConn to earn a master's in higher education and student affairs, inspired by the staff he met as an undergraduate at Florida State University.

"My UConn experience was great, honestly," he says. "There are two camps in higher education: theory-based and practitioner-based. UConn was practitioner-based. I wanted to work with students and they had just some phenomenal practitioners."

He went on to work in Washington, D.C., as a coordinator of orientation, transition, and retention at American University, then at Johns Hopkins as the assistant director of student life. On the side, he freelanced as a writer and was recruited to be a brand copywriter for Dipsea in San Francisco. He now works as a social engagement manager for Caraway, a startup that provides health care services to women on college campuses.

And he's still cooking — he runs the monthly Virgo Supperclub, serving six-course, plated dinners with friend Lara Ortiz-Luis. —GRACE MERRITT

## Garrett's Lemon Ricotta Dumplings

### Dumplings

- 2 cups whole milk ricotta
- ¾ cup all-purpose flour (plus potentially a little more depending on how wet the ricotta is)
- 2 large eggs
- kosher salt and fresh ground black pepper to taste
- zest of 2 lemons
- 4 tablespoons fresh lemon juice (and maybe more juice depending on how tangy you want them)

Bring a large pot of generously salted water to a boil. Mix all ingredients together, taste, and adjust seasonings. Let sit for 15-20 minutes so the flour can fully hydrate — the batter should be slightly gluey, like a thick banana bread.

Working in batches of 10 to 15, spoon tablespoon-sized dollops of ricotta mixture into the boiling water. (I just use a regular small soup spoon and push the mixture off the spoon into the pot with my finger.)

Once dumplings float to the surface, let cook for about 3-5 more minutes and test for doneness, then remove from water and set aside. (I use a spider or slotted spoon to pull them out. To test for doneness, cut one in half. If it's the same color and texture throughout, it's done!) Toss in shallot vinaigrette (below).

The dumplings are great on their own, just tossed in dressing, or served over grilled vegetables or a salad of shaved carrots, cucumbers, and snap peas, says Schlichte.

### Shallot Vinaigrette

- 1 large shallot, minced
- ½ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup rice wine vinegar
- juice of half a lemon
- kosher salt and black pepper
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1-2 tablespoons mayonnaise
- 1-2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- 2 tablespoons fresh dill, finely chopped

Combine all ingredients in a large mason jar or bowl. If in a mason jar, cover and shake until emulsified. If in a bowl, whisk until emulsified.

have never had an engineering class in my life, I learned how to think, how to compete, and how to win an engineering competition thanks to UConn." ➔ **Fany DeJesús Hannon '08 MA** was appointed UConn's interim dean of students. Hannon is currently the director of UConn's Puerto Rican/Latin American Cultural Center. ➔ **Becca Ginns '09 (CLAS)** was named to the 2022 Association for Healthcare Philanthropy "40 Under 40" list, which honors the industry's brightest young leaders who have demonstrated success in health care philanthropy. Ginns, a senior director of corporate and foundation relations at the Prevent Cancer Foundation, secured \$1.24 million in her first year at the foundation and developed several new initiatives. ➔ **Paige Classey Przybylski '09 (CLAS), '11 MA** just published her first novel, "Everything You Left Me," a Young Adult (YA) mystery written in verse, a form she says is growing in popularity. The book was named one of *Forbes*'s "7 Most Anticipated YA Mysteries to Dive into This Winter." She has been an educator in Connecticut public schools for 12 years. "My time at UConn was instrumental in my development as both an educator and a writer," she tells us.

**2010s**  
➔ Congratulations to **Josh Feldman '10 (BUS)** on being promoted to partner at the law firm of Ruel Ruel Burns Feldman & Britt in Hartford, Connecticut. He's a member of the firm's divorce and family law practice. ➔ **Gwaina D. Wauldon '10 JD** joined the law firm Pullman & Comley as an associate.



➔ **Seth Bronko '11 (BUS)** was elected as a Connecticut state representative, serving the 70th district representing Naugatuck. ➔ Congratulations to **Justin Raymond '11 (CLAS)** and **Michelle Raymond '12 (CLAS)** on the birth of their second son, Nolan Michael Raymond. ➔ Chemistry teacher **David Thibodeau '12 (ED), '13 (CLAS), '13 MA** writes that he was pleased to meet fellow Husky **Vincent Gallucci '65 MA**, a retired elementary school principal, during



➔ **Cindy Carrasquilla '94 (CLAS)** shares that UConn basketball greats, including **Lyman DePriest '91 (CLAS)** and **Chris Smith '92 (CLAS)** joined Haddad & Partners to tip off March Madness at Docksider Brewery in Milford, Connecticut. From left: founder and creative director DJ Haddad, DePriest, Smith, Carrasquilla, and Kevin Jones.



