

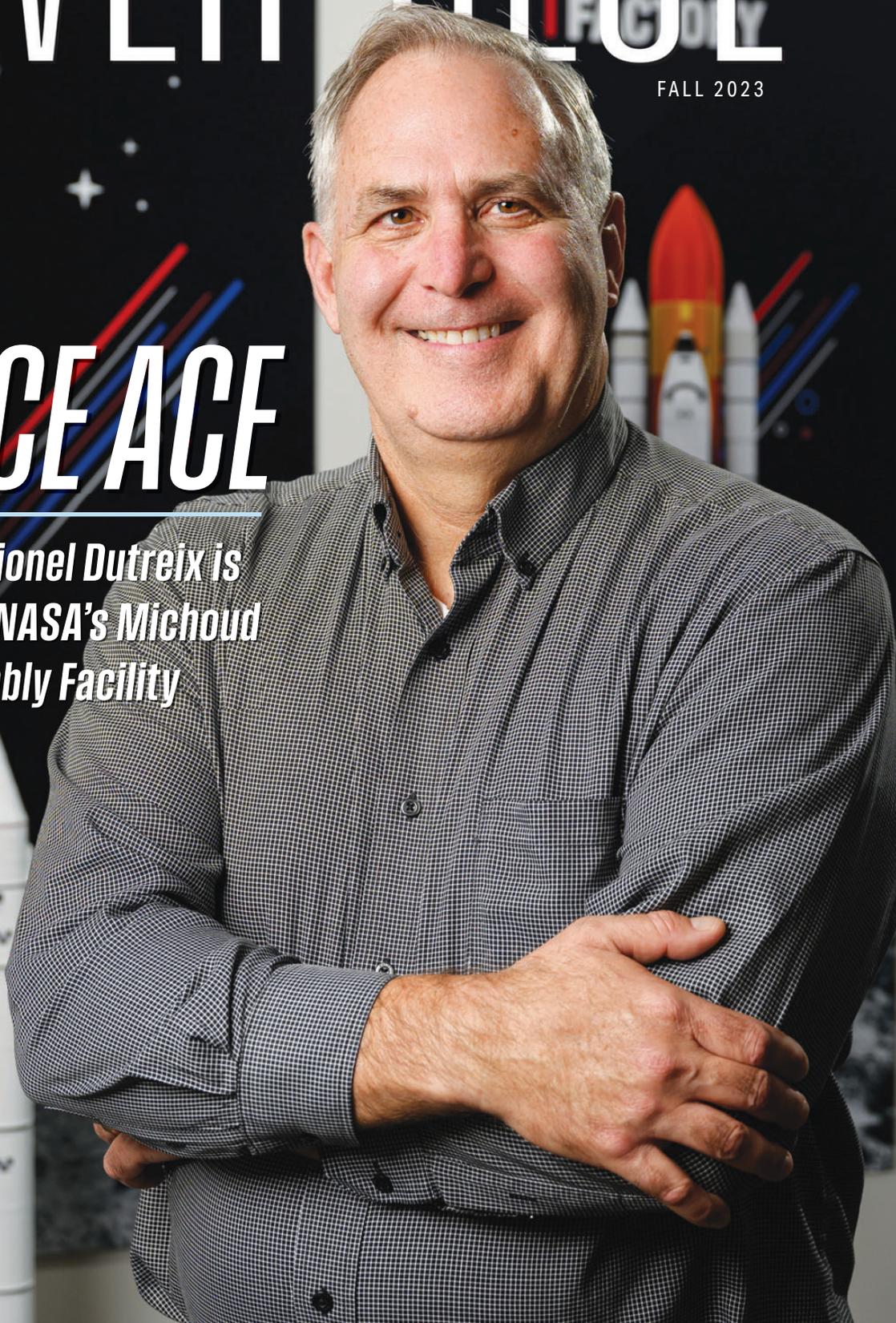
A PUBLICATION FOR ALUMNI, STUDENTS AND FRIENDS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS

# SILVER & BLUE

FALL 2023

## SPACE AGE

*Alumnus Lionel Dutreix is  
director of NASA's Michoud  
Assembly Facility*



# FIRST LOOK

*Before final exams got underway in the spring, students were treated to an only-in-New Orleans way to unwind: crawfish, jambalaya, games and music on the lakefront. It was the annual crawfish boil known as SUCbAUF.*





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MAMBO is the Student Affairs-designed orientation program, aimed at immersing first-year students into the Privateer experience and helping prepare them for their first semester at UNO.

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## Kathy Johnson Named University's 8th President

ON SEPT. 14, THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS for the University of Louisiana System selected Kathy Johnson as the 8th president in the history of the University of New Orleans. President Johnson comes to New Orleans from Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, where she most recently served for eight years as executive vice chancellor and chief academic officer. She succeeds John Nicklow, who led the University of New Orleans for seven years before departing in June to become the president of the Florida Institute of Technology.

President Johnson has more than 30 years of higher education experience as a faculty member and administrator. She has ascended through the ranks as a department chair, dean and associate vice chancellor for undergraduate education, prior to her role as chief academic officer. She has a record of achievement in a number of areas including student success, enrollment management, faculty development, research, academic program quality, strategic initiatives and partnerships, equity and inclusion, and fundraising. "I believe that the University of New Orleans has unlimited potential to contribute to our community and to the broader region through

the incredible students that we educate, as well as through our research mission that is aimed at tackling some of the most vexing challenges of our society," President Johnson said.

During her time at IUPUI—the state of Indiana's urban research and academic health sciences campus, President Johnson established the Strategic Information Council, which uses data to drive improvements in student retention and success. She launched the Forum Network to ensure that faculty had the resources they needed to be innovative and productive inside and outside of the classroom. She was also deeply involved with a number of national organizations, which forged mutually beneficial partnerships with her own institution.

"I am so excited about joining a multicultural university that is deeply engaged with its community and committed to enhancing the social mobility of our students, as well as Louisiana's economic development," President Johnson said.

President Johnson holds bachelor's and master's degrees in psychology from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and a doctorate in psychology from Emory University. She began her role at UNO on Nov. 1.

# CAMPUS SCENE

HEADLINES AND HAPPENINGS

*INSIDE  
COMMENCEMENT*

*SUCbAUF*

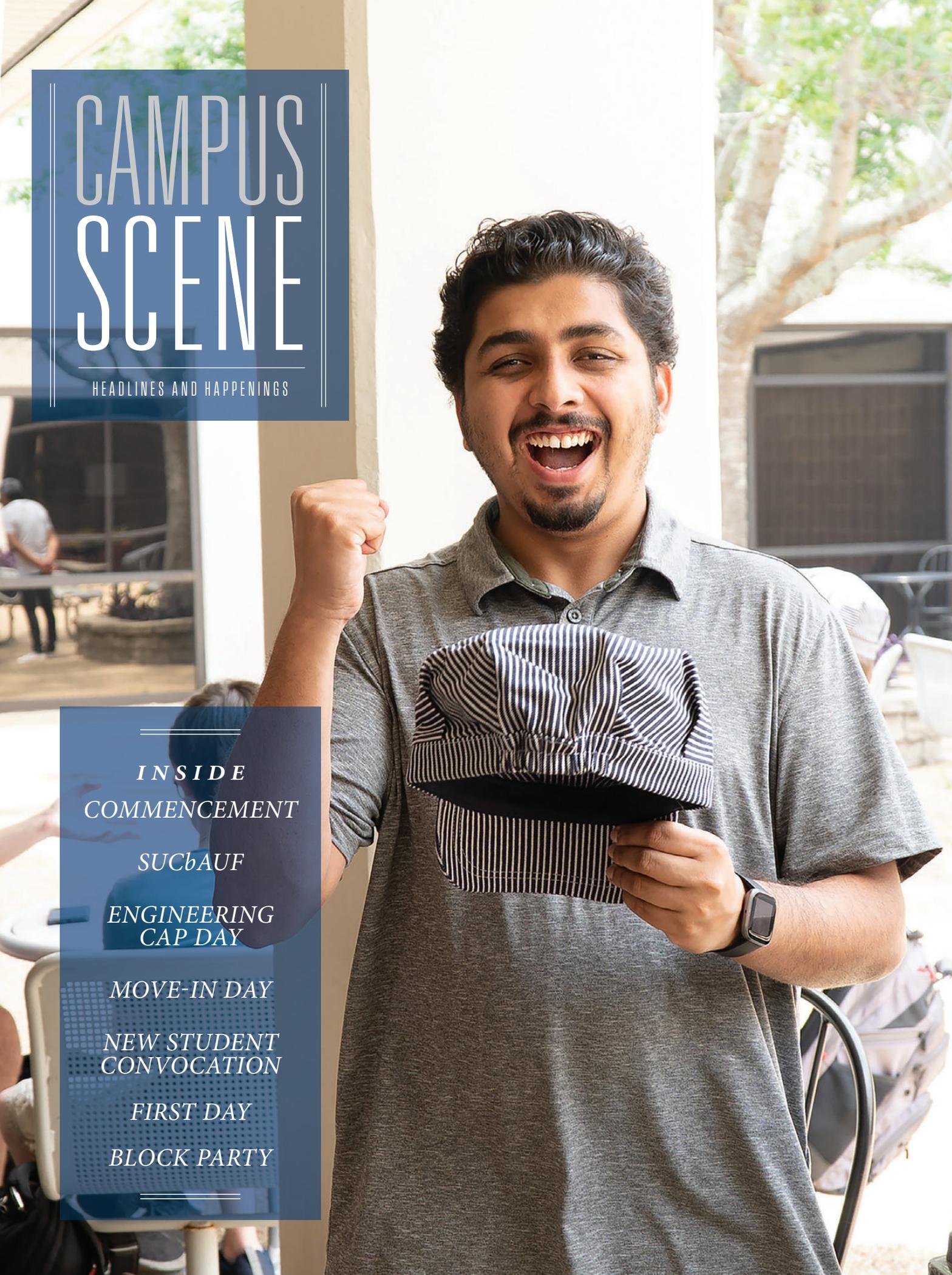
*ENGINEERING  
CAP DAY*

*MOVE-IN DAY*

*NEW STUDENT  
CONVOCATION*

*FIRST DAY*

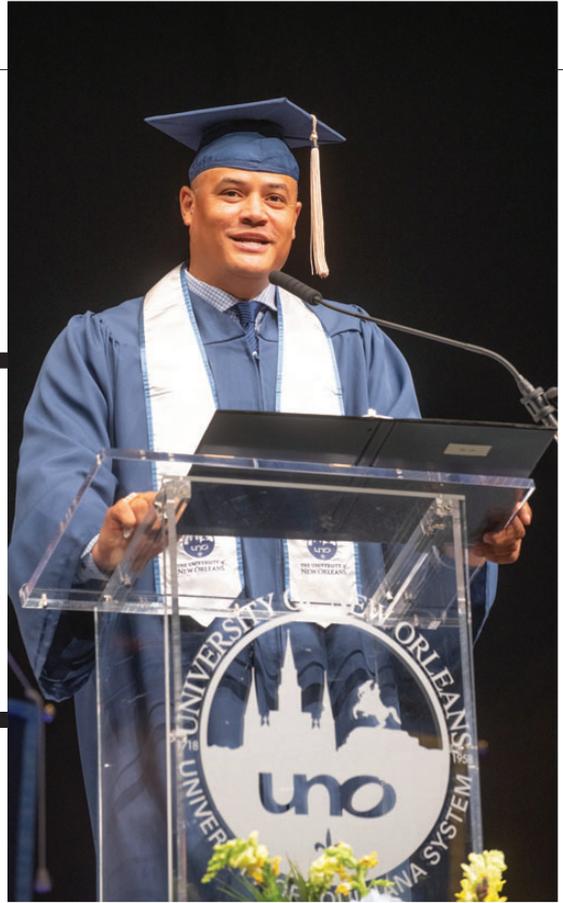
*BLOCK PARTY*



### SPRING COMMENCEMENT

*"Success is not a solo endeavor," UNO alumnus Sonny Lee told the graduating class of 2023. Lee, founder and CEO of Son of a Saint, served as the principal speaker at the University of New Orleans spring 2023 commencement ceremony on May 19.*

*The nearly 700 spring candidates who were eligible to participate in the ceremony represented 31 U.S. states and territories, and 12 countries.*





## SUCbAUF

Springtime means crawfish on the lakefront! UNO and the Student Activities Council hosted its annual SUCbAUF, a free crawfish boil for students. The event not only included the popular crustacean, but also music, games, and a rock wall in the University Center's parking lot.

# CAMPUS SCENE

## ENGINEERING CAP DAY

*In a pre-commencement tradition unique to its students, the Dr. Robert A. Savoie College of Engineering awarded its May 2023 graduates railroad engineer caps symbolizing their entry into their new profession. The capping ceremony was part of the Engineering Cap Day Cookout held a week before commencement.*



## MOVING IN PRIVATEER STYLE

*In August, faculty, staff and students gave the newest Privateers a hand during move-in at Pontchartrain Hall. Volunteers help unload trunks, TVs, microwaves and various other baskets and boxes of necessities.*



## NEW STUDENT CONVOCAION

The Class of 2027 was officially welcomed to campus at the annual new student convocation at the UNO Lakefront Arena, which included faculty marching into the arena in full academic regalia while “Pomp and Circumstance” played. The event commemorates the start of the academic journey for new students with an opening ceremony followed by free food and games.

Interim President Jeannine O’Rourke told students the journey will require hard work and dedication on their part.

“Remember that challenges are inevitable, but they are also the stepping stones to success,” she said.



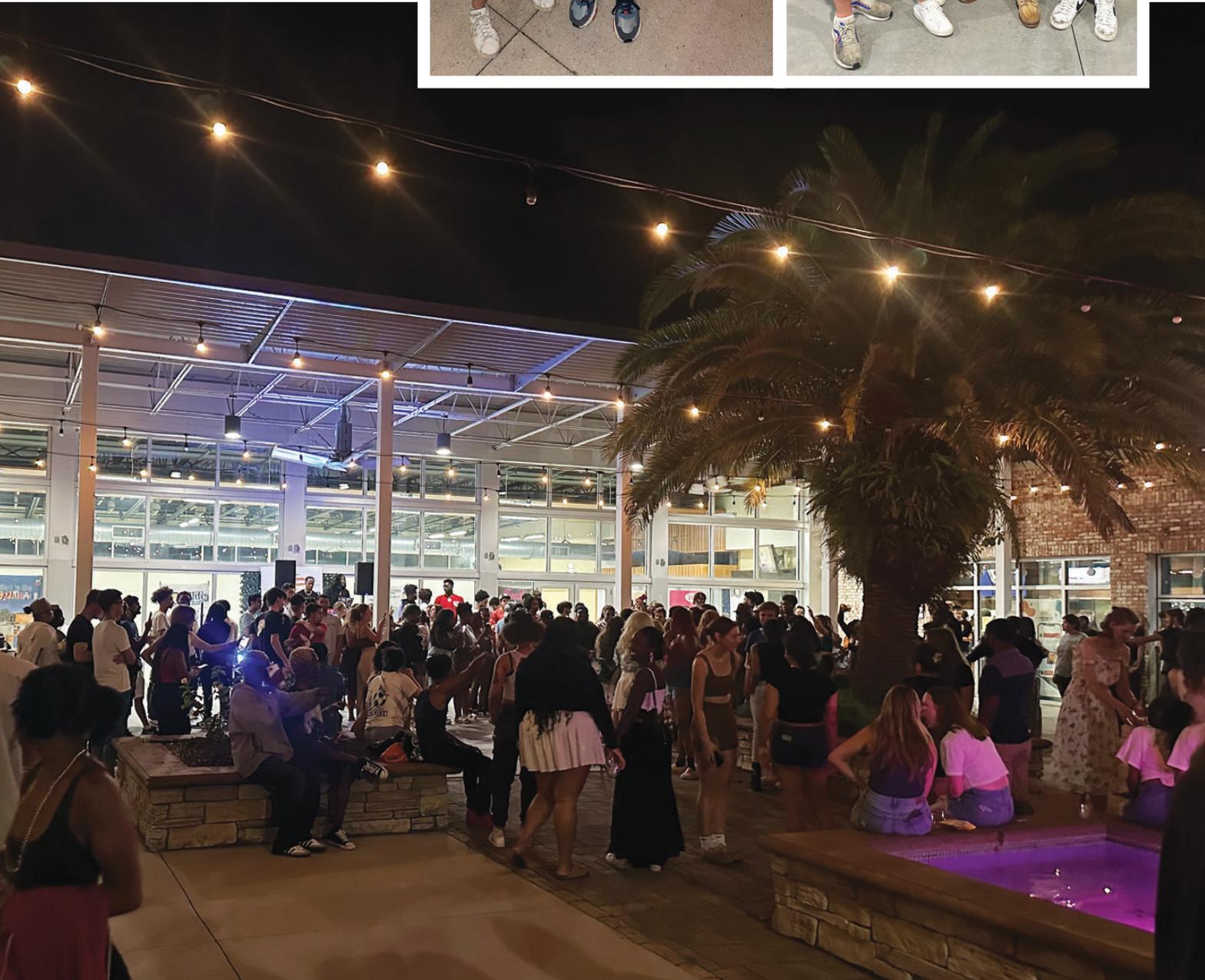


## FIRST DAY OF CLASSES

*While the outside temperatures still ran summer hot, students returned to campus for the first day of the “fall” semester on Aug. 14.*

**WELCOME BACK  
BLOCK PARTY**

*The Student Activities Council hosted its annual Block Party at The Cove in August to kick off the new semester. With DJ PJ on the mic, students were invited to show up and show out in fun.*





The UNO Alumni Association congratulates our 2023 class of distinguished alumni, to be honored on November 9 at the Homer L. Hitt Distinguished Alumni Gala!

