Southern Miss honors four extraordinary women for their success in the media

Also inside:
Remembering Dr. Wiggins and MCJ’s new home in College Hall
Student success depends on us - and you

At a luncheon Friday, Feb. 8, 2013, The School of Mass Communication and Journalism and the University of Southern Mississippi Foundation officially launched “The Campaign for Mass Comm,” one of just a handful of the foundation’s major fundraising initiatives. The campaign was designed to capitalize on the school’s move to College Hall, scheduled for the fall of 2013.

Kurt Brautigam, one of Mississippi’s most prominent public relations professionals and a member of the campaign’s steering committee, delivered the luncheon’s impassioned keynote address. He encouraged alumni to think about the impact that Southern Miss had on their lives and careers, and he outlined the reasons he decided to make a significant gift to the campaign.

Two days after the luncheon, a tornado ripped across the south end of campus, severely damaging a number of buildings, including many on the historic, beautiful landscape. The School of Music and Department of Art and Design found themselves vacating Southern Hall mid-semester to make room for their displaced art and music colleagues.

It was a tough spring semester, and not exactly the way you want to start a fundraising campaign. But we are persisting, and in this edition of the MCJ Journal, you’ll learn more about the campaign and how you can help.

The school’s faculty has adopted an ambitious five-year plan to significantly raise the school’s profile. Our goal? To become one of the top five mass communication programs in the Southeast. We also want to be the very best program in the country that serves a population of students who are mostly from groups who have been underrepresented at universities and in the media, including students who are among the first generation of their families to attend college.

Our fundraising campaign is designed to provide the school with the resources we need to become a top program. We intend to equip College Hall with state-of-the-art facilities, dramatically increase our scholarship endowment and create an endowment that will allow us to hire distinguished media professionals to serve on the faculty.

We are committed to providing our students with opportunities that will allow them to launch successful careers. We believe that Southern Miss graduates can play important leadership roles in the media, and we can cite as evidence the hundreds of alumni – including many whose parents did not attend college – who are doing just that. As always, this edition of the MCJ Journal highlights some of those remarkable graduates.

Our move to College Hall and The Campaign for Mass Comm are essentially realizations of the vision of faculty members who dedicated their professional lives to the university’s mass communication and journalism students, including the late Art Kaul and Gene Wiggins. The campaign includes the opportunity to make gifts in their names that will allow us to permanently name spaces -- classrooms, labs, offices -- in College Hall for professors who affected the lives of so many of our alumni.

For those of you who have already made a contribution to the campaign, please know how much we appreciate it. For more information about the campaign and about naming opportunities in College Hall, you can visit the campaign’s website at http://www.usmfoundation.com/masscomm. Or feel free to contact me directly at christopher.campbell@usm.edu or 601-266-6283.

This is a very exciting time for the School of Mass Communication and Journalism, and we are pleased to have the avid support of the university’s new president, Dr. Rodney Bennett. He has an undergraduate degree in mass communication; he understands what we do, and he understands our potential. We’ll be fully relocated to College Hall by the beginning of the fall semester, and we will soon be announcing a ribbon-cutting ceremony to mark the official opening of the building. So stay tuned.

Every member of the school’s faculty and staff made a contribution to The Campaign for Mass Comm before it was officially launched, which speaks to the important vision of the program that all of us share. We believe our alumni share that vision.

I hope you will consider making a donation to the campaign, no matter how small. Southern Miss – and MCJ – to the top!

-- Dr. Chris Campbell, Director
Dr. Wiggins remembered as beloved colleague, professor and friend

Dr. Robert Gene Wiggins, 69, professor emeritus of journalism at USM, passed away Feb. 21, 2013, at his Hattiesburg home. Dr. Wiggins joined the Southern Miss faculty in 1973. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from Southern Miss and his Ph.D. from Southern Illinois University-Carbondale. Prior to completing his doctorate, he worked as a professional journalist for the Jackson Daily News and for the Hattiesburg American. He also served as a public information officer in the U.S. Air Force.

Dr. Wiggins was part of the journalism department for more than 33 years. He was the founding director of the School of Mass Communication at USM from 1983-2001.