TOM'S TRIVIA ANSWERS

1. A; 2. B; 3. D; 4. C; 5. C

a gathering last Christmas. “Vin and I chatted extensively about how education has changed over the years, our UConn experiences, and what it means to be a teacher,” says Thibodeau, who teaches in Smithfield, Rhode Island, and at Johnson & Wales University in Providence. “Despite being separated by several generations, our shared profession and UConn experiences brought us together for an evening of memories, stories, and laughs!” ➔ **Erick Russell '12 JD**, a partner at Pullman & Comley, was elected state treasurer in Connecticut. He is the first Black LGBTQ candidate elected to statewide office in Connecticut.

➔ Congratulations to **Erin Nicholls '12 (CLAS), '16 JD**, who recently became a partner at the Wiggin and Dana law firm.



➔ **Katherine M. Patnaude '12 MS** was promoted to audit partner at PKF O'Connor Davies in the company's Wethersfield, Connecticut, location. ➔ Coastal Bridge Advisors, an investment company, promoted **Brett St. John '13 (CLAS)** to investment portfolio strategist. ➔ **Suzanne Ondrus '14 Ph.D.** shared that she is excited about moving into consulting in the fields of diversity, equity, and inclusion; gender equity; and nonviolent communication. So far, her clients have been the National (continued on p. 48)



MAKING GOOD

**Aaron Carr is Holding Landlords Accountable**

**Aaron Carr '12 (CLAS)** started a small housing watchdog nonprofit at age 28. Less than a decade later, that group has filed the largest housing discrimination lawsuit in U.S. history.

Originally from Long Island, Carr plied his psychology degree after graduation as campaign manager, then chief of staff for a New York state assembly member representing the Bronx. While there, he heard countless constituents complain that they were trying in vain to hold their landlords legally accountable.

So in 2016, Carr founded the Housing Rights Initiative with a few thousand dollars of his own money and began filing lawsuits and issuing scathing public reports. A 2018 *New York Times* profile summed up his work with this headline: “Are Landlords Telling the Truth? The City Doesn’t Always Check. He Does.”

The group now operates in five states and maintains six full-time staffers led by Carr as executive director, an army of interns and contractors, plus multiple partner law firms and government agencies. “The biggest challenge of starting an organization when you are only 28 is that, well, you are only 28. You have no idea what you are doing,” says Carr, laughing. “But the benefit of starting an organization when you are young is having a high level of energy and motivation, which is half the battle!”

Last year, his group filed the largest housing discrimination lawsuit by defendant size in U.S. history. Suing 124 real estate companies, it alleges discrimination against would-be tenants who intended to use rent subsidy vouchers. According to the complaint, in the last pre-pandemic year of 2019, only around one-fifth of New Yorkers who received such vouchers were able to actually secure housing with them. In January, a New York Supreme Court justice ruled that Carr’s organization had standing, allowing the lawsuit to proceed. (As of this writing, no final decision has been issued.)

“I graduated from UConn in psychology. And while I ended up doing something totally different, the best part about psychology is that it’s transferable to whatever you decide to do in life,” he says. “Psychology is everywhere. It’s in transactions, it’s in management, and it’s in execution. It’s been over 10 years since I graduated from UConn, and I am still applying many of the things I learned then today.” —*JESSE RIFKIN '14 (CLAS)*



➔ Gary Gladstein '66 (CLAS), '08 H and his wife, Phyllis, center, with his children, Mindy Grafstein and Jeffrey Gladstein.

**HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTE NAMED ON 20<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY**

On February 22, 2023, UConn honored alumnus Gary Gladstein '66 (CLAS), '08 H and his family for providing more than a quarter-century of transformative support of human rights at UConn with the naming of the **Gladstein Family Human Rights Institute**.



“

Gary Gladstein and his family have been integral to the growth and success of the Human Rights Institute, which supports inquiry into the most pressing human rights questions and prepares the next generation of human rights advocates. We are incredibly grateful for their vision and generosity.”

Radenka Maric  
President, UConn



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*Submissions may be edited for clarity and/or length.*

Alliance on Mental Illness and the National Federation of Coffee Growers of Colombia. During the pandemic, she learned advanced Spanish on her own and, later, conducted gender and DEI training in Spanish in Colombia and Guatemala. Also, last year she published a second book of poetry, “Death of an Unvirtuous Woman,” which strikes back at victim-blaming in an 1881 Ohio homicide resulting from a domestic violence case involving a German immigrant couple.