The Homer L. Hitt Distinguished Alumni Award Gala honors University of New Orleans alumni who have distinguished themselves in their fields. The University chooses to recognize them for their outstanding accomplishments and their service to their communities and their alma mater. Honorees represent the best of the UNO community.



HOMER L. HITT DISTINGUISHED ALUMNA OF THE YEAR  
**Sabrina D. Farmer**, '95  
Bachelor of Science in Computer Science  
Vice President of Engineering  
Google



NORMA JANE SABISTON YOUNG ALUMNA OF THE YEAR  
**Avril M. Habetz**, '05  
Master of Business Administration  
Managing Partner/CEO  
Northwestern Mutual of Louisiana & Mississippi

#### COLLEGE AND ATHLETICS HONOREES

*College of Business Administration*

**Joseph M. Dempsey**, '76  
Chief Financial Officer  
Crescent Crown Distributing, LLC

*College of Liberal Arts, Education and Human Development*

**Jericho Brown**, Ph.D., '02  
Professor and Director of Creative Writing  
Emory University

*College of Sciences*

**Frank E. Juge, Jr.**, '62  
Professor  
University of Central Florida

*Dr. Robert A. Savoie College of Engineering*  
**Kimberly S. Cook-Nelson**, '94, '97, '99  
Executive Vice President, Nuclear Operations & Chief Nuclear Operating Officer  
Entergy

*Privateer Athletics*  
**A. Wayne Cooper**, '78  
Posthumous Award

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# NEWS & EVENTS

## ENTREPRENEUR AND FORMER SAINTS STAR MARQUES COLSTON TALKS BUSINESS AT UNO

FORMER NEW ORLEANS Saints star receiver and entrepreneur Marques Colston learned on the football field the importance of creating separation between himself and a defender in order to make a play. As a venture capitalist, Colston has elevated his art of separation into a business philosophy.

Colston has taken a term used to describe his role on the field for the Saints and turned it into a durable competitive advantage that has allowed him to achieve enviable success since leaving the National Football League in 2015.

He calls it “creating separation” and shared the particulars of the three-part philosophy during a talk at the University of New Orleans in April.

“This is a joy for me because I get to mix my two passions,” Colston told the audience. “I get to talk about the art and science of running routes, while hopefully adding value in the business realm.”

Colston is the founder of Marques Colston Enterprises, an executive coaching and development consulting firm, which empowers innovative organizations and growth-minded athletes, entrepreneurs and executives to unlock creativity and possibility to experience

sustainable professional success.

He has taught Entrepreneurship and Leadership to undergraduate students as an adjunct professor at the University of New Orleans. He will also teach a course in UNO’s sport business MBA concentration. In 2019, he received an honorary doctorate from UNO.

Colston’s presentation, “Keys to Unlocking Intentional Performance,” came via a sit-down talk with Pamela Kennett-Hensel, dean of UNO’s College of Business Administration. His visit was part of the Homer Hitt Presidential Lecture series held in the University Center’s ballroom.

During the interview, Colston shared that his successes and failures, both on and off the field, helped him develop the separation philosophy. As an NFL receiver, Colston said he had to develop an awareness of his strengths and weaknesses and to evaluate the same in an opponent.

He had to understand his role, his skillset, and his value as player.

Colston, who was a 7th-round NFL draft pick, was not projected

to fare well as a professional athlete. However, he is a Super Bowl champion, an inductee in the New Orleans Saints Hall of Fame and the sports hall of fame in both Pennsylvania and Louisiana. While playing for the New Orleans Saints, Colston was the all-time franchise leader in receptions, receiving yards and total touchdowns.

In business terms, creating separation involves putting

yourself in the best position to launch an initiative, performing effectively to reach goals, and being able to sustain that success and ultimately to continue to move the venture to higher levels, Colston said.

“Never stop innovating and never stop investing in your process,” Colston said. “To me, that is the key to sustainability. Your process has to evolve as you evolve.”



## MAMIE GASPERECZ IS NEW VICE PRESIDENT FOR BUSINESS AFFAIRS

MAMIE STERKX GASPERECZ is a historian at heart who has used her business sense to turn around a struggling New Orleans museum, teach financial literacy to student-athletes and help families reach savings goals. Gasperez, the new vice president for business affairs and chief financial officer at the University of New Orleans, says she is excited that her “eclectic” journey has returned her to the lakefront.

Gasperez, who has been praised for her exceptional leadership and management skills, brings a three-decade record of accomplishment of generating new revenue streams and forging partnerships in business and nonprofit environments. She arrived on campus March 1.

“I’m your enthusiastic outlier,” Gasperez says.

For the past five years, she has served as vice president for Gulf Coast Bank & Trust and secretary/treasurer for the Gulf Coast Bank & Trust Foundation. Prior to that, she spent a decade as the executive director of two French Quarter museums, the Hermann-Grima and Gallier Historic Houses. She holds a bachelor’s degree in history and an MBA from Loyola New Orleans.

Gasperez also spent three years as an adjunct instructor in UNO’s College of Business Administration from 2002 to 2005.

“My story is if I can work at the Hermann-Grima and Gallier Houses ... and make them money and grow their endowment significantly and balance the budget every year;

maybe (this) was the job for me,” Gasperez says with a laugh in reference to her nontraditional path to academia.

Working in New Orleans and serving on boards has given Gasperez an appreciation for UNO’s impact, she says. That revelation was brought home again during an icebreaker exercise at a New Orleans Chamber of Commerce board meeting when she announced her new position at UNO by saying her favorite color was “Privateer blue.”

“Every single person that followed me, around the room, had been to UNO at some time in their lives,” Gasperez says.

The key ingredients for her success include hard work and strategic connections, Gasperez says. She describes her role in keeping the University of New Orleans successful in culinary terms—back of house.

“We have to run efficiently so that the rest of the University can serve the students,” she says. “We are ‘back of house’ so to speak and that’s really critical.”

Growing up in Alexandria, Louisiana, Gasperez says her mother instilled in her a sense of duty for community service by example.

“The public service piece just came (naturally) to me. My mom was such a bright light,” Gasperez says. “That’s just one of those things like, ‘Of course, I’m going to do that.’”

She jokes about her family’s traditions, roots and longevity.

“I’m Southern, I’m Catholic, so that means I don’t actually own anything that wasn’t owned



by someone else and I can tell you how they died,” Gasperez says. “I’m the fifth Mamie.”

She was drawn to New Orleans for college because of its rich history and never left.

“I had an undergrad in history and a master’s in business. I went to work at The Historic New Orleans Collection working in the archives,” Gasperez says. “It was fascinating. I was an archivist!”

In the mid-80s, Gasperez’s career shifted to the banking industry and personal finance.

“I saw women advancing in the banking industry, so I did my homework to see what was going on and kind of fell into it,” she says. “Then I found what I loved doing—obviously charging people to keep their money for them—but helping them achieve their goals.”

Gasperez has been active in many local civic groups, including the Preservation Resource Center, the Louisiana Children’s Museum and Breakthrough New Orleans, and has been recognized throughout the city for her leadership and many achievements, including being named the YWCA Volunteer

*Mamie Gasperez, vice president for business affairs and chief financial officer at the University of New Orleans.*

of the Year, one of *New Orleans Magazine*’s “People to Watch” and a Young Leadership Council role model in 2021.

She has also served as the chair of the Vieux Carré Commission and as a Commissioner for the French Quarter Management District.

In a nod to her contributions, Gasperez was asked to remain on the board of the New Orleans Chamber of Commerce even after leaving her bank position for UNO.

She looks forward to being able to leverage her community connections into potential partnerships and collaborative efforts for the University, Gasperez says.

“I think sometimes a big head of gray hair and just a penchant for rolling up your sleeves and doing the work carries you far,” Gasperez says. “So, I’m fortunate to have those relationships to be able to figure out some new things that we can do.”

## THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS AND THE BEACH AT UNO ANNOUNCE FIRST COHORT OF WIND SCHOLARS

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans and The Beach at UNO have announced the inaugural cohort of the Louisiana Wind Energy Hub's Wind Scholars Program. These five engineering students will receive \$5,000 scholarships from The Beach's Innovation Fund for program-specific courses related to renewable energy and paid internships with industry-leading companies.

The applicants who were selected are: Elizabeth Donner (junior, civil engineering), Tamera Lepore (senior, naval architecture and marine engineering), Nahreen Mahmud (junior, electrical engineering),

Gazi Raihan (graduate, mechanical engineering) and Melanie Ros (junior, civil engineering).

The five scholars were introduced to members of the New Orleans City Council during a presentation in council chambers in September.

"Innovation in technology, policy support and economic development will provide a foundation for growth in the regional renewable energy sector," said Lizette Chevalier, dean of the Dr. Robert A. Savoie College of Engineering. "Our Wind Scholars will have an opportunity to launch their careers with support from both industry and our programs within the college,

which will make them well-prepared to enter the field."

The Wind Scholars will receive a paid internship offered by RWE, Entergy, Gulf Wind Technology, Edison Chouest Offshore or Keystone Engineering. The internships will last from the 2023 fall semester through the summer of 2024.

The Wind Scholars Program is grounded in UNO's ability to tailor a curriculum that suits the wind energy sector's demands. With leadership from the University and The Beach at UNO, and facilitation by GNO, Inc., the program emerged from roundtable discussions and curriculum reviews with

key industry leaders. These interactions were pivotal in packaging existing engineering courses, strategically turning a vision into a reality that aligns with the city, state and national climate action goals.

"This response to the workforce development needs in wind energy sector has the ability to become a foundational blueprint for academic and industry collaboration that ensures students have the skills they need for emerging industries across the spectrum," said Rebecca Conwell, president and CEO of The Beach at UNO.

According to the Department of Energy, the U.S. has the third largest offshore wind market capacity in the world. Over the next several years, the nation has plans to significantly increase its alternative energy production by installing wind farms in the Gulf of Mexico that will be able to power more than 1 million homes across the Gulf Coast.

The Louisiana Wind Energy Hub at UNO was launched in August 2022 with the goal of accelerating the growth of the state's wind energy innovation ecosystem. The hub fosters a collaborative ethos that supports emerging companies, spurs the development of novel technology and helps supply trained professionals to the rapidly growing renewable energy sector.

*New Orleans City Councilmembers JP Morrell (far left) and Helena Moreno (far right) congratulate the first cohort of Wind Scholars in council chambers.*



## UNO RESEARCHERS TO USE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO DETECT FLOOD CONTROL DEFICIENCIES

RESEARCHERS AT THE University of New Orleans want to use artificial intelligence to evaluate and detect potential deficiencies in the United States' floodwater control structures. The proposal includes the creation of an automated program using unmanned aerial system imagery and other sensory data to assess the integrity and stability of the nation's flood control systems.

The Joseph Canizaro and James Livingston Gulf States Center for Environmental Informatics (GulfSCEI, pronounced Gulfsea) at the University of New Orleans has secured a one-year contract worth \$1.25 million from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) for the research. The research will be performed jointly with USACE's domain experts.

As part of its national flood risk management plan, the USACE has planned, designed and

constructed over 700 dam and reservoir projects and more than 13,500 miles of federally authorized levees and floodwalls.

The greater New Orleans area faces a triple threat when it comes to sources of flood risk, the Mississippi River, rain and hurricane storm surge, according to the Corps.

The proposed research by UNO seeks to develop and deliver a modern, automated AI-based system to evaluate deficiencies—such as slope instability, cracks, sand boils or seepage—that could lead to the failure of flood control systems with disastrous results, says computer science professor Mahdi Abdelguerfi, who is also GulfSCEI director and the project's principal investigator.

"These processes are not easy to identify through manual and costly visual inspections before or during flood events," Abdelguerfi says. "This system will provide a solid framework for



USACE decision-makers, emergency planners and stakeholders in making rapid decisions, especially during times when our nation's flood control systems may be in jeopardy during flood events or when intense tropical storms are directly threatening the integrity of aging water resources infrastructure."

The USACE contract will fund a senior research associate, two postdoctoral research associates, three doctoral research assistants and four undergraduate research assistants. The grant comes with options for up to two additional

*UNO has been awarded a \$1.25 million grant from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to evaluate flood control systems.*

years of funding at a similar yearly level, Abdelguerfi says.

"This new USACE funding, coupled with an ongoing nearly \$2 million research contract from the Department of the Navy, will enable GulfSCEI to hire additional research staff and research assistants, thereby, greatly expanding the research footprint of the research center," Abdelguerfi says.

## STUDENTS TOUR SWAROVSKI FACTORY IN AUSTRIA

SEVENTY STUDENTS FROM the UNO-Innsbruck International Summer School had the opportunity to deal intensively with the topics of sustainability management and communication during a visit to the Swarovski factory in Wattens, Austria.

During the July visit, the students met with the head of production in Wattens, Herbert Schuler, and with Philipp Skal, head of the sustainable operations and products.

The students also were given a tour of the crystal glass company that's typically reserved for customers from the fashion and luxury goods industry as well as exclusive partners such as designers.



## GOOGLE EXECUTIVE SABRINA FARMER TO RECEIVE 2023 UNO HOMER HITT DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD



Sabrina Farmer



Avril Habetz

GOOGLE VICE PRESIDENT Sabrina Farmer will receive the 2023 University of New Orleans Homer L. Hitt Distinguished Alumni Award. Additionally, Avril Habetz, managing partner for Northwestern Mutual of Louisiana and Mississippi, has been named the 2023 Norma Jane Sabiston Distinguished Young Alumna of the Year.

Both will be celebrated at a gala, sponsored by Entergy and Google, at the National WWII Museum on Nov. 9.

Farmer is vice president of engineering at Google, where she is responsible for the resilience and performance of Google's largest consumer and enterprise products, including Ads, Search, Gmail, Android,

Maps and YouTube. She also oversees the various product infrastructure systems, including authentication, abuse and data analytics. She supervises a global team of 750 employees.

Farmer joined Google in 2005 and has nearly three decades of experience in production engineering. She is the founder of a global conference with USENIX—a nonprofit organization that supports advanced computing systems—focused on site reliability engineering. She has also contributed to two books on the subject.

A native of Marrero, La., Farmer earned a bachelor's degree in computer science from the University of New Orleans. A longtime advocate

for women in technology, she has developed programs focused on advancing women's careers and making the high-tech work environment more inclusive and flexible. A year after graduating, she founded the Scholarship for Women in Computer Science at UNO, which currently supports three students in the Department of Computer Science. She also provides mentoring to scholarship recipients.