Dr. Wiggins' specialty was communication law, and he taught undergraduate and graduate courses in this area. He also authored numerous publications, including books, book chapters and journal articles in the area of mass communication law. He taught graduate courses in public relations case studies and law, as well as undergraduate courses in media writing and law, and continued to teach courses in media law and ethics after his retirement in 2008.

Below is an excerpt of the eulogy given at Dr. Wiggins' funeral by Rick Cleveland, executive director of the Mississippi Sports Hall of Fame and former student of Dr. Wiggins:

This was really late on a Friday night or early on a Saturday morning. We were in the smoky, grimy third-floor newsroom of the old Hattiesburg American building on Front Street. Had to be 45 years ago. This was when we typed our stories on cheap copy paper with manual typewriters. We really were, in every sense of the term, ink-stained wretches.

I was a teen-aged sports writer and Gene Wiggins — Wiggie, we called him then — was my boss. This was a high school football Friday night, so we had both been to cover a game, then returned to the newspaper to take the results of other games on the phone. Gene had finished his story and 90 percent of all the other stories and was smoking a cigarette and waiting on me. He was patient for a while and then much less patient. A/f ter all, the Mississippi Sports Hall of Fame and former student of Dr. Wiggins:

Dr. Gene Wiggins 1943-2013

Here's another example of that Wiggins wit. Another Friday night I finished my story and handed it to Gene to edit. I anxiously watched him read it and mark it and then I saw that classic and impish Gene Wiggins grin cross his face.

"Rickey, that was some fine writing," he said. "Your subjects and verbs mostly agreed. You spelled almost everything right. It flows really well. Very few typos. Now then, next time, would you mind including the dad-blamed score."

There was so much to admire and love about Dr. Gene Wiggins. Right at the top, in my mind, was that dry sense of humor and that grin, which he always used so well to get his points across. "Geno" dispensed wit and wisdom in just about equal doses. And he always used that exquisite wit to dispense his wisdom.

I can tell you this much: The Cleveland family never had a better friend. That includes my dad, Gene; my mom, Carrie; my brother, Bobby; and me. When USM expanded The Rock back in the mid 1970s, my daddy, Ace Cleveland, borrowed Gene from the School of Communications to work in the press box. Gene typed the play by play for the next nearly 40 years. To my knowledge, he and Ace have typed every play by play at USM since 1953. That's 60 years. I know this much: The next guy had better be good at it. Believe me, Gene was good at it. He was fast and he was accurate. He was so good at football, Ace got him to do the basketball play by play as well. All the while, he and Ace traded barbs the way kids used to trade marbles. They made the press box a fun and often irreverent place to be.

My brother Bobby worked two jobs while he went to school at USM. He worked at the newspaper in the morning. He tended bar until late at night. He went to class, on rare occasions, in between. When Bobby made it to class, it was what we sports writers would call an upset. Once, Bobby fell asleep in one of Gene's classes and started snoring. Gene walked over to his desk, tapped him on the shoulder and asked: "Mr. Cleveland, am I disturbing your sleep?"

No, Bobby said, on the contrary, he wished Gene would just keep talking. It wasn't bothering his sleep at all. In fact, it was helping. Bobby says Gene never woke him up again. But I'll tell you this: Gene did ensure that Bobby got a diploma. It took him nine years and Gene probably had to cook the books a little, but he did it.

Now then, raise your hand out there if you had Law of the Press, later called Media Law, under Gene Wiggins? Me, too. We are all survivors. We're kind of like a Band of Brothers in that regard. We may not have gotten Purple Hearts, but we deserved something similar. That class could leave your brain frazzled and your GPA battered and bruised. I guess we all survived.

Besides being my favorite professor, Gene was also my adviser. When it came time to take Law of the Press, he insisted I take a light schedule other-wise. Law of the Press is not for sissies, he said, or something like that. You are going to really have to show up, work and study in this class, he said. And he was right.

I took that as a personal challenge. I showed up. I worked and I really studied. And I've got to tell you, no column I ever wrote and no award I ever won was more satisfying than the A I got in the most difficult class I ever took. That A in Gene Wiggins' Law of the Press class was like my Southern Miss Medal of Honor.