➔ **Robert Isner '15 (PHARM), '17 Pharm.D.** and **Stefanie Zassman '15 (PHARM), '17 Pharm.D.** got married in September in Woodbury, New York,

surrounded by family and friends, including many UConn alumni. They met in the School of Pharmacy and through Greek Life. ➔ Proud parents Elizabeth and Antonio Pinho wrote to share the news that their son, **Christian Pinho '15 (ENG)**, was hired by Google last June. “Thank you, UConn, for effectively preparing our son with the knowledge, skills, and qualities he needed to learn to think and create on his own.” ➔ **Tatianna A. Montalvo '18 (ED)**, a broadcast media manager at ESPN, was part of a team that won a Sports Emmy for Outstanding Technical Team Event for their broadcast of the College Football Playoff National Championship.



➔ **Anna Neupert '19 (BUS)** and **Max Wildfeuer '18 (BUS)** say they had the best time celebrating with fellow Huskies at their wedding. Congratulations, you two!

**2020s**

➔ **Chase Foltz '21 (ED)** was hired as a graduate assistant for Manhattan College’s Office of Athletics. He most recently worked with the Norwich Sea Unicorns of the Futures Collegiate Baseball League. ➔ **Will Mandelbaum '21 (SFA), (ED), '22 MA** starred as Jean-Michael in Fairfield Center Stage’s “La Cage Aux Folles.”



➔ Recent graduate **Anna Rodin '23 (CLAS)** has already published a book, “For Your Twenties: A Guide



➔ When physical therapist **Sarah Grossman '81 (CAHNR)** started the school year in the Chimacum, Washington, school district six years ago, she discovered she had three preschool children on her caseload who couldn’t walk. The school’s playground wasn’t accessible for wheelchairs and walkers and there was no money in the school budget to address this. So she sprang into action.

Enlisting the help of colleagues, friends, and parents, Grossman applied for grants and organized fundraisers to raise \$1.4 million to build a community-wide, accessible playground, called JUMP! (Jefferson Universal Movement Playground). Now, students can safely play on a playground with a wheelchair-accessible merry-go-round; an accessible net climber, swings, and slides; and even a “Serenity Spot” sensory time-out cubby for children on the autism spectrum. She is now fundraising for phase two to complete the playground as designed.

Recently honored with a Public Health Hero Award for her work as board president of JUMP!, Grossman also sits on the county’s Accessible Community Advisory Committee, where she works to provide grants to make area towns more accessible for everyone.

She says she is thankful for her UConn professors, who helped steer her in the right direction. “I still remember professors Ronnie Leavitt and Pam Roberts inspiring me to pursue pediatrics after thinking I wanted to focus on sports medicine,” she says.

She lives in Port Townsend, Washington, with her partner and their dog. “We enjoy camping, hiking, and exploring the natural areas in the Pacific Northwest and the Southwest,” she says. —GRACE MERRITT

to Staying Connected Amidst the Chaos.” “While targeted at people in their twenties, this book is truly for all ages,” she says. “Between a global pandemic, the political climate, social media stressors,

and the daily to-dos, we face some unique challenges. I lay it all out vulnerably and authentically with stories from my own life as well as from experts I’ve interviewed.” Way to start off with a bang, Anna!



Debbie Coleman: Visual Assets Manager, Pixar

**JOB ENVY**

**Smart With Heart**

**Eunice Omega '11 (CLAS)** might have more “pinch me” moments than most, working at what many would consider a dream company.

“Getting to sit at my first table read was electrifying,” says Omega, a former assistant housing director at the School of American Ballet who started as a Pixar Animation Studios creative development associate in July 2021.

Omega spends much of her workday playing matchmaker, reading agent-submitted scripts to find the right writers for in-development projects. “I determine if the script is quality writing, if it’s tonally what we look for at Pixar,” she says. “Our motto is, ‘Smart with heart.’”

She also helps facilitate research, cultivates experts to weigh in on experiences being portrayed in upcoming films, and has sat on one of the studio’s “Culture Trusts,” where a group of employees helps ensure authentic cultural representation. Omega is in the room with other creatives batting around ideas, taking down notes — but also giving notes, entertainment speak for feedback, when the opportunity arises.

“I asked a colleague, the writer for ‘Turning Red,’ her advice about those times I get nervous sharing a note,” Omega says. “She said, ‘There are notes that don’t have to come from you. And there are notes that can only come from you.’ I had to be mindful of that and understand my value and what I bring to the table. I am leaning really heavily on my perspective.” —JULIE (STAGIS)

BARTUCCA '10 (BUS, CLAS), '19 MBA

*Omega says the coolest thing about working at Pixar is the impact: “The fact that ‘core memory’ from ‘Inside Out’ is part of the lexicon? These movies form people’s experiences.”*



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