Farmer will be the 40th honoree to receive the Homer L. Hitt Distinguished Alumni Award. The honoree is selected by a committee of former award recipients.

Avril Habetz leads Northwestern Mutual's team of financial professionals in Louisiana and Mississippi. She oversees

the market development of eight district offices in the two states. She began her career at Northwestern Mutual in 2007 as an executive assistant. Since then, she has assumed leadership positions including director of training and development, chief development officer, and district director for New Orleans.

She was promoted to managing partner of Louisiana and Mississippi in June 2023. Habetz has a bachelor's degree from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette and an MBA from the University of New Orleans.

The 2023 Homer L. Hitt Distinguished Alumni Gala will be held at the National WWII Museum: Boeing Freedom Pavilion.

## \$1.22 MILLION GIFT WILL MODERNIZE CHEMISTRY LABS

A \$1.22 MILLION GIFT FROM an anonymous donor will modernize University of New Orleans chemistry laboratories. This is the second such gift in the past five years.

In 2018, the same benefactor's \$1 million gift was used to upgrade a first round of chemistry labs and classrooms. The latest donation will be used to renovate an organic chemistry lab and a general chemistry lab in order to meet the 21st century learning needs of students.

"We are so appreciative of the ongoing generosity of our donor to provide cutting-edge laboratory experiences in our introductory and organic chemistry labs," says Steve Johnson, dean of the College of Sciences. "Coupled with outstanding instruction by chemistry graduate

students and staff, these students will be well-prepared for their future endeavors in the physical and life sciences."

The renovations and purchase of new equipment will be made with the goal of meeting the best practice standards recommended by the American Chemical Society. Improvements include ergonomically designed work areas as well as new lighting, washing stations, and chemically resistant bench tops and flooring.

Students can take advantage of state-of-the-art instruments, new storage areas and safety equipment with easy access to eye washes and safety showers. A lab prep and stockroom will also be renovated with new storage capability and improved workspace.



University of New Orleans students work in a chemistry lab that was modernized with a \$1 million gift from an anonymous donor. Five years later, the same donor has given \$1.22 million for additional labs to be upgraded.



## PONTCHARTRAIN INSTITUTE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES RECEIVES \$568K BOARD OF REGENTS GRANT

SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN 2001, the focus of the University of New Orleans Pontchartrain Institute for Environmental Sciences (PIES) has been on addressing coastal and environmental issues. A three-year, \$568,000 grant for the Louisiana Board of Regents will help PIES be better suited to tackle problems facing coastal communities in New Orleans and elsewhere by providing state of the art instrumentation and equipment.

“Our coastal communities are increasingly vulnerable to rising sea level, storm surge, land loss, declining fisheries resources, habitat loss and pollutants,” says Robert Mahon, assistant professor of earth and

environmental sciences and the principal investigator for the grant. “PIES faculty have individual expertise spanning these threats, and we strive to pull our expertise together in one cohesive network to thrust PIES into a multidisciplinary future.”

The primary mission of the Pontchartrain Institute is to assist in dealing with the region’s environmental and infrastructure challenges by fostering interactions among professionals with expertise in basic and applied environmental research, including those skilled in environmental management, social sciences and planning, Mahon says.

The new equipment completely revamps and modern-

izes PIES’ field and laboratory resources allowing them to address critical and timely problems facing Louisiana’s Gulf Coast regions and beyond, he says.

“We will establish a real-time monitoring network at eight sites across Lake Pontchartrain and Lake Borgne, which will provide hourly, public data via satellite and cellular networks on wave conditions and water temperatures, as well as a variety of water quality and fisheries acoustics data,” Mahon says.

The grant also will allow for the first major coordinated effort across the interdisciplinary PIES team that now includes nine faculty members from

*UNO’s Shea Penland Coastal Education and Research Facility (CERF) on Chef Menteur Pass is the site for many Pontchartrain Institute for Environmental Sciences outreach activities.*

four different academic departments, Mahon says.

The grant’s co-principal investigators are earth and environmental sciences professors Madeline Foster-Martinez, Mark Kulp, and Martin O’Connell, biological sciences professors Kelly Boyle and T. Erin Cox, chemistry professor David Podgorski, and civil and environmental engineering professors Gianna Cothren and Satish Bastola.

## NEW HOSPITALITY FACILITY AND TRACK & FIELD STADIUM AMONG APPROVED STATE-FUNDED CAPITAL PROJECTS

A \$6 MILLION HOSPITALITY facility and a \$13 million track and field stadium for the University of New Orleans are among the state-funded capital projects approved in June by the Louisiana legislature and Gov. John Bel Edwards.

The University will also receive \$5.3 million to replace and repair roofs on a number of campus buildings. The projects will be funded through general obligation bonds and the capital outlay savings fund.

The new state-of-the-art hospitality facility will be the home of the renowned Lester E. Kabacoff School of Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Administration. Located next to the Homer Hitt Alumni & Visitors Center, with second-story views of Lake Pontchartrain, the facility will be used for teaching and hands-on training in the field of hospitality management. It will feature a production kitchen and demonstration lab, hotel lobby teaching space, a beverage lab, flexible classroom space, a multi-purpose dining room and

an exterior patio.

UNO offers both a bachelor's degree in hotel, restaurant and tourism administration and a master's degree in hospitality and tourism management.

The University has already raised \$1 million in private funds for the hospitality facility. The state's 2023-24 budget includes first-year money for the planning phase of the project, with construction expected to begin in year two.

"We are thrilled about our new hospitality facility; the Kabacoff School is well-known for its cutting-edge curriculum, and this will provide the necessary infrastructure to take the program to new heights," says Pam Kennett-Hensel, dean of the College of Business Administration. "The hospitality industry is critically important to the state's economy, and the Kabacoff School plays an essential role in educating leaders in the field."

The new track and field stadium will be a transformative facility for the University's intercollegiate athletics program,

as well as an asset to be enjoyed by local K-12 schools and community members. The facility will occupy the green space on campus at the corner of Leon C. Simon Boulevard and Elysian Fields Avenue. It will feature a 9-lane track, soccer-size field, an array of field sports spaces, fieldhouse, grandstands and a press box.

It will allow the University's NCAA Division I track and field program to host home meets, which is not currently possible. The facility will be used to host state and metro New Orleans high school meets and New Orleans Recreation Development Commission meets. Residents of the the University's Gently neighborhood will also be able to use the track, thereby promoting greater levels of physical fitness in the community.

"Although we still have some work to do to bring it to life, the new Privateer Track will provide our teams with a phenomenal home base to train and compete," says Tim Duncan, vice president for athletics and rec-

reation. "As #NOLAsTeam, we will be proud to host events in conjunction with our neighbors at Ben Franklin High School, the new Hynes-UNO Charter School and others to continue to positively influence the Gently community and beyond."

As a priority five capital outlay project with no first-year funding for design and planning included in the 2023-24 state budget, it will be up to state lawmakers in future years to dedicate funding to the track project in order for it to be built.

**BOTTOM, LEFT:** The new state-of-the-art hospitality facility will be the home of the renowned Lester E. Kabacoff School of Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Administration. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** The track facility will occupy the green space on campus at the corner of Leon C. Simon Boulevard and Elysian Fields Avenue. It will feature a 9-lane track, soccer-size field, an array of field sports spaces, fieldhouse, grandstands and a press box.



## NEW ONLINE GRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMS FOCUS ON WORKING ADULTS

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans has announced a partnership with Academic Partnerships (AP) to support the expansion of its online portfolio of graduate degree programs. UNO will launch six online graduate programs designed to meet the needs of working adults looking for an alternative to traditional on-campus education.

The University of New Orleans will offer programs in the College of Business Administration, the Dr. Robert A. Savoie College of Engineering, and the College of Liberal Arts, Education and Human Development.

With classes starting in January 2024, the following programs will be offered in 8-week courses and can be completed in as little as one year:

- Master of Science in Engineering Management
- Master of Science in Hospitality and Tourism Management Executive Track
- Master of Science in Tax Accounting
- Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction
- Master of Education in Educational Leadership (K-12)
- Master of Education in Higher Education Administration

“We are excited to team up with Academic Partnerships. Together we will build on our shared mission of providing high-quality education in an affordable way,” says Darrell Kruger, provost and senior vice president for academic affairs. “As one of Louisiana’s most diverse universities, we continue to be focused on meeting our students where they are. By offering our programs in a more accessible format, we will be better able to serve our local community, Louisiana and beyond.”

The University of New Orleans is a public metropolitan research university committed to providing educational excellence to a diverse undergraduate and graduate student body. The University is one of the region’s foremost public resources, offering a variety of world-class, research-based programs, advancing shared knowledge, and adding to the region’s industry, culture and economy.

UNO has been repeatedly recognized as one of top 50 national universities whose students graduate with the least average debt.

Helping to support this affordable and quality delivery model is Academic Partnerships, a leading online facilitator based in Dallas, Texas. AP is a partner to more than 55 universities across the country, primarily regional public universities, helping those institutions expand access to high-quality, affordable and workforce-relevant education.

“AP is proud to partner with the University of New Orleans to expand their online programs,” says Fernando Bleichmar, CEO of Academic Partnerships. “We are especially looking forward to helping launch the programs in education. As school districts across Louisiana face devastating teacher shortages, UNO is working hard to make their education programs more accessible to the working teacher, in an affordable way. These programs will have a meaningful impact on the community, and we are excited to partner with UNO to make this a reality.”

The first cycle of classes begins Jan. 8, 2024, with an application deadline of Dec. 18, 2023.

## news in brief

### Sport Business MBA and Expanded Business Concentration

Master of Business Administration students at UNO are now able to pursue a concentration in sport business. The new cluster of courses, introduced this fall, is ideal for students who are interested in working at the intersection of sports and business.

In addition, UNO has expanded its business degree course offerings to include a new management concentration in supply chain, operations and logistics (ScOL) aimed at meeting the demand for professionals with such expertise.

### UNO Counseling Student Awarded Military Scholarship

Jen LeCompte, a student in the University of New Orleans counselor education master’s program, has been selected for a military scholarship through the National Board for Certified Counselors. The scholarship was created to increase the number of counselors available to serve military personnel and families.

LeCompte, who serves in the Coast Guard Reserves, wants to use the \$8,000 scholarship to help bring more awareness to the prevalence and treatment options for military sexual trauma.



Jen LeCompte

### UNO Students Selected For UL System's Scholar Leadership Program

University of New Orleans students Eian Bailey of LaPlace, La., and Joshua Joubert of Lake Charles, La., have been selected for the University of Louisiana System’s Reginald F. Lewis Scholars program.

Each year, 18 rising sophomores are chosen based on academic merit, financial need and demonstrated leadership skills.



Joshua Joubert



Eian Bailey

### UNO's Native Plant Garden Earns Habitat Certification

Another University of New Orleans native plant garden has been designated by the Native Plant Initiative of Greater New Orleans (NPIGNO) as a certified habitat. The designation recognizes the University for preserving and promoting the state’s natural heritage via native plant gardens which benefit wildlife and natural ecosystems.



# FACULTY FOCUS



## UNO RESEARCHERS CREATING VIRTUAL TRAINING TOOLS FOR WIND TURBINES REPAIR

WITH A GROWING NUMBER of wind energy developments proposed for Louisiana, and with companies in the state having had a hand in the creation of the first commercial offshore wind farm in the United States, University of New Orleans researchers want to ensure there is a trained labor force for the burgeoning market.

University of New Orleans chemistry professor Matt Tarr has received a nearly \$285,000 grant from the Louisiana Board of Regents to create mixed reality training tools for wind turbine inspection and repair.

"The tools we are creating will be used for training offshore wind turbine technicians," Tarr says. "The project will aid in workforce development and improved training programs to support the developing offshore wind industry in Louisiana."

U.S. wind electricity generation has grown from 0.1% of total electric generation in 1990 to 380 billion kilowatt-hours, over 9% of total utility-scale

electric generation, Tarr says. Wind energy represents a growth sector and Louisiana is well positioned to develop the sector, he says.

The first commercial offshore wind farm in Block Island, Rhode Island was made possible by Louisiana companies, including those performing vessel manufacturing, blade testing and design, lift boat design and engineering, and others, Tarr says.

Despite these assets in Louisiana, the design, manufacturing and repair of large-scale blades for offshore turbines face numerous technical challenges. New tools are needed to develop and evaluate manufacturing and repair processes as well as to train workers in these areas, Tarr says.

"This project will create extended reality tools that will allow more rapid manufacturing design and testing, more efficient training of workers, and more reliable in-field repairs for blades and other wind turbine components,"

Tarr says. "The extended reality training technology developed in this project will not only provide direct support for the growing offshore wind industry, but it will also create business and job opportunities for other advanced manufacturing sectors and the extended reality training industry."

Extended reality encompasses virtual and mixed reality tools, which utilize video imagery in a headset or glasses that provide a realistic, immersive environment, Tarr says. Mixed reality is a blend of the real world with virtual objects.

"We will use mixed reality to provide training scenarios that are realistic and utilize physical tools, like screwdrivers, while allowing addition of visual elements that don't exist, such as a view of the ocean from 300 feet above it and damage superimposed on a real turbine blade," Tarr says.

UNO researchers are working with Louisiana renewables company Gulf Wind Technology and the physical set for



*University of New Orleans chemistry professor Matt Tarr wants to ensure there is a labor force ready to inspect and repair wind turbines.*

developing virtual training will be located at their site in the Avondale Global Gateway, Tarr says.

"We already have the physical elements of the training tool in place and are starting on virtual imagery creation now," Tarr says. "Top Right Corner, a local virtual reality solutions company, is partnering with us for the virtual components."

## ENGINEERING PROFESSOR ELNAZ SAFAPOUR WANTS TO HELP RURAL COMMUNITIES WITH STORM RECOVERY PLANS

IN THE LAST DECADE ALONE, south Louisiana has been hit by five hurricanes, leaving in their wake millions of dollars in property damage and an immeasurable emotional toll. In the aftermath of a hurricane, the priority for decision makers is to return the affected community to its pre-disaster level of functioning.

University of New Orleans civil engineering professor Elnaz Safapour, whose research includes disaster risk management and the recovery of vulnerable communities, wants to help communities assess and improve their storm recovery plans.

Safapour has been awarded a \$160,000 grant from the Louisiana Board of Regents to develop a best practice proto-

col for pre-and post-hurricane recovery activities.

“Recovery is a complex process further complicated by a given community’s vulnerability to hazards and disasters—and rural communities are particularly vulnerable,” says Safapour, who has been involved in different federal and state research projects on various construction and reconstruction topics, including critical infrastructure resilience.

Rural communities normally struggle with challenges and limitations even before a disaster, preventing the affected rural areas from successfully recovering from hurricanes in a timely manner, Safapour says.

According to 2021 Louisiana population estimates, 724,014

out of 4.6 million people live in rural communities consisting of families with low-income, Safapour says.

“Many rural communities have serious challenges year-round and grapple with financial, social, environmental and educational issues, even outside the impacts of a disaster,” she says.

As part of her research, Safapour plans to collect data from people who live in rural areas and were affected by Hurricane Ida, a Category 4 storm that brought 150 mph winds as it ravaged many rural Louisiana parishes in 2021.

Her research will also include interviews and data from decision makers and project managers who were actively in-



*Elnaz Safapour*

involved in the recovery processes of rural areas damaged by Ida.

“Our project aims to improve the adaptability and resiliency of rural communities that may be affected by hurricanes,” she says. “This research project is going to minimize the consequences of hurricanes and speed up the recovery process in affected rural areas.”

Safapour says she plans to develop a decision-support system, including an integrated plan for short-term recovery before a hurricane, for decision-makers, authorities and project managers who are responsible for post-hurricane recovery of affected rural areas.

“This decision-support system will help practitioners and project managers prioritize activities and allocation of resources for the success and effectiveness of the post-hurricane recovery process,” Safapour says.