You know it is one thing to like your professor. I know I had several professors I liked who didn't really teach me all that much. It is another thing to respect your professor. Believe me I had several professors whom I respected but did not like a bit. But it is entirely another thing to both like and respect your professor. I would challenge you to try and find a USM journalism student who didn't both like and respect Gene Wiggins. You just can't do it. Such a person does not exist. He had that rarest of abilities to make everyone he met feel better about themselves — and to also make them better people.
A NEW LEVEL
OF LEARNING

The Campaign for Mass Comm will transform the school, its faculty and facilities, ensuring that its graduates have every opportunity to prepare themselves to serve in leadership positions in the media of the future. This 21st century renaissance will enable students to develop skills in a culturally diverse environment under the mentorship of seasoned professionals who recognize the impact of new technology on the media industry.

Our past has produced thousands of success stories…
now we can help future graduates reach their potential.

Visit www.usmfoundation.com/MASSCOMM to make your gift today.
#USMSteelMagnolias all about USM women in the media

By Carly Tynes

The School of Mass Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern Mississippi hosted its sixth annual symposium Nov. 15, 2012. "Southern Miss Women and the Media: #USMSteelMagnolias" honored four women who made significant impact in the media.

This year, four women were inducted into the School of Mass Communication and Journalism Hall of Fame. This year's inductees were:

• Sally-Ann Roberts, award-winning reporter and co-anchor of the WWL-TV (New Orleans) morning news show.
• Martha D. Saunders, president of Southern Miss from 2007 – 2012 and first female president of the university.
• Rebecca Brown Baldwin, vice president and general manager of Zap2it.com, a television and movie information website.
• Margaret Loesch, founding president and CEO of The Hub Network, a TV network that targets kids and families.

The Hall of Fame was created in 2006 as a way for the School of Mass Communication and Journalism to honor those who have graduated from the department and have gone on to distinguished careers.

The 2012 symposium focused specifically on women and the media and gave students an opportunity to attend a question-and-answer panel session along with master classes put on by the four women inducted into the Hall of Fame this year. The ladies were inducted for different reasons, having a long list of accomplishments backing up their impressive resumes.

The keynote speaker for the luncheon was Tena Clark. Clark was inducted into the MCJ Hall of Fame and recognized at last year's symposium. She is a music producer who has written award-winning hits, contributed to multiplatinum movie soundtracks, written songs for television shows and was the creator of the McDonald's campaign theme, "Have You Had Your Break Today." She is the founder and CEO of DMI Music & Media Solutions.
Baldwin credits lessons learned at Southern Miss for lifelong success

By Kathryn Miller

Rebecca Baldwin started out as many journalism students have before and after her - as a reporter and executive editor for The Student Printz at the University of Southern Mississippi. Now, 30 years later, she is a manager of the website Zap2it.com, the news and entertainment website for Tribune Media Services.

She was inducted into the Southern Miss Mass Communication and Journalism Hall of Fame late November.

Baldwin received her bachelor’s degree in journalism in 1980. “My years at Southern Miss helped transition me into adulthood and laid the groundwork for everything I’ve done since,” Baldwin said.

She then worked toward a master’s degree in journalism at the University of Florida over the next two years.

Baldwin began working as an Arts & Entertainment editor for The Orlando Sentinel in 1984. After nine years at The Orlando Sentinel, Baldwin became the director/product developer for Tribune Interactive in 2000. During her time there, Baldwin earned her Master’s in Business Administration in marketing and marketing management at Northwestern University.

In 2006, Baldwin became the vice president and general manager of Tribune Media Services’ popular website, Zap2it.com. Tribune Media Services is America’s leading source of entertainment listings data. This website is a practical guide for many Americans who love television and movies.

Since its launch in 2000, Zap2it.com has become a popular website, giving users access to all things entertainment including celebrity news, TV news blogs and movie news. Zap2it.com has recently expanded with its two new TV blogs: Pop2it, focusing on pop culture, music, and fashion, and 2Cool, which focuses on young Hollywood stars and their entertainment work. The website reached a record audience of 7.2 million U.S. visitors in May 2011.