*LEFT: Hurricane Ida caused flooding and wind damage when it came ashore in 2021.*



## ENGINEERING PROFESSOR NIKOLAS XIROS' RESEARCH WILL HELP CONVERT WATER CURRENTS TO ELECTRICAL POWER

UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans engineering professor Nikolas Xiros imagines the impact his hydrokinetic energy research could have on a Louisiana coastal town whose electrical power grid has been decimated by a hurricane.

Xiros, whose expertise lies within the fields of marine and electromechanical systems engineering, is working on a system that will help convert vibrations from water currents into electricity.

"After the hurricane, if they don't have power, maybe they can use this technology to have power until the power from the grid is restored," says Xiros, who also is chair of UNO's Bollinger School of Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering and a professor of electrical and computer engineering.

Xiros has been contracted by Vortex Hydro Energy to create a Power Take Off (PTO) system that will be able to harness the power created by a device called the vortexed induced vibration for aquatic clean energy or VIVACE.

Researchers at the University of Michigan have developed the hydrodynamic part of the system, while Xiros' task centers on designing a system to efficiently harness the electrical power created by the oscillatory motion of the VIVACE.

Xiros' research and

teaching activities encompass marine and ocean engineering process modeling and simulation, system identification, dynamics and control, reliability, signal, and data analysis with emphasis on propulsion, power, energy and renewables.

Researchers say the VIVACE converter can be placed in a river or ocean current to extract hydrokinetic energy from moving water and convert it into useable energy, such as electricity. The idea for the VIVACE is rooted in the naturally occurring vortex induced vibrations (VIV), a problem that engineers typically try to mitigate, Xiros says.

VIV are the resulting oscillating motions that a cylinder-shaped object makes

when placed in moving water. The cylinder causes vortices to form—think of water swirling around a basin as it drains—resulting in the cylinder moving up and down or side to side.

A well-known example of the negative impact of vortex induced vibrations is illustrated in the collapse of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge in Washington in 1940, Xiros says.

The suspension bridge, known as Galloping Gertie, was built to be flexible

and was known to sway in the wind. However, it collapsed just five months after completion due to vibration induced vortices that caused it to sway wildly and eventually break apart.

"You had a pattern of vorti-

ces in the wake downstream of the flow and that caused those oscillations," Xiros says. "In most cases VIV is a curse."

However, Xiros' colleague, Michael Bernitsas, an engineering professor at the University of Michigan, decided to turn the vexing problem into a positive.

"He said, 'OK, where there is a challenge, there is also an opportunity. What if I designed a system that is actually harvesting this energy and using it to produce electricity?'"

The VIVACE converter is an oscillating cylinder system that Michigan researchers have developed to create a VIV current.

Xiros' Take Off System will be attached to the VIVACE and used to convert oscillatory motion into electricity.

"We're harvesting some of this huge energy by using our Power Take Off System," Xiros says. "The benefits for community resilience are they can have power even if the grid is down.

"Also, this is a renewable energy source that we can use even if the grid is available to generate power without any harmful effects to the environment."

*The Tacoma Narrows Bridge collapse in Washington was the result of vortex induced vibrations (VIV). Researchers say VIV can be converted into useable energy.*



Nikolas Xiros





Researchers release fluorescent sand pellets off the shoreline in Lafourche Parish, Louisiana.

## EARTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES PROFESSOR MARK KULP TRACKS GRAINS OF SAND FOR COASTAL RESTORATION PROJECTS

WHILE FINDING THE proverbial needle in a haystack might be difficult, University of New Orleans earth and environmental sciences professor Mark Kulp and his research team have enlisted technology to help them with an equally daunting task—tracking grains of sand.

The sand that the team is tracking is used in coastal restoration projects to help combat land loss and provides a buffer to reduce the force of storm surge that can lead to flooding and other harmful environmental impacts.

The team's research in tracking the movement of such sand could help determine the best location for placing sediment in future restoration plans.

"The whole idea is to be more effective and efficient in the money and the effort we are spending on these beach 'renourishment' projects," Kulp says.

Kulp is the UNO principal investigator for a \$108,728 grant from The Water Institute of

the Gulf, funded through the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority on a yearlong project to trace and

analyze sediment movement on the westernmost barriers of Lafourche Parish.

The goal of that \$70 million restoration project, according to state officials, is to create and nourish more than 300 acres of marsh,

dune and beach along a 7-mile shoreline to reduce the impacts of storm events. The project added 9.2 million cubic yards of sediment to protect endangered and protected migratory species and critical infrastructures, including Port Fourchon and Highway 1, a vital hurricane evacuation route for Fourchon and Grand Isle.

The Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) is responsible for operating projects that restore, create, enhance and maintain coastal wetlands in the state. As part of that oversight, CPRA periodically evaluates sediment

dynamics to determine project success and ecosystem sustainability, Kulp says.

UNO researchers, led by Kulp, will analyze the sediment transport trends along the western Caminada Headland between West Belle Pass and Raccoon Pass in Lafourche Parish using 'ecotracer' pellets—fluorescent grains of sand.

Sand can go in a number of different directions, Kulp says. It can be transported offshore, it might be transported along the beach in the wave or surf zone, or it can be transported high upon the beach during a major storm and become stranded in the dunes or elsewhere, Kulp says.

To figure out how an individual sand grain is transported, researchers employ a technique called particle tracing using fluorescent replicates. The fabricated pellets are replicas of real grains of sand, except they are fluorescent.

"You want that particle to be just like the regular sand in terms of density and size and other characteristics," Kulp says.

Samples of sand were taken from several locations in the area prior to the spreading of

hundreds of kilograms of the fluorescent ecotracer pellets, Kulp says.

"We've done two sediment sampling efforts already. Once hurricane season is over, we will do another one at the end of the year," Kulp says.

"Basically, we'll have four different sample sets over the course of a year-and-a-half to indicate how these particles moved around this particular part of the coast."

The samples will be sent to a company that specializes in analyzing sand grains, Kulp says. Researchers expect to create a final report by next spring.

"Once we know where those fluorescent particles are moving to along the shoreline, then we can make some interpretations about how the sediment is being transported," Kulp says. "What that means for restoration projects is that maybe we learn we shouldn't have put so much sand at this location because the sand gets transported way offshore. Or, if we put it here, it stays in the system and actually helps rebuild the beach more effectively."



Mark Kulp

## UNO RESEARCHERS SEEK TO ANSWER: ARE RECREATIONAL ANGLERS AT RISK FROM SEAFOOD CONSUMPTION?

UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans biologist Erin Cox and her students are delving into the depths of the northern Gulf of Mexico and fishing for answers that could impact a popular south Louisiana past time—recreational fishing. Their research will explore the levels of potentially harmful pollutants in fish caught by recreational anglers.

Cox's research expertise is in coastal benthic organisms, which are the animals and plants that live on the sea floor. Her lab received a \$3,000 undergraduate research grant to study the tissues of 14 fish species from artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico.

Cox is collaborating with UNO biological sciences professor Kelly Boyle and chemistry professor Phoebe Zito, who are mentoring students in fish biology and chemistry.

Arsenic, mercury, copper, chromium, cobalt, lead, manganese and zinc are examples of common metals present in the environment which are known to negatively impact aquatic and human health. Although they occur naturally in the earth's crust, anthropogenic activities such as mining, industrial wastewater and agriculture can release high concentration of heavy metals into the environment.

These metals often enter the water through runoff and are carried by rivers to the coast, eventually entering the ocean. Heavy metals can also enter the water through the atmosphere, in a process called atmospheric deposition.

One of the main risks

associated with fish consumption is the presence of mercury and other heavy metals. Heavy metals, like mercury, can build up in our bodies over time. The consumption of high concentrations of heavy metals can lead to delays in development and cognitive impairments in young children.

In both children and adults, health issues of the central nervous and cardiovascular systems have been reported due to heavy metal toxicity. Heavy metals such as arsenic can cause cancer and are toxic in very small concentrations.

"This research will provide a comprehensive analysis of the risk of recreational anglers to harmful trace element pollutants when consuming fishery species from northern Gulf of Mexico artificial reefs," says Cox.

Fish were collected from artificial reefs about 35 feet off the coast of Orange Beach, Alabama and researchers plan to get additional fish from Grand Isle, Louisiana, Cox says.

The students will examine differences in trace element concentrations in fish tissues by species, and for juvenile and adult sizes in species such as red and gray snapper, hardhead catfish and gray triggerfish, Cox says.

The students are seeking to answer three main questions:

Whether fish targeted by recreation anglers have greater concentrations of trace element pollutants in their muscle tissues than non-target species?

Do targeted fishery species of legal harvest size have greater concentrations of trace element pollutants in muscle tissues



than those of non-legal size?

Do trace element concentrations in liver or muscles differ and does one tissue type seem to be a better indicator of bioaccumulation?

Once the undergraduates complete their research, the results will be analyzed to determine how fish movement, integration and trophic position influence the bioaccumulation and biomagnification of pollutants in their tissue.

*UNO students Haley Beaulieu and Emalee Swisshelm dissect fish in in biologist Erin Cox's laboratory to analyze the level of potentially harmful pollutants.*

## SCIENCE EDUCATOR DINAH MAYGARDEN NAMED AN URBAN CONSERVANCY 2023 URBAN HERO

UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans researcher and science educator Dinah Maygarden has been named one of The Urban Conservancy's 2023 Urban Heroes. The annual award recognizes individuals for their role in creating a more vibrant and resilient New Orleans.

Maygarden, research associate and science education program director at UNO's Pontchartrain Institute for Environmental Sciences, was honored and celebrated during an awards luncheon on Oct. 6 at the Lakefront Airport's Walnut Room.

The Urban Conservancy's Urban Heroes Celebration aims to highlight the progress as a community to promote

equitable access to New Orleans' and the region's rich economic, environmental and cultural assets.

Since 1997, Maygarden has worked at UNO implementing educational projects for K-12 and adult audiences in New Orleans to connect students to the coastal zone in which they live. She brings real-world relevant science problems to teachers, students and adult learners.

Maygarden hosts field-based workshops for these audiences at UNO's Shea Penland Coastal Education and Research Facility (CERF) and elsewhere. She also develops partnerships with many community organizations to enhance the impact of and fund these programs.



*Dinah Maygarden is a research associate and science education program director at UNO's Pontchartrain Institute for Environmental Sciences.*

## COMPUTER SCIENCE PROFESSOR ATRIYA SEN AWARDED NSF GRANT FOR AI RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans computer science assistant professor Atriya Sen has been awarded a two-year, \$175,000 National Science Foundation grant to develop artificial intelligence (AI) techniques for biodiversity science, in collaboration with biologists at Arizona State University.

Sen's research will employ AI to help predict population decline of certain biological species. He proposed this project to the NSF with UNO doctoral student Rasha Alshawi.

Human-caused extinctions of biological species are accelerating rapidly. However, substantial uncertainty is often

involved in predicting the extinction or population decline of species, even considering high-resolution information, Sen says. Flux in taxonomic classification is a key factor that is controversial for its impact on biodiversity conservation and policy decisions, Sen says.

"Artificial intelligence incorporating this taxonomic factor has the potential to provide novel insights into extinction risk, by projecting different contingent outcomes for distributions/extinction risks under different taxonomic perspectives," Sen says.

Developing an accurate and scalable AI for taxonomic intel-

ligence will also be crucial to downstream computational reasoning for testing the robustness of conservation decision-making considering conflicting or uncertain taxonomies, which can be in itself sufficient to move a group of organisms in or out of consideration for legal protection as an endangered group, Sen says.

"As more nations and organizations launch biodiversity monitoring projects, coordinating these decentralized efforts will pose a major challenge that exceeds any foreseeable capacity of humans to address without assistance from AI," Sen says.



*Atriya Sen*

## BIOLOGIST WENDY SCHLUCHTER RECEIVES A NEARLY \$750K DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY RESEARCH GRANT

UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans biology professor Wendy Schluchter has received a nearly \$750,000 Department of Energy grant to study and deconstruct the fluorescent pigmentation process of photosynthetic microbes called cyanobacteria, once referred to as blue green algae.

The deciphered details of that pigmentation process,

Schluchter says, could be used to track proteins in order to study various diseases in mice models and in cultures of human cells, or that could be used to engineer increased biofuel production by cyanobacteria.

Schluchter, chair of UNO's biological sciences department, has been awarded a three-year, \$749,930 DOE grant to further her research.

Cyanobacteria are found in all types of environments and play a critical role in the global carbon cycle, Schluchter says. They also are a source for biofuels, a more environmentally-friendly fuel source.

These organisms harvest light using huge antenna complexes composed of specific proteins carrying pigments that give them brilliant colors

from orange, pink, purple and blue. The ability to change pigment also changes the wavelengths of light available for photosynthesis, Schluchter says. Most organisms are competing for available light.

This project will study a subset of the bilin lyase enzymes that are responsible for the extensive pigment diversity of cyanobacteria, contribut-

ria and trying to characterize the enzymes required to add pigments to these proteins," Schluchter says. "We are going to study a unique set of these enzymes and try and solve the structure of these enzymes to understand the biochemistry of the pigment ligation reaction."

Schluchter, the principal investigator on the research,

will travel to UIC to learn techniques in protein structure determination and analysis.

"The mechanistic understanding to be gained from this research will lay the groundwork for designing artificial photosynthetic light harvesting systems that can be used for applications such as biofuel production," Schluchter says. "And it will

set the stage for developing tool enzymes for fluorescent protein production that can be used in all types of biomedical research to study disease processes."

Phycocerythrin is the specific protein that Schluchter is studying. It's currently being used as a versatile and stable fluorescent protein with many research applications, she says.

"Our research may eventually allow it to be synthesized inside human

cells to 'tag' any protein we want to study in the cells and follow it due to its fluorescent properties," Schluchter says. "Often when studying diseases, we find out that many proteins are not trafficked properly in cells. They accumulate where they aren't supposed to be, so having this technology will allow us to track proteins in cells."



*Wendy Schluchter holds the University of New Orleans Eurofins chair in molecular biology and is professor and chair of the biological sciences department.*

ing to their wide adaptability to various light and nutrient environments from land to ocean.

"I'm studying a group of proteins that harvest light for photosynthesis in cyanobacte-

is working with University of Illinois at Chicago professor Xiaojing Yang, a structural biologist, on the project.

Schluchter's Ph.D. student, Xindi Liu, who is in UNO's integrative biology program,

# UNO'S URBAN ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND POLICY INSTITUTE RECEIVES \$2 MILLION GRANT TO STUDY HOW TO IMPROVE HIGH SCHOOL FINANCIAL LITERACY PROGRAMS

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans' Urban Entrepreneurship and Policy Institute has been awarded a three-year, \$2 million grant from the John Templeton Foundation to examine the impact of high school financial education courses and to design more effective courses based on their findings.

Several states, including Louisiana, have passed laws that require high school students to complete a financial education course in order to graduate. However, little research has been done to examine how effective these courses are at helping students acquire the relevant knowledge and skills, says Chris Surprenant, professor of ethics, strategy, and public policy, and director of UNO's Urban Entrepreneurship and Policy Institute.

Surprenant; Gregory Price, economics and finance professor; and Marques Colston, former New Orleans Saints wide receiver and entrepreneur-in-residence at UNO's Urban Entrepreneurship and Policy Institute, are spearheading the research.

As part of their research, a pilot program is underway at McDonogh 35 High School in New Orleans called, "Dollars to Dreams," that will aim to teach students financial education through the process of starting and operating a business.

"Most of the students are already running businesses—they're cooking food, designing clothes, braiding hair, etc.," Surprenant says. "We're using their existing business and business experience as a starting point for the course."

In Louisiana, Gov. John Bel

Edwards recently signed HB 103, which will require all high school students to take a course in financial literacy to earn a diploma.

"Legislators are passing these laws with the right intentions," Surprenant says. "We do a disservice to high school students if they graduate without understanding basic concepts like interest and interest rates, how credit cards work, or how to contest a bill or charge. But data we collected during and after the pandemic suggests that high school students may not learn much in these classes, at least how they're being taught right now."