Baldwin credits her experiences at USM, including being a member of the Pride of Mississippi Marching Band, with teaching her much of the knowledge she has about the professional world. “From the first day I showed up at Pride practice, I knew I was part of a larger team that depended on me to do my part as well as I possibly could,” Baldwin said. She also said the same went for her job at The Student Printz, saying everyone on the staff had a job to do and everyone had to work hard together to produce a paper they could be proud of.

“If I believe I always had the desire and drive to be successful, but Southern gave me the experiences and the tools I needed to convert that ambition into reality,” Baldwin said.

She thanks the women who blazed trails ahead of her so she rarely has to think about how being a woman has affected her career. However, her desire to have a successful career has had a definite impact on her personal life. Since her college years, Baldwin knew she wanted to start a career and grow in it before she got married and had children.

“It’s all about communication, teamwork, and showing respect and appreciation,” Baldwin said.
Loesch started at the bottom before working her way to the top

By Carly Tynes

Margaret Loesch never doubted her ability to become successful in the television industry. She worked her way into some of the top positions at several of the top television industry companies in the United States and says being a woman in the industry has proven to be nothing but an asset.

“You have to figure out a way around the obstacles,” Loesch said. “Being a woman has absolutely been an asset; women have different skill sets that are unique to women. Women are mostly good with details, while men are mostly good at big picture stuff.”

Loesch is currently the founding president and CEO of The Hub Network, which targets kids and their families. She is over all business and creative areas for the television network and has been since July 2009.

She graduated from Southern Miss after earning a bachelor’s degree in political science, and continued along a path toward success. Loesch held her first positions in the television business in 1971 at ABC. She worked in programming and production until 1979, when she began working with NBC.

Prior to working as the CEO and founding president of The Hub, Loesch held numerous executive positions within many prestigious companies. The first senior position she held was with Hanna-Barbera Productions as the vice president for children’s programming. She then moved up to the executive vice president position in the same company. She oversaw the development and production of more than 500 hours of programming, including “Richie Rich,” “The World’s Greatest Superfriends” and “Smurfs” for Hanna-Barbera.

In 1984, Loesch moved to Marvel Productions, where she was president and CEO of the company. She became president of Fox Kids Network Worldwide, from 1990 until 1997, which was when the network decided to purchase the “X-Men” TV series and brought it to the network. The purchase of the series proved to be an extremely successful one for the network, as the show became wildly popular. Loesch was also responsible for bringing the network into Latin America, the United Kingdom and Australia. She was named vice chairwoman for these efforts.

Loesch was also the co-founder and CEO of The Hatchery, a family media company; the founding president and CEO of Crown Media United States, where she launched and was responsible for building the Hallmark Channel; and president of the Jim Henson Television Group, where she also served as executive producer of the popular children’s show “Bear in the Big Blue House.”

At the 2012 MCJ Symposium panel discussion, Loesch said overcoming obstacles and getting over disappointments have been two of the main factors that have helped her career.

“Life is filled with obstacles. You have to be a problem solver,” Loesch said. “You have to be able to handle disappointment and not let it paralyze you.”

Among her many accomplishments and awards are four Emmy Awards, a George Foster Peabody Award, a Vision Award and a Chair Award from the Caucus for Television Producers, Writers, and Directors. She was recently inducted into the School of Mass Communication and Journalism’s Hall of Fame last November.

Along with holding the various senior positions she has held in her extensive career, Loesch has also been a dedicated member of many industry organizations. She has served on the board of trustees for the Sesame Workshop, which serves as the producers of the educational program, “Sesame Street.” She is currently on the advisory board of the Coalition for Quality Children’s Media as well as vice chairwoman of the board of directors for the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences Foundation, proving her commitment and passion for providing quality television entertainment for children and their families.
Saunders leaves powerful legacy at Southern Miss

By Kathryn Miller

Martha Saunders can be considered a true lady of the University of Southern Mississippi. Her pride and dedication to higher education is evident when she speaks about her long career in the field of higher education.

In 1966, Saunders began her college life at USM and earned her bachelor’s degree in French in 1969. She later decided to attend the University of Georgia in 1978 and earned her master’s degree in journalism. Saunders received her Ph.D. in communication theory and research at Florida State University in 1990.

"I don't think it's an overstatement to say that Southern Miss probably made the difference in shaping my career and life," Saunders said.

Saunders remembers that there were few careers for women when she was in college.

"Nevertheless, as a student I was encouraged to push harder, try new things and reach high," she said. In 1999, Saunders accepted a job as the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of West Florida.

After three years in Florida, Saunders accepted a job at Columbus State University as vice president for academic affairs in 2002.

In July 2005, Saunders moved to Wisconsin to become the chancellor at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater for two years. In May 2007, Saunders was named the next president of the University of Southern Mississippi.

Saunders helped stabilize USM’s finances and increased student enrollment to record-breaking levels. She led the USM Centennial Celebration in 2010, and was awarded the coveted Silver Anvil Award from the Public Relations Society of America for her work on two public relations campaigns for the university.

In 2011, U.S. News & World Report ranked USM among the nation’s 20 most popular universities. U.S. News & World Report also ranked USM’s college of business in the top 15% of the nation’s schools.

Saunders proved herself as a leader of the university who worked hard to leave Southern Miss better than she found it.

In June 2012, Saunders decided to step down as president of the University of Southern Mississippi. She accepted a job as provost and vice president of the division of academic affairs at the University of West Florida in Pensacola.

Saunders reflected on her work experience as a woman. She said she was treated differently because she was a woman, but it never slowed her down in her endeavors.

“"I have been accused from time to time of not 'knowing my place' but it only made me more determined to persuade people that a woman's place is wherever she can do good work," she said.

Saunders recalled working for a dean who nominated her for almost every opportunity that presented itself.

“I remember being a little embarrassed of his confidence in me and told him I wasn't sure I qualified for all the honors he was endorsing,” Saunders said.

She said she still remembers him quietly saying, "Go ahead and give it a go. You might just be surprised."

Saunders has a unique ability to unite a university and bring it together.

“She [Saunders] was really the driving force behind the School of Mass Communication and Journalism making the move into College Hall,” Chris Campbell, Director of the School of Mass Comm and Journalism, said. "She really understands what we do, and she respects what we do a tremendous amount. We can't thank her enough.”
Foundation of faith and education helps Roberts triumph over trials

By Carly Tynes

Sally-Ann Roberts is no stranger to delivering messages to the masses that eagerly cling to her every word. She is currently an award-winning journalist for WWL-TV in New Orleans where she co-anchors the highest rated local morning news show in Louisiana.

"If this is your passion, don't look back; keep going forward," Roberts said during her visit last November to Southern Miss.

She was inducted into the USM School of Mass Communication and Journalism Hall of Fame.

She discussed her life growing up as a military child, career as a reporter, experience as a mother and grandmother, a widow who is now remarried, and a Christian woman. She would stop periodically to take questions and offer words of wisdom from many years spent reporting the news.

"You have the privilege of being at Southern Miss," Roberts said. "The ones before you are doing so well because of the foundation they have received at Southern Miss."

Sally-Ann Roberts was born in Arizona to parents Lawrence and Lucimarian Roberts. Her father was a member of the U.S. Air Force, so she spent her childhood moving from place to place several times.

After growing up on the move, the Roberts family settled at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Miss., and Roberts was a junior in high school at the time.

Roberts graduated from Biloxi High School, and then made the decision to attend college. She graduated from the University of Southern Mississippi with her bachelor's degree in journalism ('74), as well as her master's degree in communications ('76).

In 1977, Roberts began her tenure with WWL-TV as a city hall reporter. She won many awards for her coverage of the city government during the administrations of Moon Landrieu, Ernest Morial and Sidney Barthelemy. She earned first place in journalistic excellence from many organizations such as the Louisiana Associated Press, The Press Club of New Orleans, the New Orleans chapter of Women in Communications and Radio and Television News Directors Association.

In 1998, Roberts played an important role as a member of the reporting team that earned the coveted Edward R. Murrow Award for WWL-TV for late-breaking news.

Roberts' entire career has been filled with local as well as national recognition. She has received awards from the Young Leadership Council, YWCA, Junior League, Toastmasters International, New Orleans Black Social Workers and many more organizations for her work as a journalist and community member.

She has received many awards from organizations that recognize successful women. Also in 2006, Roberts was recognized by City Business as one of the 50 Women of the Year in Greater New Orleans.