Price agrees. He says their initial findings suggested that students may acquire the relevant knowledge and skills connected to financial literacy better through the process of starting and operating a business than through a more traditional classroom setting.

"We all agree that students need to learn these things," Price says. "But we should figure out how best to structure these courses before automatically treating them like any other class."

To test that hypothesis, Colston and Surprenant have launched "Dollars to Dreams," an entrepreneurship and financial education program where participating students are eligible to receive dual-enrollment college credit through the University of New Orleans.

"The program is an opportunity to create a new paradigm," says Colston, who has taught Leadership and Entrepreneurship as an adjunct professor at UNO. He has worked with Sur-

prenant and Price over the past two years to identify possible problems with current financial education courses and how they can be addressed.

"The 'Dollars to Dreams' program goes beyond teaching numbers and budgets and aims to foster a mindset of possibilities," Colston says. "We believe connecting financial education with entrepreneurship and business ownership can empower students with essential knowledge and experience to seize their futures."

Colston, Surprenant and Wayne Encalarde, former director of Small Business Growth and Ecosystem Development at the New Orleans Business Alliance, are piloting "Dollars to Dreams" at McDonogh 35 High School, which is part of the InspireNOLA Charter Schools system. Encalarde will teach the daily course, with assistance from Colston and Surprenant.

"InspireNOLA and McDonogh 35 scholars are elated to start this opportunity," says Jamar McKneely, CEO of InspireNOLA Charter Schools. "Numerous McDonogh 35 scholars are starting their own businesses or want to start their own businesses, and they all need to learn how to make smart financial decisions. This is a wonderful opportunity for them, and we hope to expand this program to all InspireNOLA schools."

Surprenant says they plan to expand the program to other schools in spring 2024 and for the 2024-2025 academic year.

"We're thankful for the support of the John Templeton Foundation and are looking for additional school partners for the



*UNO professors Chris Surprenant (above) and Gregory Price (top) along with Marques Colston, former New Orleans Saints player and entrepreneur-in-residence at UNO, will teach and examine the impact of high school financial education courses.*

coming academic years," Surprenant says. "In a few years, all Louisiana high school students will be required to take a course in this area. This new requirement should benefit the students of Louisiana, and we hope to help train educators teaching these courses so that they can have the greatest possible impact in the classroom."

For more information on Dollars to Dreams, including how to partner with Surprenant and Colston, please visit [dollarstodreams.org](http://dollarstodreams.org).

## MELLON FOUNDATION AWARDS UNO \$750K FOR COLLABORATIVE PUBLIC HUMANITIES PROJECT

A \$750,000 GRANT FROM the Mellon Foundation will help fund a collaborative humanities effort among the University of New Orleans' Midlo Center for New Orleans Studies, The Neighborhood Story Project and the Justice Studies Ph.D. Program.

The three-year grant comes through the Mellon Foundation's Higher Learning program, which aims to broaden understanding of American history and culture.

"What's most exciting is that the Mellon Foundation recognizes and values the spirit of collaboration we share with one other and with the community," says history professor Mary Niall Mitchell, who is director of the Ethel and Herman L. Midlo Center for New Orleans Studies.

Engaging the rich history and culture of the city of New Orleans and its surrounding communities, the humanities collaborative project will include the development of public humanities programming both on and off campus. It will support courses that invite community-

based scholars to co-teach with faculty, promote experiential learning and collaborative research in the field, and offer participants the opportunity to attend conferences and develop cultural exchanges.

The collaboration will also build on UNO's strong record of public-facing programming, exhibits and work in the digital humanities.

The Midlo Center, established in 1991, serves as an incubator and support system for new research on New Orleans, particularly work in the service of social justice and civil rights. It has developed a large network of community partners, among them, social justice organizations, local museums and universities, cultural institutions, archives, public libraries and educators.

The Mellon grant will fund the hiring of a full-time program manager for the Midlo Center who will also facilitate collaboration among Midlo, the Neighborhood Story Project,

and Justice Studies. The program manager will support the work of student-community partnerships (including on-going work with Whitney Plantation Museum, The Descendants Project, The New Orleans Workers Center for Racial Justice, Plessy and Ferguson Initiative, and Grow Dat Youth Farm), promote the Center's public humanities work citywide and connect projects from all three UNO entities.

In addition, the grant will fund a part-time digital specialist who will support digital humanities engagement and content, provide technical expertise and help link the Midlo Center with other campus units, particularly those working with associate director Ryan Gray on projects devoted to cultural heritage management and environmental justice.

"The Mellon grant will strengthen support for our community partnerships, which join UNO with the city it serves. And it will create more opportunities for our students to engage in

experiential learning, to develop new bodies of public humanities scholarship alongside our partners, and to share that work with the public," Mitchell says.

The Neighborhood Story Project, housed in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology since 2005, has a long track record of producing collaborative ethnographies with neighborhoods and community-based organizations of New Orleans and broader region.

Two of the goals of the Neighborhood Story Project, with support from the Mellon Grant, are to establish a residency program and support community-based scholars in the classroom and in the long-term ethnography,

*A grant from the Mellon Foundation will help fund a collaborative public humanities effort among UNO's Midlo Center, the Neighborhood Story Project and the Justice Studies Ph.D. Program. Rachel Breunlin (below right) is the director of the Neighborhood Story Project.*



*Botanica*, says Rachel Breunlin, faculty member in the UNO Department of Anthropology and Sociology and director of the Neighborhood Story Project.

Through a three-year residency program, the Neighborhood Story Project will focus on developing a new collaborative ethnography with artist-scholar Monique Verdin and her organization, the Land Memory Bank and Seed Exchange. In 2019, the Neighborhood Story Project produced and published Verdin's book, *Return to Yakni Chitto: Houma Migrations*.

"With Mellon's support, we will collaborate on *Botanica*, a collaborative ethnography that will pull together storytellers, scholars, herbalists, artists and gardeners to cross-pollinate knowledge of historical and contemporary gardens and natural environments in south Louisiana," Breunlin says. The research will lead to an exhibit at the Louisiana State Museum's Cabildo in the spring of 2024 and a book with the University of New Orleans Press.

Established in 2020, the Ph.D. program in Justice Studies fosters interdisciplinary, collaborative, community-engaged scholarship. The program's creation offers UNO faculty and students the chance to explore innovative and vital humanities research at the doctoral level, in the service of social justice in New Orleans, says historian Max Krochmal, director of the doctoral justice studies program at UNO.

The Mellon Grant will fund the creation of a part-time program coordinator position,

provide research and travel grants to students as well as collaborative teams of students, faculty members and community partners, and support a lecture series and other public programming, Krochmal says. In the final year of the grant, Mellon support will underwrite a post-doctoral fellowship with which Justice Studies can recruit a future UNO faculty member working in the fields of race, ethnicity and social justice.

"Mellon funding will expand the program's capacity and impact, allowing Justice Studies to foster new collaborative community-engaged scholarship by bringing together students, faculty, nonprofit organizations and grassroots activists to co-create new humanities knowledge and public programming," Krochmal says.

The first cohort of Justice Studies Ph.D. students are now completing their comprehensive examinations and proposing dissertation projects and collaborations with community partners in the fields of criminal justice, educational justice, environmental justice and social justice. Justice Studies students will also benefit from engaging with the Midlo Center and the Neighborhood Story Project, adding synergy among the three UNO units and extending the impact of the overall Mellon grant, Krochmal says.

"We are three entities at UNO, each engaged in justice-oriented humanities scholarship," Mitchell says. "Mellon's generous support will allow us to grow our programs, expand their reach throughout the city and do so in wonderfully collaborative ways."



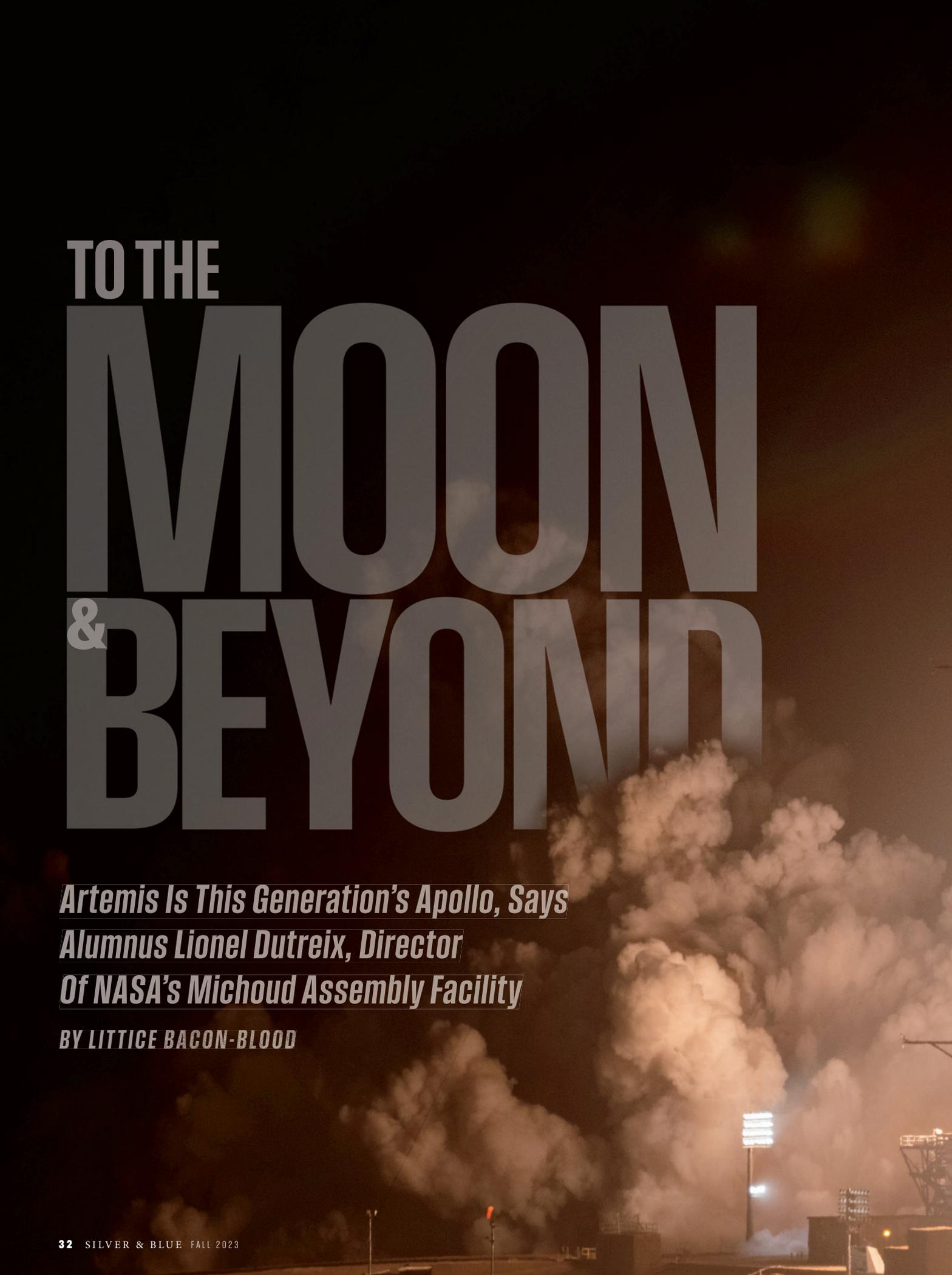
## UNO ANTHROPOLOGY PROJECT IN NEW ORLEANS' FRENCH QUARTER

UNO anthropology professor Ryan Gray, who is also associate director of the Midlo Center for New Orleans Studies, conducted a high visibility project last spring in the French Quarter – during the French Quarter Festival in April.

Gray and his team were working at Madame John's Legacy, the second-oldest building in the French Quarter, built in 1789. Gray's team was asked to investigate what the building looked like when it was first constructed, to aid with restoration plans.

Several curious passersby stopped to ask questions enroute to the festival.





TO THE  
**MOON**  
&  
**BEYOND**

*Artemis Is This Generation's Apollo, Says  
Alumnus Lionel Dutreix, Director  
Of NASA's Michoud Assembly Facility*

*BY LITTICE BACON-BLOOD*



*The core stage for Artemis II is built, outfitted and assembled at NASA's Michoud Assembly Facility in New Orleans. Through Artemis, NASA will land the first woman and the first person of color on the Moon, establish a long-term presence on the lunar surface, and prepare for human missions to Mars, according to NASA's website.*



UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS alumnus Lionel Dutreix likens his job to that of a mayor of a small city. His “city,” however, is unlike any other in that its focus really is rocket science. Or, perhaps, the *science* of rockets.

Dutreix is the director of NASA’s Michoud Assembly Facility in New Orleans, dubbed “America’s Rocket Factory,” as for over five decades it has been the premier site for manufacturing and assembling of large-scale space structures and systems.

In fact, contractors at Michoud are currently at work helping to construct large parts of the Space Launch System rocket and Orion spacecraft that is set to return astronauts to the moon in 2025 under NASA’s Artemis program.

The core stage for Artemis II is being constructed, outfitted, and assembled at Michoud. Through Artemis, NASA will land the first woman and the first person of color on the Moon, establish a long-term presence on the lunar surface, and prepare for human missions to Mars, according to NASA’s website.

On a stroll through his nearly 830-acre town, Dutreix, who earned a bachelor’s and master’s degree in electrical engineering, is privileged to witness the storied history of space exploration.

Workers at Michoud are building the 212-foot tall core stage of the Space Launch System, which is the largest part of the 322-foot-tall rocket.



NASA’s Space Launch System, or SLS, is a “super heavy-lift launch vehicle that provides the foundation for human exploration beyond Earth’s orbit. With its unprecedented power and capabilities, SLS is the only rocket that can send Orion, astronauts and cargo directly to the Moon on a single mission,” according to NASA officials.

“Just seeing the flight hardware and knowing that will take individuals back to the moon and on to Mars—it’s pretty cool,” Dutreix says. “We’re building a pretty sizeable portion of it right here.”

According to NASA officials, the Artemis program involves a series of increasingly complex missions that will enable human exploration to the Moon and Mars. Artemis I launched in 2022 with the unmanned Orion spacecraft—portions of which also were assembled at Michoud.

Next year, Artemis II's mission will launch four astronauts aboard the Orion spacecraft that will orbit the moon. NASA has targeted 2025 as the next lunar landing date. It will be the United States' first moon landing since Apollo 17 in 1972, according to NASA.

Dutreix became Michoud's director in 2021 and manages the daily operations of the site, which has 20 tenants. NASA is the anchor tenant, while several others hold contracts with the space program.

"We have a veritable community out here. We have the prime contractors that build the NASA flight hardware and the rocket; we have other industry out here that makes for a really good mix on-site," Dutreix says. "As the director, I'm responsible for the whole facility, starting at the secure perimeter and everything in the facility."

Those duties include oversight of the on-site fire department, security team, maintenance of green space and growth of the facility's tenant base, he says.

"The more tenants we have, the less it costs us to operate," he says.

As the "mayor," Dutreix has an enviable courtside seat as NASA administrators plan a course for space exploration that will extend over the next 20 to 25 years. It's a seat that Dutreix has worked decades to acquire.

In 1987 Dutreix had a job interview with Rocketdyne, which

was a lot of testing at Stennis, Dutreix recalls.

"I learned a lot," Dutreix says. "I'd hang out with the technicians, and they might not know the theory, but they knew how to make it work. I just sponged all of that up."

In 2000, Dutreix was hired by NASA to be the chief test operations and electrical branch chief for the Engineering and Test Directorate at Stennis. He later became the project manager for the design, construction, and activation of a new Altitude Test Facility at Stennis.

"What attracted me to that was the opportunity to start making decisions as to what was going to happen," he says. "As a contractor, you're executing the contracts of the mission that NASA is doing today. When you move into NASA, you get a little bit more into what are the new missions."

In 2017, Dutreix was named the deputy chief operating officer at Michoud where he helped sustain Space Launch System and Orion production efforts and coordinated requirements and logistics with Michoud tenant leadership for approximately 3,500 Michoud employees.