Roberts and her co-anchor Eric Paulsen received the Blue Ribbon Award from the Louisiana Center for Women in 2008.

Roberts is the older sister of Robin Roberts, a "Good Morning America" anchor with a rare type of cancer. She spoke openly about the effect her sister's sickness has had on the entire family, but felt hopeful Robin would make a full recovery. The day after Sally-Ann was recognized at Southern Miss, she flew to New York City to interview her sister.

The entire time Roberts was speaking to the classroom filled with Southern Miss students she calmly repeated her mantra that she learned from her mother before her mother's death in 2012.

"Pray, prepare, proceed," Roberts said.

She expressed the importance of the strength found through her Christian faith.

Roberts said by God's grace alone she has made it through the trials and triumphs life presented to her.

After five years as a widow, she recently remarried. She is the mother of three and the grandmother of one.

Roberts has written two books that have both been published by Pelican Press called "Going Live…An Anchorwoman Reports Good News" and the novel "Angelvision."
The School of Mass Communication and Journalism closed a chapter that was years long in its old home of Southern Hall, and has opened a new chapter in its newly renovated home of College Hall.

College Hall was built in 1912 and is one of the five original buildings on the university’s Hattiesburg campus. The building has housed everything from departmental offices and classrooms to the university’s first library and auditorium.

The three-story building now houses classrooms and offices on the first floor; classrooms, offices, a digital photo laboratory, photo studio and two computer labs on the second floor; and the Student Media Center on the third floor. The Student Media Center consists of the Student Printz newspaper; Roots Radio station, WUSM-FM; The Agency at Southern Miss; The Crew video production group; and South City Records record label.

“The Campaign for Mass Comm” is the official fundraising campaign established by the University of Southern Mississippi’s Foundation on behalf of the school. All funds received through the campaign will be designated for endowments to provide monetary support.

“Our primary vision for the funds raised through the campaign is to be able to provide students who have to work while they are in school with some sort of money so they can get out of restaurants and stores and into our media services,” said Chris Campbell, director of the School of Mass Communication and Journalism. “We want to be able to pay them and give them experiences that will help them become more marketable once they graduate and leave Southern Miss.”

The fundraising campaign, although originally announced in 2012, was put on hold when president Martha Saunders resigned from the university. Campbell said she played a pivotal role in getting the department into College Hall and establishing the fundraising campaign.

After the fundraising committee regrouped, the campaign was officially re-launched on Feb. 8 of this year. Two days later, the face of campus was forever changed when an EF-4 tornado ripped through Hattiesburg and its surrounding areas on Feb. 10.

The south side of the University of Southern Mississippi’s campus was heavily damaged. The School of Music and the Department of Art and Design were both displaced from classrooms and offices and were in need of any spaces that could be offered or shared on campus. Everyone agreed that the School of Mass Communication and Journalism would make the move so the displaced departments could make use of Southern Hall’s classrooms and offices.

So the move to College Hall took place months earlier than planned, and the department’s fundraising campaign was rightfully placed at the back of people’s minds due to more pressing needs in light of the tornado.

“People understood the quick move was not ideal,” Campbell said. “We were sympathetic to departments struggling after the tornado.”

Campbell said that College Hall did receive minor damage due to the tornado. Ninety windowpanes were cracked and damaged due to the flying debris and were replaced during the summer of 2013. He said the roof received some damage as well, but the university is still speaking with the university’s insurance provider about what to do next.

“The department sees College Hall as a symbol of a new era for journalism and mass communication,” Campbell said. “This represents our opportunity for us to do really extraordinary things.”

“Our students will be given the opportunity to figure out how to run the media of the future.”

By Carly Tynes

Out with the old, in with the new:

College Hall rebirth means more than renovations and fundraising; it symbolizes a totally new era for MCJ students at USM

School of Mass Communication & Journalism
Southern Miss
When it comes to crisis management and social media intervention, Jim Coll ('99, '06) knows just how to respond. Over the course of the past 18 months, Southern Miss has been in the news for different reasons that have drawn attention – whether good or bad – to the university.

Coll, the university’s chief communication officer, spoke at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities national conference in Washington, D.C., in April about his experiences with social media and crisis management. He offered tips to conference participants and even shared the situations he and the Southern Miss communications team found themselves working to clear up. Coll was awarded the 2012 Bud Kirkpatrick Practitioner of the Year Award by the Public Relations Association of Mississippi.

Several high profile events put the university in the national spotlight over the past couple of years such as the black face incident that involved several of the Phi Mu sorority members painting their faces to resemble the Huxtables of The Cosby Show, the pep band controversy during the NCAA basketball tournament, the sudden resignation of university president Dr. Martha Saunders and the destructive tornado on Feb. 10, 2013.

The Southern Miss communications team was called to action last year following what Coll refers to as the “pep band incident.” Several Southern Miss pep band members chanted a derogatory remark directed at Kansas State basketball player Angel Rodriguez during an NCAA basketball tournament game that was nationally televised.

It was clear the communications team didn’t have time to sit down and draft out eloquent apologies on behalf of the university after the event occurred. Social media sites were filled with talk about what was said, and announcers were discussing it almost immediately after it occurred. The team knew it had to act fast, so they decided an immediate, heartfelt response was the only way to begin the damage control.

An apology was issued from university president Martha Saunders. Coll then took the response and posted it on the Southern Miss blog, Facebook and Twitter accounts. The apology made its way to the appropriate people by the appropriate means and in a timely manner. He said the reactions of the crowds who knew of the incident were overwhelmingly positive because the university quickly took responsibility for what happened.

Coll wrote on his blog after the pep band controversy about the positives of situations that throw the university into the national spotlight, even if the event was negative.

“I've learned there is at least one important positive to a crisis – you are exposed to journalists and mass media outlets that you usually unsuccessfully beg for attention. You may be at the beginning of a long and good relationship – if you handle the situation well.”

On a separate occasion, he wrote another blog post giving his “Top 10 Social Media Truths During a Crisis.” He gives tips on every social media topic from choosing who to run your social media to how to handle criticism even after trying your hardest to repair what damage was done.

Coll said the Southern Miss communications team was faced with a different crisis the night the tornado struck campus.

“We have protocol to follow when a natural disaster strikes,” Coll said. “We were using every outlet of communication, especially our social media sites, so that we could let students know what was happening on campus and when it would be safe to return.”

The Southern Miss communications team consists of Coll, Van Arnold, assistant director of media relations; David Tisdale, senior writer; Landy Laird, distribution administrator; Geoff LoCicero, director of web services; Aaron Green, web developer; Lauren VanZandt, web designer; Olivia Ann Hurst, social media specialist; LaTonya Frelix, web content producer; Jerry Santos, coordinator of media production; Jay Dunn, digital media producer and Cassie Oubre, manager of operations.
Halford ends rare two-year stint as Printz chief

By Carly Tynes

Mary Margaret Halford ('13) quietly observed production of The Student Printz on May 2 for the final time after serving a very rare two-year stint as the newspaper's executive editor. She turned to her staff, smiled and said, "It hasn't hit me yet that this chapter is coming to an end."

For two years, Halford poured herself into the paper, bringing in awards and recognition from across the region. Her Monday and Wednesday evenings were spent in the Printz offices, working hard to produce a paper alongside the other editors on staff.

Halford's connection with Southern Miss – and The Student Printz – runs deep. From the time she was a 6th-grader, she attended almost all home football games. Her mom's brother played football for the Golden Eagles. Her dad's brother, George Halford, served as executive editor of The Student Printz during the fall semester of '81.

"My family has been invested in this university as a whole for years," Halford said. "My Uncle George told me right before he died to go to USM, be happy, get involved... He liked to joke a lot so of course he jokingly said I could never fill his shoes as editor of the Printz."

Halford took her uncle's advice seriously. She got involved from the very beginning in Southern Miss activities. She joined a sorority her freshman year and is now considered an alum of the organization. At the end of her freshman year, she changed her major to public relations and when past Printz editor Samantha Schott spoke to one of her classes about writing for the paper, she decided to give news writing a shot.

Halford quickly learned the tricks of the trade in the newspaper industry. She began working at the Vicksburg Post under editor Karen Gamble as an intern during Christmas break of her sophomore year.