As the Michoud director, Dutreix is privy to some logistics meetings involving space exploration and the potential for colonizing the moon—and possibly Mars.

"How do you live on the moon ... how do you grow food on the moon?" Those are some of the questions that are discussed, Dutreix says. Also, possible housing options and the how-to's of transporting tents into space.

"You're going to have to bring some stuff up, and they are learning to do a lot of that on the Space Station."

Asked to name his favorite interstellar-themed movie, Dutreix rounds down and discards a few—"The Right Stuff," "Alien," "Apollo"—before landing on "The Martian."

*FACING PAGE, TOP: The 212-foot-tall core stage of NASA's Space Launch System rocket and its four RS-25 engines will help power NASA's Artemis II flight test, the first crewed Artemis mission that will send four astronauts around the Moon and return them home to test the spacecraft in deep space ahead of lunar surface missions in 2025.*

*FACING PAGE BOTTOM: University of New Orleans alumnus Lionel Dutreix, pictured with UNO Provost Darrell Kruger, manages the daily operations of NASA's only manufacturing facility where development of the Space Launch System and Orion spacecraft are underway. This page: Dutreix with Artemis astronauts*

While many such movies might be deemed far-out, that film, which stars actor Matt Damon as a botanist, underscores the reality of the current space program and one of its goals: How to live long-term in space, Dutreix says.

In talking with younger employees and students, Dutreix says he tries to emphasize the historical nature of the work happening at Michoud.

He shares memories of his early days at Stennis with them and how he would hear stories about the Apollo missions from some of the older workers.

"I say, 'You're at the beginning of the next generation of programs that I didn't really experience,'" says Dutreix, who explains that the shuttle program was already underway when he joined Stennis in the late 80s. "Apollo was before me, and Shuttle was already matured."

Artemis is "their Apollo," Dutreix says.

"It's kind of cool to think that when they get to be my age they can say 'Yeah, I was there when we built the first one and launched it; and now we're on Mars!'"

was located at Stennis Space Center near Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. Dutreix, a newly minted UNO graduate, was not familiar with Stennis.

There was a space shuttle engine test the day of his interview, Dutreix says.

"You could feel the vibrations of the rocket and I was like 'This is for me!'"

NASA was in the middle of its Space Shuttle program and there



# PLANNING FOR CHANGE

## ALUMNA ANGELA BROOKS IS PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION

BY LITTICE BACON-BLOOD



ANGELA BROOKS WAS DRAWN TO THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans graduate program in urban planning because she saw New Orleans as the perfect place to study historic preservation. However, it was one of the city's more modern structures that propelled Brooks to a career in community development and housing.

While enrolled at UNO, Brooks worked as a probation and parole officer. One day she had to drive the young daughter of one of her client's home.

When they arrived at the apartment complex, Brooks was floored by the dilapidated buildings.

"I thought it was abandoned. I didn't know people still lived there," Brooks says, referring to the Iberville Public Housing Development circa 1996. "That's what really sparked my interest in housing, because I could not believe that we had government-supported housing that looked like that."

Brooks, who earned a master's degree in urban planning from UNO, is months into a two-year term as president of the American Planning Association. The 41,000-member organization has a commitment to advancing better and more just communities through good planning and is the largest planning organization in the world, Brooks says.

As president, Brooks leads the 16-member APA Board of Directors in governing the association, setting strategic goals and elevating the importance of planning across the U.S. She is the first Black woman elected president of the American Planning Association.

"A lot of my talking points as APA president are, 'You have to implement things on the scale that makes sense for your community,'" Brooks says. "There is no one size fits all. There are some generic strategies that probably make sense for everybody; you just have to figure out the scale for your community."

Brooks says she would like to use her

two-year tenure to help create an environment that's "welcoming to anybody who wants to be here." She noted that planners of color continue to make up a small part of the APA membership, as do younger planners, Brooks says.

"If I can take the next two years to elevate the voice of young emerging planners, either students or young professionals, for me that would be a great accomplishment," Brooks says.

The APA presidency is a volunteer position that Brooks handles along with her other day job.

She's director of the Illinois office of the Corporation for Supportive Housing, a nonprofit that offers a plethora of services aimed at developing affordable housing solutions and helping people navigate barriers to get housing.

"Anything that helps in homelessness is something we probably work on," says Brooks, who is a certified planner.

"I'm a 'houser.' I house people," says Brooks.

The versatile nature of the planning profession is part of the attraction for Brooks, who has also worked as a real estate developer.

"It's an interdisciplinary field that really thinks about how the built environment grows and develops ... and how you plan for it," Brooks says. "Literally within the field of planning, there's interdisciplinary types of things that you can do; it could be transportation, it could be housing, it could be core land zoning use."

Three primary target goals for Brooks as APA president revolve around housing, climate impact and community resilience.

"How do planners help communities become safer and more resilient for future impacts? We have areas throughout the country that are being impacted by climate," Brooks says.

"We have whole states that are like, 'Where are we going to get water in 10 years?' How do we start thinking about that proactively?"

The shortage in affordable housing, which has reached crisis levels in many communities, is another major concern, Brooks says. As she travels to national and international planning conferences, housing is part of the discussions.

"I've noticed that a lot of their sessions are on housing, also. It's just a reminder that we talk about the housing crisis in the U.S., but everybody's dealing with how are we going to house people."

The APA has a partnership campaign with the National League of Cities called the Housing Supply Accelerator that has brought local governments, community planners, builders, financial institutions, housing policy associations and state and federal partners together to develop, align and advance solutions for housing supply challenges at the local level.

"It's really going to identify what are the barriers to increasing the housing supply throughout the country," Brooks says. "What makes me excited, we have elected officials with us. As planners we can have all these great theories, we can write these great plans, but elected officials have

to actually pass it and legislate it."

Brooks was born and raised in Seattle, Washington, but is a daughter of Southern parents. Her father was born in Monroe, Louisiana and her mother is from North Carolina. She spent summers in both places and earned her undergraduate degree in planning from Jackson State University in Mississippi.

"I describe myself as Seattle-born, Southern-raised, Midwest living," Brooks, who lives in Chicago, says with a laugh. "When both of your parents are Southern, no matter where you live, you're Southern."

Brooks first joined APA while studying at UNO and developed a network of friends and colleagues that she remains close with.

"I developed some really good relationships with people who, 20-some-odd years later, they are still a big part of my life," Brooks says. "The network I created there has been quite beneficial."

Her best advice to students: Take advantage of the networking opportunities and promote yourself as a professional on social media.

"When you are a student, there are very few professional planners—probably in any field—that would not take a call for an informational coffee," Brooks says. "I believe in pouring into the next generation of planners."

Make good use of social media platforms to establish your brand, Brooks says.

"Really highlight the work that you're doing so that people know who you are and look at you as an expert in whatever space you're working in."



Angela Brooks (center left) with alumna Michelle Miller (center right) and current UNO Planning Students at the National APA Conference in Philadelphia.



## Author Leah Myers: 'In my heart, I'm a storyteller'

AUTHOR LEAH MYERS, WHO EARNED AN MFA IN creative writing from the University of New Orleans, had prepared herself to wait. She anticipated the literary agency rejection letters.

After all, she recalls thinking as she waited for replies from a batch of submissions, this was her debut book.

"I didn't have a book to my name," says Myers, who graduated in 2021. "I had writing credits in magazines but didn't have a history, so they were taking a chance on me."

Sure enough, the rejections—nicely worded as they were—did come. However, Myers didn't have to wait much longer. A promising letter arrived in 2021.

"I re-read it probably four times and I immediately excused myself to go outside to walk around because I couldn't stand still anymore," Myers says. "I had to go somewhere and be excited!"

The agent, Paul Lucas of Janklow & Nesbit Associates, was interested in the book and wanted to shop it around at publishing companies.

Having someone outside her support system excited about her work was "amazing," Myers says.

"It was incredibly validating and very surreal," Myers says laughing at the memory.

And on May 16, her debut memoir, "Thinning Blood," was published by W.W. Norton & Company, the same day as a review of her book appeared in *The New York Times*.

"I'm still reeling," Myers says.

*The New York Times* book review section receives hundreds of books daily from publishing companies and authors with the hopes of getting a mention in one of the nation's most prestigious newspapers.

Myers' prose was not only selected, but it also received a rave review.

"I knew they were going to review it but had no idea who or what they would say," Myers says. "I was really glad to see somebody connect with my work and praise it, especially in such an open platform."

Just two years after submitting the book, which she started while enrolled at UNO, Myers earned a book deal and has been on the road with book signings, readings and panel discussions.

"In my heart, I'm a storyteller; that's my role," Myers

says. "I'm not really great at public speaking so writing is my way of telling and preserving stories and histories."

"Thinning Blood," is a personal reflection of her Indigenous ancestry and the dwindling numbers of tribal citizens. Myers wrestles with the possibility of being the last tribal citizen in her family line of the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe of the Pacific Northwest.

The tribe, like many others, bases its membership on blood quantum.

"A big part of my book revolves around the idea of blood quantum," Myers says. "What that means is that certain tribes will have for their enrollment policies a level of blood that someone has to be Native American."

In Myers' tribe, the blood quantum is one-eighth. Her great-grandmother was the last full-blooded S'Klallam in Myers' family line, she says. In the book, she takes a generational look as she traces her "thinning blood" from her great-grandmother to herself.

"I am one-eighth," Myers says. "Unless I have children with another member of the tribe, they would not have enough native blood to be considered tribal citizens."

Myers draws the title of her book from that tribal blood quantum law. She often contemplates the possibility of her family's tribal lineage ending with her.

"I think about it a lot," Myers says. "It's a big part of why this book exists. I found out the tribal enrollment numbers and realized how many of us are at one-eighth."

In 2019, there were 542 total tribal members, Myers said. Of that number, 297 members were listed as one-eighth S'Klallam. Only tribal citizens can be involved in tribal politics and participate in tribal meetings.

"It was scary to think that there were so few people and so many people's children who won't be citizens," Myers says. "Where does that leave the tribe if there are so few children and fewer every generation?"

Myers was raised in Georgia and did not grow up experiencing her tribal heritage. She had visited her ancestral land which is in Washington state along the Olympic Peninsula.

Prior to starting graduate school, Myers spent a year in Washington soaking in the history, traditions and customs. One of the traditions that she was able to experience was the annual canoe journey. All of the tribes in the area come together to make trips around the coast of the peninsula.

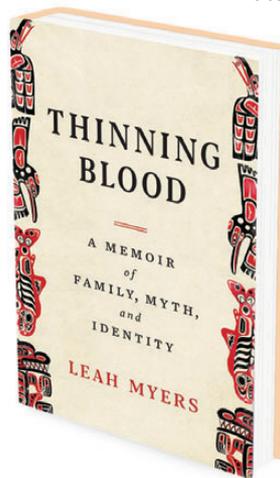
"Tribes host different landings at different beaches and have feasts and songs," Myers says. "It's really an event that encapsulates community and heritage."

Myers credits UNO's Creative Writing Workshop for helping her craft the book.

"It started in those workshops with my peers and mentors there," says Myers. "I learned the best practices for writing ... the faculty taught me important life lessons as well."

Myers recalls advice given by one of her professors during her first semester at UNO: Stop making excuses for bad writing.

"The grade helped me in so many ways," Myers says. "I'm so proud of what I did there. I couldn't have written the book without it."



# ‘Ma, you can do it!’



## Nancy Sherman, 84, graduates UNO with honors



NANCY SHERMAN JOKED THAT WHEN she enrolled at the University of New Orleans a decade ago at the age of 74, that she never intended to get a degree. Her plan, she says, was to just take a few classes—piano, French—be social and be done.

“I started for fun,” Sherman says. “Because I’d never been to a university before.”

Sherman spent 20 years as a flight attendant, a career she started shortly after graduating high school in Pennsylvania, before moving on to real estate while raising her daughter.

Her daughter, Kelly Sherman, who graduated from UNO with a biology degree, suggested that Sherman should enroll.

“I moved here from the North and she said you know you can go to the university you don’t have to pay tuition,” Sherman says, referring to the Lifelong Learners program for seniors 65 and older.

She enrolled and started taking classes, but she never thought about graduating, Sherman says.

“I was just having fun going to the university. I had some really cool classes, and the students were wonderful,” Sherman says. “I just kept taking classes ... and they kept saying you’re a junior now, you’re senior now and then my adviser says, ‘You know you can graduate.’”

In May, the 84-year-old Sherman donned her cap and gown and graduated with honors with a bachelor’s degree in interdisciplinary studies.

“Today means a lot of love because I had a lot of help,” Sherman says. “My daughter really pushed me, she would say, ‘Ma, you can do it!’ I had a lot of fun. I really recommend it. I think all seniors should go!”

As she sat waiting for the commencement ceremony to start, Sherman chuckled as she reflected on her journey to earning a college degree.

“It’s just been an amazing adventure in my life,” Sherman says. “Because it’s not an adventure that I had ever planned.”



*Nancy Sherman (middle) sits with her daughter, Kelly, and Scott Pentzer, director of the School of Interdisciplinary Studies at UNO, during an Honors Day event.*



# A STEELY RESOLVE

*Civil engineering students revive steel bridge tradition with stunning regional win* BY LITTICE BACON-BLOOD

YELITZA CEDEÑO WAS ENTHRALLED. THE FURIOUS, BUT focused activity in the college's structure lab arena was fascinating to Cedeño, who was president of the University of New Orleans student chapter of American Society of Civil Engineers.

"I just saw students running in the arena and they were building something," Cedeño recalls. "I was like, 'What is going on? They were so focused ... they were putting bolts in stuff. They were drilling.'"

Cedeño, who was at Auburn University for the 2022 student concrete canoe competition, was exploring other areas when she happened upon the steel bridge competition. She'd never seen it before because COVID-19 had restricted competitions and travel.

"It was love at first sight," Cedeño says laughing. "I went to my faculty adviser and said, 'I'm going to be captain of the steel bridge competition next year!'"

That "wild statement" as Cedeño describes it, set in motion a nearly yearlong process that included assembling a team, securing materials and designing and fabricating a 23-foot-long steel bridge intended for pedestrian and motorists to cross a 7-foot river.

The American Institute of Steel Construction and American Society of Civil Engineers sponsor the steel bridge competition as an annual event intended to demonstrate knowledge and skills of future generation design professionals.

At the ASCE 2023 Gulf Coast Student Symposium, held March 9-11 at the University of South Alabama in Mobile, UNO's team beat out 15 other universities from Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

The team included: Gavin Trinh, Maria Umanzor, Perry Newman, Cedeño, Steven Hernandez, all civil engineer majors and Francisco Espinoza and Alonso Milon, who are majoring in construction management.

Cedeño was team captain and project manager—one with very little experience, she says.

"None of us had any experience," says Cedeño, noting the last time the University of New Orleans competed in the contest was in 2018. "So, we were starting from nothing. A brand-new team."

Cedeño did tap into the knowledge of a former UNO steel bridge competition captain and even talked with other competing schools to get information. Her team worked on the project from November to mid-February.

"This is extracurricular, this is on top of class, jobs, etc.," Cedeño says. "We were doing this because we love it. We came in on weekends or in between classes. It was a lot of work."

The competition includes structural costs based on total weight; construction cost based on the number of builders in a timed race to erect the bridge; and safety, with time penalties for dropping bolts,



nuts or tools and stepping outside the construction zone or in the river. Aesthetics and the use of materials that promote robustness without wastefulness are also judged in overall performance.

UNO was up against some veteran teams, Cedeño says. The top two finishers in the competition would advance to the national competition in California.

“From the start we knew we had two rivals. One that always dominated this area: LSU, and then we saw another rival was the University of South Alabama—the host,” Cedeño says.

The Region 5 competition was the first one held, and UNO was tagged as the first team to compete, she says.

“We were the newbies! We didn’t have any experience last year and we didn’t even get to see another team do it,” Cedeño says. “It was crazy ... we did our best.”

The competition allows for 30 minutes. UNO’s construction time was 20 minutes. Then the bridge’s structural design was tested by adding weight during the lateral load test. They passed “with flying colors,” Cedeño says.

“We went to the vertical load test, the bridge had to hold 2,500 pounds with a maximum deflection of 3 ½ inches,” she says. “We had 1.05 inches, so that’s like 1 inch compared to the 3, so we were good!” South Alabama swept through the construction, doing well as

expected. Cedeño and her teammates watched from the sidelines as LSU worked quickly on the floor. They completed construction in 15 minutes with no penalties, confirming why they were considered a dominant team in the region.

“Their time was ridiculous ... then they passed the lateral test,” Cedeño says.

Then came the vertical load test. The team must add 12.5-pound angle weights to the bridge until it reaches the maximum load of 2,500 pounds. The LSU team had added all but five of its angles and the arena had grown quiet, Cedeño recalls.

“Then the bridge broke. Their bridge—broke,” Cedeño says, still amazed several months later. “We have a chance to go to nationals!”

As it turns out, the UNO team not only earned its ticket to nationals, but the team also won the overall competition and placed first or second in a majority of the categories.

“This is a very special win since it is the first time competing in steel bridge since 2018,” says Gianna Cothren, professor of civil engineering and ASCE faculty adviser. “With their best design, many hours of welding and construction, and a last week of practice in our structures lab basement, our team pulled off the unusual feat of winning first place overall with no experience.”

“We received many congratulations and awe from other universities that usually dominate this event,” Cothren says.

Though UNO’s civil engineering program is small relative to some of the universities they competed against, Cothren says they were fortunate to have strong support from former UNO President John Nicklow, Dr. Robert A. Savoie College of Engineering Dean Lizette Chevalier and the local civil engineering industry.

“Our students have unbelievable perseverance to make things happen,” Cothren says.

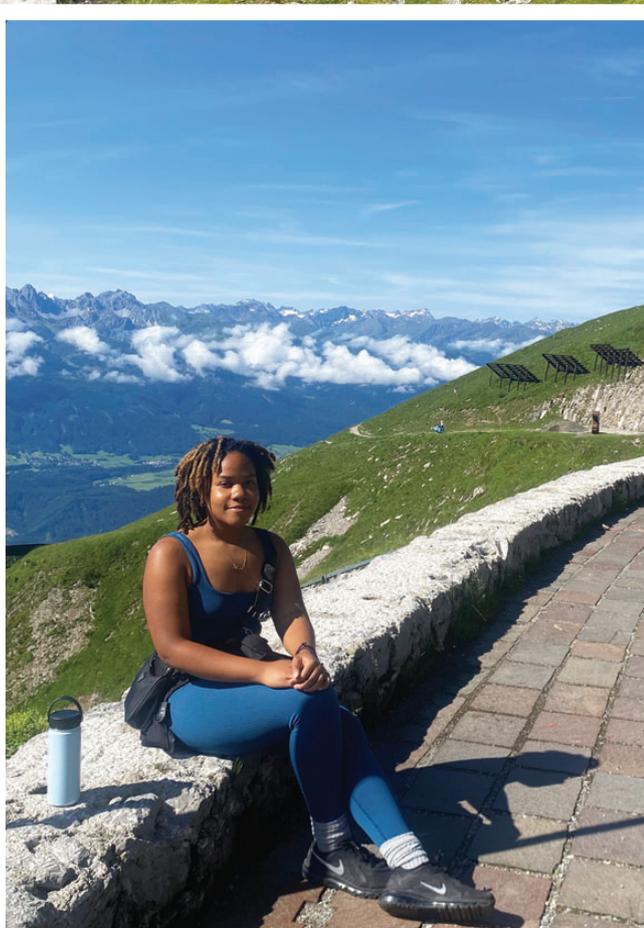
Cedeño, who graduated in May, says she is pleased with her team’s accomplishments and the legacy they’ve left for others, although they did not win at nationals.

“I’m proud to say that I have created a path for the next people to come,” she says.

UNO will host the 2024 ASCE Gulf Coast Student Symposium on March 7-11. The event will include the steel bridge, concrete canoe, surveying and sustainability competitions, along with several other competitive civil engineering events.

*UNO’s steel bridge competition team members from left to right, Gavin Trinh, Maria Umanzor, Perry Newman, Yelitza P. Cedeño and Steven Hernandez. Not pictured are Francisco Espinoza and Alonso Milon.*

# Gil Gresham



*Gil Gresham posing in the Tyrolean Alps in Austria.*

**Name:** Gil Gresham

**Age:** 20

**Hometown:** New Orleans

**Major/degree program:** History

**What do you want to do after graduation?** After graduation, I'll be attending law school. I'm not sure what school I will attend yet, but I'm excited nonetheless. I would like to have a legal career, possibly in the political sector.

**What languages you speak:** English and Spanish Level A2.

**Where did you go and when?** Innsbruck, Austria from July 1 to Aug. 11, 2023.

**Why did you go?** No one in my family has traveled outside the continental United States, mostly due to their lack of resources and the familial obligations that kept them near Louisiana. My parents want me to live a better life than they could, and traveling is something they always encourage me to do. I was already grateful to have an opportunity to receive the kind of education that they couldn't but even more so to be able to receive

one so far from home.

**What did you study while you were there?** I studied modern military history and post WWII literature.

**Most memorable experience?** My most memorable experience was the Stoos Ridge Hike in Switzerland. The view of the Alps, spotted with bright blue lakes on a crystal-clear day, was breath taking.

**Where do you want to go next?** I would like to go to Mexico, preferably Mexico City or Oaxaca.

**Advice to others considering study abroad?** My advice would be to apply even if you aren't 100% sure you will enjoy it. There is something for everyone to enjoy while abroad whether that be learning a new language with your new local friends, trying a different country's cuisine, or in my case, mountain hiking. There are scholarships available and there is always a way to make it work. It's worth the effort. There is nothing comparable to this experience.

## Philip J. Gunn Accounting Lecture Hall and Thomas M. and Constance P. Kitchen Lecture Hall Dedication

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans recognized the long-standing support from four of its alumni on May 9, with the dedication of the Philip J. Gunn Accounting Lecture Hall and the Thomas M. and Constance P. Kitchen Lecture Hall in Kirschman Hall, which houses the College of Business Administration.

The celebration included the unveiling of plaques that will hang on the walls in recognition of the leadership and generosity of Philip Gunn and Jeanne Turner and Tom and Constance Kitchen.

All four are UNO graduates, former President John Nicklow said.

“Both Jeanne and Connie hold degrees in education, Phil has a degree in accounting and

Tom has a degree in accounting, as well as an MBA from UNO,” Nicklow said. “Your generosity and commitment to your alma mater are truly inspirational, not only to other alumni, but our students, faculty, staff, and friends of the University.”

The Philip J. Gunn Accounting Lecture Hall recognizes the support that Phil Gunn and his wife, Jeanne Turner, have provided, including three endowed first-generation scholarships for students majoring in accounting, as well as general support for the accounting department, Nicklow said.

Philip J. Gunn is a director in P&N’s Accounting and Assurance Services Group in the firm’s New Orleans area practice. Prior to joining P&N in 2013,

he served as an audit partner for a big four firm. He has over 40 years of public accounting experience, and has focused his career on serving companies in a variety of industries, including energy, industrial, and consumer products companies.

The Thomas M. and Constance P. Kitchen Lecture Hall honors the Kitchens’ establishment of the Kitchen Family Undergraduate Scholarship for first-generation college students, Nicklow said.

Tom Kitchen retired as president and CEO of Stewart Enterprises Inc., the second largest provider of funeral services and products in the U.S. He led the team in negotiating the merger with its largest competitor, Service Corporation International.

He previously spent nearly 24 years in various executive roles with Avondale Industries Inc., a marine construction and repair company based in New Orleans. He served as president of the company before retiring in 2002.

“The combined support of these four donors represents more than \$500,000 to Next Is Now: The Campaign for the University of New Orleans,” Nicklow said. “I am thrilled that generations of UNO students will benefit from their gifts.”

*In recognition for their support of UNO, the Philip J. Gunn Accounting Lecture Hall and the Thomas M. and Constance P. Kitchen Lecture Hall were dedicated in Kirschman Hall, which houses the College of Business Administration.*

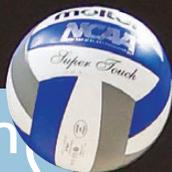


Thomas M. and Constance P. Kitchen



Philip J. Gunn and Jeanne Turner

ATHLETICS



# A Mother's Footsteps

*Privateer middle blocker  
Sydney Gott finds a  
familiar home in UNO*

**BY RANDI BOHLER**



THE FACT THAT California native Sydney Gott plays Division I college sports is not much of a surprise. At 6-foot-3, she has the height and athleticism that is prized on the court. But when she arrived at the University of New Orleans last fall to play volleyball, the destination was an unexpected one.

After several years and thousands of miles traveled, Gott's journey once again dove-tailed with that of her mother's. Twenty-five years after April Gott played basketball for the Privateers, Sydney donned the silver and blue to continue a family tradition—this time in volleyball.

Born and raised in the Northern California town of Quincy, and the oldest of three siblings, Sydney excelled in athletics. She became a volleyball star at Quincy High School, where her mother was her coach. Sydney was named three-time All-Conference selection and conference MVP at the same high school where April earned conference MVP and All-District honors as a basketball player.

After graduating from high school, Sydney attended Feather Ridge Junior College, located in her hometown. She led the Golden Eagles to a state title with a record of 39-2. The middle blocker was such a force that she caught the attention of several Division I volleyball programs. Sydney decided on the University of Hawaii at

Hilo. After a full season as a starter for the Vulcans, she realized she wanted a change, but she had no immediate plan. At the time, New Orleans wasn't even on her radar.

"My mom and I kind of blew off the idea of me coming to New Orleans, because she didn't think I would want to go to the same school as her," Sydney says. "We are very competitive. So, at first coming here meant I had to get the same

That was actually the same deciding factor for April.

In 1996, former New Orleans women's basketball head coach Joey Favaloro flew more than 1,000 miles to Ventura, California to visit April Garrish (now Gott), who was already a two-time state champion and winner of the sixth man award at Ventura County Community College.

"That meant a lot to me," April says. "A lot of the other

case for Sydney."

Though it was decades later, Sydney sensed a similar approach in 2022 when interacting with Privateers volleyball head coach Ashley Preston.

"I was drawn to the way Coach P holds her players accountable and how intentional she is about the atmosphere she creates for us," Sydney says.

"The 'I am my sister's keeper' mantra was also something that spoke to me."



accolades, if not more than my mom. I called her one day and said, 'I think I want to go to New Orleans.' She was beyond excited!"

Attending her mother's alma mater was an added benefit. The main reason Sydney said she fell in love with the University of New Orleans was the care and intention the University pours into its students.

coaches that were recruiting me wanted me to come out there, but Coach Fav did his first introduction by coming out to California and seeing me play.

"Also, UNO is Division I, and unlike many bigger Division I schools, it was very family-oriented and made me feel like I would be well taken care of. And, because I was, I knew the same would be the

Stepping foot on campus in the fall of 2022 was not only a full-circle moment for Sydney, but a reunion for her mom who hadn't been on campus since 1998.

"I heard all the college stories from my mom, so to have the opportunity to live through some of those experiences is cool," Sydney says. "My mom met my godmother here too, ☑"

# ATHLETICS

so they both helped me move in, and as soon as we got here, they were pointing to different places on campus and reminiscing.

“I love how this campus is big enough to feel like you can get out and do something, but small enough to walk everywhere and feel connected,” she says.

In her first season as a Privateer, Sydney certainly looked comfortable in her new home. She earned a spot on the New Orleans Invitational All-Tournament Team and was second on the team with 58 total blocks. She also had a season-

high 11 kills against Western Illinois and nine blocks against Prairie View.

As a senior, Sydney is looking to improve on the court and, ultimately, match another of her mother’s accomplishments by earning her bachelor’s degree in psychology, just as April did.

While Sydney is the first to continue the Gott legacy at the University of New Orleans, her mother says she may not be the last.

“My 15-year-old daughter, who is 6-foot-2 and plays both basketball and volleyball, can’t wait to come here next,” April says.

*Sydney, (center), her mother, April Gott (left) and Sydney’s godmother, Jackie Clayton, whom her mom met when they were students at UNO.*



## Bischke Named Student-Athlete of the Year

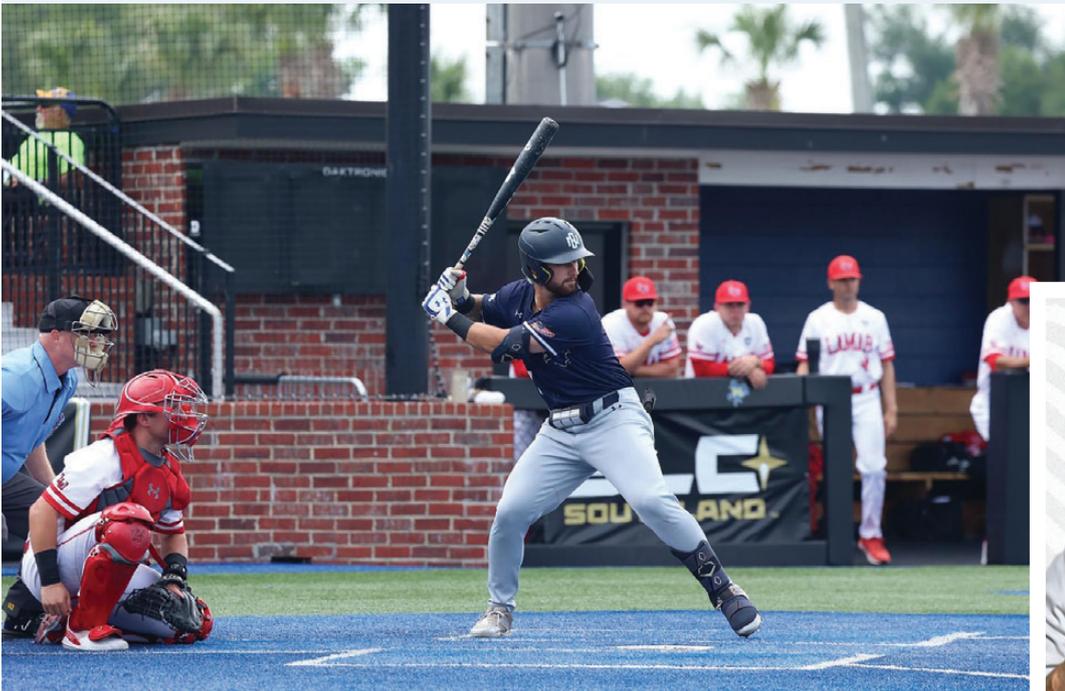
Tyler Bischke became the first New Orleans Privateers baseball player to be named Southland Student-Athlete of the Year as part of the conference’s All-Academic teams which were released in June. It’s the fourth consecutive year that a Privateer has won Student-Athlete of the Year.

Bischke adds the accolade to a growing list of awards. He has

also earned First Team All-Southland, Southland All-Tournament and Second Team ABCA All-Region recognition after a phenomenal season on the diamond.

The Pittsburgh native also carried a 3.61 GPA as a finance major and recently earned his degree in May.

On the field, Bischke ranked in the top ten in the Southland in runs scored, hits, RBI, doubles, home runs and total bases. He started every game at second for New Orleans in the 2023 season and had 73 hits, 12 home runs and 54 RBI. He also co-led the team in doubles with 16.



# UNO MATRIX

PRIVATEER NETWORK

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# ALUM NOTES

## Jarred Adams (B.S., 2004, M.B.A., 2021)

Jarred Adams has been named director of health, safety and environment at HOST, a ship agency, stevedoring and terminal operations company. Adams holds a bachelor's degree in marketing and an MBA from the University of New Orleans.

Adams has more than a decade of experience developing standardized safety systems and programs to strengthen workplace safety. He will oversee the company's workplace safety programs, ensure proper employee training and manage compliance with federal, state, and local regulations.

"T. Parker Host has a storied history of service to its clientele and dedication to its employees," Adams says "I am honored to join this legacy and support the company's mission of providing exceptional maritime service, safely."

Adams joins HOST as the company celebrates its 100-year anniversary. He will be based at Avondale Global Gateway.



## Rebecca O'Brien (M.S., 2012)

Rebecca O'Brien has been appointed senior sales executive for the New Orleans Marriott and Sheraton New Orleans Hotel. O'Brien holds a master's degree in hospitality and tourism management from the University of New Orleans.

O'Brien will be responsible for generating group business from the mid-Atlantic markets, including Washington, D.C, Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and North and South Carolina.

Prior to joining the properties, O'Brien was the director of business development for Greater New Orleans, Inc. (GNO, Inc.).

"I am honored to be joining such renowned New Orleans properties," O'Brien says. "I look forward to collaborating with the exceptional team here to elevate our sales strategies and provide unforgettable experiences for our guests and attendees."



## 1970s

### Eddie Gammon (B.S., 1978)

Eddie Gammon has joined Corpus Christi-based American Bank as its director of bank operations. Gammon brings more than 40 years of operational, financial, managerial, treasury management, payments, technology and sales experience in the banking industry to his new role. He holds a bachelor's degree in business management from the University of New Orleans.

### Mark Romig (B.S., 1978)

Mark Romig has been elected to the Greater New Orleans Sports Foundation board of directors. Romig holds a bachelor's degree in hotel, restaurant, and tourism administration from the University of New Orleans.

### Marieé Walton (B.S., 1979)

Marieé Walton has been named chief operating officer at Poyner Spruill, LLC, a North Carolina law firm that serves the construction industry. Walton holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of New Orleans.

## 1980s

### Kevin Guidroz (B.S., 1985)

Kevin Guidroz has been promoted to chief operating officer at Taste Buds Management and Zea Rotisserie and Bar in New Orleans. Guidroz holds a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the University of New Orleans.

## 1990s

### Russell Gahagan III (M.B.A., 1991)

Russell Gahagan III has been named chief financial officer at Rev Federal Credit Union in South Carolina. Gahagan holds an MBA from the University of New Orleans.

### Jed Liuzza (B.S., 1991)

Jed Liuzza has been appointed chief human resources officer at Hutchinson Regional Healthcare System in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Liuzza holds a bachelor's degree in management from the University of New Orleans.

### Mary Hart (B.A., 1992, M.Ed., 1998)

Mary Hart has been named assistant superintendent of administration for St. Tammany Parish public schools in St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana. Hart holds a

### **Annmarie Camp (M.U.R.P., 2005)**

Annmarie Camp has been appointed North America Business Development Leader at Chubb in New York. Camp holds a master's degree in urban and regional planning from the University of New Orleans.

Chubb is the world's largest publicly traded property and casualty insurance company with operations in 54 countries and territories.

Camp has over two decades of insurance industry experience. Most recently she served as head of personal risk services for Chubb in Europe. In her new role Camp will be responsible for providing oversight to the business development team that represents and

sells the full range of Chubb commercial lines products and services in the region.

"During Annmarie's 14-year career at Chubb, she has developed an enviable track record of leadership in motivating and empowering high performing teams within personal lines businesses in the U.S. and abroad," says Rob Polisenio, chief operating officer, North America Field Operations.



### **Regina Davis (M.B.A., 2001)**

New Orleans native Regina Davis, who holds an MBA from the University of New Orleans, has been named manager of ExxonMobil's Baton Rouge, Louisiana Refinery. Davis earned a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from Louisiana Tech University and joined ExxonMobil as a process contact engineer in 1999.

"As a first-generation college graduate, I'm passionate about developing the next generation of STEM and manufacturing leaders, and have spent much of my career recruiting, mentoring and developing minority and female talent," Davis says.

Davis has held various leadership positions in the company, including as manager of the Strathcona Refinery in Edmonton, Alberta. In Strathcona, she helped create and sponsor the Women's Interest Network (WIN) and was an inaugural co-chair of the Women United Initiative for the United Way Alberta Capital Region.

"I am eager to return to the rich and vibrant culture in Louisiana and to champion the many education and workforce development efforts that ExxonMobil supports," Davis says. "The Baton Rouge workforce is one of the most respected across our Americas operations, and I am honored to lead this outstanding team."



## 2000s

Bachelor of Arts in elementary education and a master's degree in educational administration from the University of New Orleans.

### **Irby E. Morvant, Jr. (B.A., 1992)**

Irby E. Morvant, Jr. has been promoted to general manager of Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort and Spa in Texas. Morvant holds a bachelor's degree in drama and communications from the University of New Orleans.

### **Darren Savoye (B.S., 1992, M.S., 2001)**

Darren Savoye has been promoted to executive vice president of engineering and business development at Bollinger Shipyards LLC. Savoye holds a bachelor's degree in naval architecture and marine engineering and a master's in engineering management from the University of New Orleans.

### **Jeffrey Yorkey (B.A., 1993)**

Jeffrey Yorkey has been appointed as Monroe County prosecutor in Monroe, Michigan by Monroe County circuit judges. Yorkey holds a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of New Orleans and earned his law degree from the University of Toledo College of Law.

### **Amy Barnes (B.A., 1996, M.Ed., 2001)**

Amy Barnes has been named a parishwide assistant principal for St. Tammany Parish Public Schools and will rotate among the district schools as needed. Barnes earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in educational administration from the University of New Orleans.

### **Chanel Christoff Davis (B.S., 1996)**

Chanel Christoff Davis, CEO of Davis Davis & Harmon LLC, has been selected to participate in Salesforce's Black-Owned Business Mentorship Program. Davis Davis & Harmon LLC (DDH) is a sales/use tax consulting firm headquartered in Dallas, Texas. Davis holds a bachelor's degree in accounting from the University of New Orleans.

### **Chad Boore (M.B.A., 1998)**

Chad Boore has been named chief operations officer for MercyOne North Iowa Medican Center in Mason City, Iowa. Boore holds a master's degree in business administration from the University of New Orleans.

### **Darcey Delatte (B.S., 1999)**

Darcey Delatte has been named vice president of finance at Louisiana Federal Credit Union. Delatte holds a bachelor's degree in accounting from the University of New Orleans.

### **Pooja Rahman (M.B.A., 1999)**

Pooja Rahman has been appointed chief risk officer and a member of the Transamerica management board, at Transamerica. Rahman holds a master's degree in business administration from the University of New Orleans.

### **Erika Mann (M.Ed., 2000)**

Erika Mann has been named the chief executive officer of the Dryades YMCA in New Orleans. Mann is the first woman to serve as the CEO of the century-old institution. Mann holds a master's degree in education from the University of New Orleans.

### **Stuart Gay (B.S., 2001)**

Stuart Gay has been named to the New Orleans KID smART to board of directors. Gay holds a bachelor's degree in finance from the University of New Orleans.



## William Wainwright (Ph.D., 2011)

William Wainwright was appointed the 15th president of Southeastern Louisiana University in April by the Board of Supervisors of the University of Louisiana System. Wainwright, who holds a doctorate of philosophy in higher education administration from the University of New Orleans, has more than 24 years of progressive leadership experience in higher education.

Prior to SLU, Wainwright spent 12 years as chancellor of Northshore Technical Community College where help lead exponential growth and success for the institution, including expanding campuses and tripling enrollment.

"Dr. Wainwright is perfectly suited to lead Southeastern into its second century," Dr. Jim Henderson, UL System President and CEO, said. "His record of growth and innovation at the executive level over the past 15 years is unmistakable. His ability to develop and maintain deep relationships will have immediate and lasting impact."



## Jeff Gernon (M.S., 2007)

Jeff Gernon has been named first chief commercial officer at Audubon Engineering Company of Houston, Texas. Gernon, a registered Professional Engineer, earned a master's degree in civil engineering from the University of New Orleans.

Gernon is a global executive who brings more than 20 years of commercial experience, performance insight, and financial leadership to the position.

Gernon will oversee all commercial activities, with a strong focus on planning and executing global development strategies to connect customers with best-fit solutions. He will collaborate with functional leaders company-wide to align the commercial team with organization growth objectives.

Gernon will be based in Metairie, Louisiana.

"As a highly accomplished leader, he has a reputation for sharp customer focus, versatility, and aptitude for delivering results across diverse business cultures," says CEO David Robison.



## 2010s

## 2020s

### Ronald "Chip" Morrison, Jr. (B.S., 2001)

Ronald "Chip" Morrison, Jr. has been appointed to the board of governors of The American Academy of Estate Planning Attorneys. He will serve as an adviser and help guide the direction of the national member organization. Morrison holds a bachelor's degree in business management from the University of New Orleans.

### Gregory A. Rosenstein (M.B.A., 2004)

Gregory A. Rosenstein has been named the new chief financial officer at OutSolve in Metairie, Louisiana. Rosenstein holds a master's degree in business administration from the University of New Orleans.

### Janelle Wald (B.S., 2004)

Janelle Wald has been named executive director of Crookston Area Chamber of Commerce in Minnesota. Wald holds a bachelor's degree in marketing from the University of New Orleans.

### Annmarie Camp (M.U.R.P., 2005)

Annmarie Camp has been appointed North America Business Development Leader at Chubb in New York. Camp holds a master's degree in urban and regional planning from the University of New Orleans.

### Thanh Nguyen (M.B.A., 2005)

Thanh Nguyen has been named the pharmacist in charge of Crescent City Therapeutics in Kenner, Louisiana. Nguyen earned a master's degree in business administration from the University of New Orleans and a doctor of pharmacy degree from Xavier University of Louisiana.

### Tameka Bob (Ph.D., 2007)

Tameka Bob has released her first self-help book titled "It's Okay to Answer Yourself," an interactive companion to help you thrive through aloneness. Bob holds a doctorate in counseling from the University of New Orleans.

### Traci Howerton (M.A., 2007)

Traci Howerton is the account supervisor of marketing and content at The Ehrhardt Group in New Orleans. She has more than 20 years of experience in public and media relations, marketing and advertising. Howerton holds a master's degree in history from the University of New Orleans.

### Kevin Samrow (B.S., 2009)

Kevin Samrow has been named chief executive officer for Merit Health Natchez in Natchez, Mississippi. Samrow holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of New Orleans.

### Kevinisha Walker (B.A., 2012)

Kevinisha Walker has joined *The Los Angeles Times* as part of its newsletters team. She was the social media editor for The Daily Beast news website. Walker earned a bachelor's degree in English from the University of New Orleans and a master's degree in journalism from Roosevelt University in Chicago, Illinois.

### John Yadamec (B.S., 2013)

John Yadamec has joined Fox Rothschild LLP as an associate in the litigation department. Yadamec holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of New Orleans.

### Joe Cippilone (M.Ed., 2018)

Joe Cippilone has been named an exemplary educator by the Louisiana Department of Education. He was one of only eight educators statewide to earn this distinction. Cippilone, who earned a master's degree in education administration from the University of New Orleans, is the supervisor of special education for middle and high schools in St. Bernard Parish.

### Forrest G. Condon (B.A., 2023)

Forrest G. Condon has a poem featured on Backward Trajectory. Condon holds a bachelor's degree in English from the University of New Orleans.

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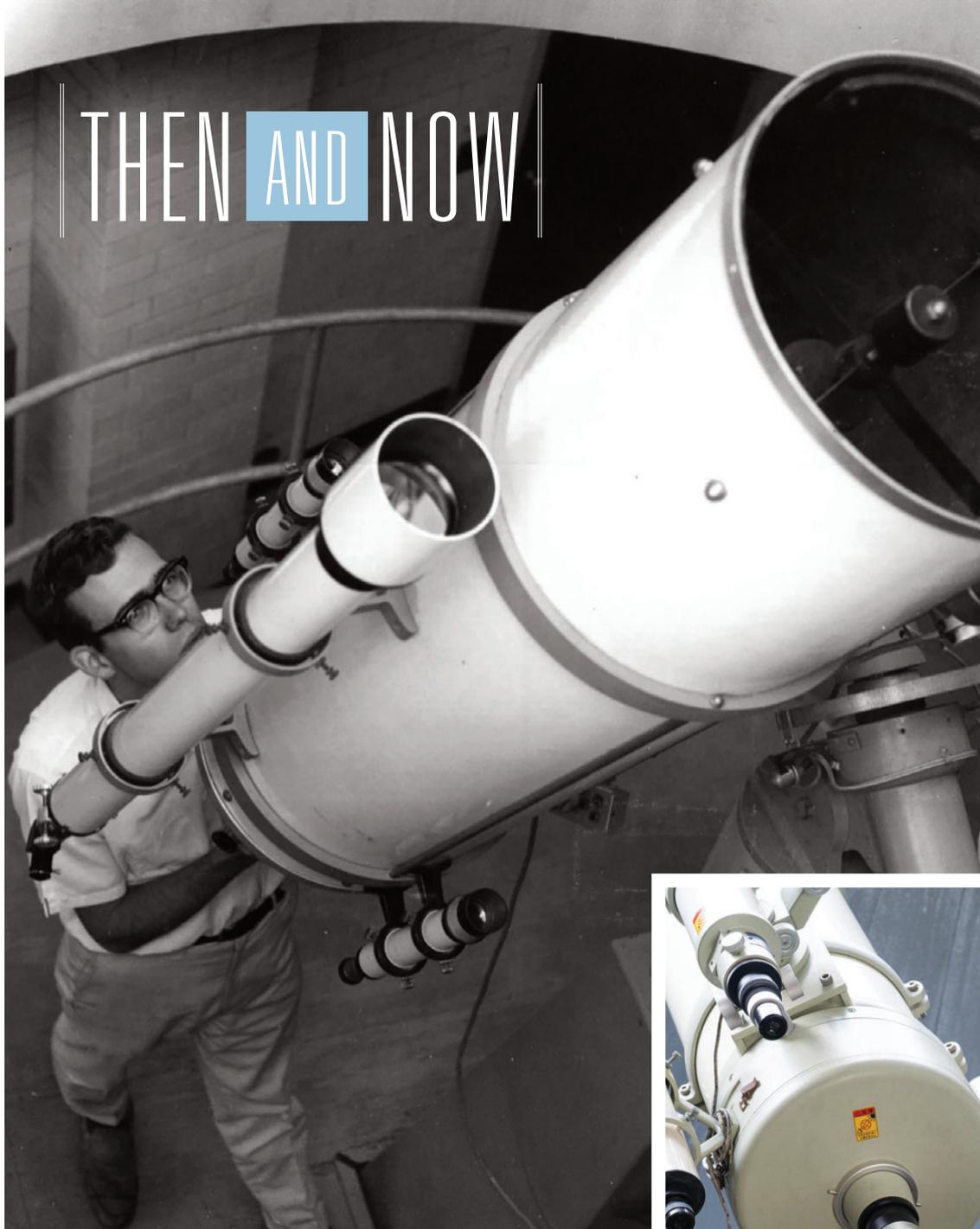
DID YOU: Get married? Get a new job? Receive an award? Have a baby? Send your Alum Note to [alumni@uno.edu](mailto:alumni@uno.edu)

# ALUMNI MEETUPS

Over the course of the year, the UNO Alumni Association plays host to a veritable feast of events, including White Linen Night in New Orleans and gatherings in New York and Washington, D.C. These recent outings allowed Privateers to meet up and catch up on life happenings, as well as share updates about the good things going on at the city's only public research university! No doubt these alumni are UNO Proud!



# THEN AND NOW



## UNO'S OBSERVATORY

FOR DECADES THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS Observatory has offered stargazers a chance to peek at celestial bodies, such as the moon, stars, planets and far away galaxies that are millions of light years away. In addition, visitors to the observatory have witnessed cosmic occurrences, such as Mercury's rare trip across the sun in 2019. Visitors were able to view Mercury's transit as it passed between the Earth and the sun via the telescope, which was equipped with special solar lens.

The telescope, housed on campus in the Science Building, is also a teaching tool for the physics department and Physics Club of UNO.

# Thank You

We'd like to thank all donors who have supported *NEXT IS NOW: The Campaign for the University of New Orleans*, specifically, our University Fellows whose gifts of \$100,000 or more are helping to dream what's possible, supporting what's essential, and shaping what's next.

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