"When I went out for editor my junior year, I thought there was no way I would get the position. I thought I would really just be getting interview experience more than anything," Halford said.

To her shock, the USM Board of Publications selected Halford as the editor of the student newspaper that year. The paper won the General Excellence award at the Mississippi Press Association's Better Newspaper Contest following her first year as editor.

After applying and interviewing again, Halford was selected for the second year, her senior year, to return as executive editor. Again, she and the staff won awards from the Mississippi Press Association and she herself won first and third place awards for spot news writing from the Louisiana-Mississippi Associated Press Managing Editors contest.

Halford made many tough decisions regarding controversial issues that placed the university in the national spotlight. In 2011, she made the decision not to run the photo of the women involved in the sorority who painted their faces in black face to resemble the Huxtables of The Cosby Show. And in 2013 she was responsible for getting Printz reporters and photographers in the community almost immediately after the destructive tornado ripped through campus.

"The staff for the past two years...I feel like I just got really lucky with those people," she said. "I would get compliments from people in the administration and all over the community about the staff. A lot of credit for awards needs to be placed on the staff."

"Dr. Campbell was always so supportive. He would always tell me what he liked about that day's paper or what he didn't like. He also helped with the staff's confidence in their writing," she said. "He was so good at reminding me what I was doing in the Printz office as editor. People like Dr. Campbell really helped. The entire MCJ faculty and staff were so good to me."

Halford recently accepted a reporter position with The Sun Herald newspaper at the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

SSCA honors school for its commitment to minority recruitment and retention

By David Tisdale

The University of Southern Mississippi School of Mass Communication and Journalism recently earned the Minority Recruitment and Retention Award from the Southern States Communication Association (SSCA).

The SSCA Minority Recruitment and Retention Award honors institutions that have demonstrated noteworthy commitment to the recruitment and retention of minority students for their campuses.

"The SSCA award is a great honor for our school," said Dr. Kim LeDuff, associate professor of mass communication and acting director for the school. "We take great pride in the fact that through our school's diversity plan we have managed to attract a diverse population of students, develop the most diverse faculty of any unit on campus and create and foster an open and inclusive environment for our faculty, staff and students."

LeDuff said the school is also committed to encouraging future journalists and communicators that it trains to be culturally competent and understand the importance of including diverse voices as they inform society.

"Many of our faculty and graduate students are engaged in research that explores diverse issues, including the history and representation of race, ethnicity, gender, ability and sexuality in media as well as how diverse groups use media technology," LeDuff said.

Right: USM MCJ graduate school coordinator Dr. Fei Xue with the SSCA diversity award.

Southern Miss School of Mass Communication & Journalism
Four new faculty join School of Mass Communication and Journalism

Four new faculty members brought a combination of professional experience and academic training to the Southern Miss School of Mass Communication and Journalism for the 2012-13 academic year. Visiting Associate Professor Cindy Blackwell previously served as an associate professor of agricultural communication at Oklahoma State University, where she co-directed four major grant projects, including one in which her team assisted with the education and development of media specialists in Mali, West Africa. She holds a master's and Ph.D. from Texas A&M and a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Texas at Austin. She is teaching in the undergraduate and master's programs in public relations and is advising The Agency at Southern Miss, the school's student-operated advertising and public relations firm.

Assistant Professor Gina Chen earned her Ph.D. and master's degree at the Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University in New York. She spent 20 years working as a newspaper and online reporter and editor with most of her professional experience at The Post-Standard in Syracuse, N.Y. Her research on social media has been published in a variety of journals, including Mass Communication and Society, the Newspaper Research Journal and Computers in Human Behavior. She teaches courses in multimedia storytelling and newspaper and online journalism.

Visiting Instructor Peter Chen graduated from California State University-Fullerton with his bachelor's degree before spending 18 years as a photographer, reporter, photo editor and multimedia journalist at The Post-Standard in Syracuse. He teaches courses in multimedia storytelling and photojournalism.

Associate Professor Vanessa Murphree previously served as an associate professor at the University of South Alabama. She earned undergraduate and master's degrees at the University of Alabama and her doctorate in mass communication at the University of Southern Mississippi. She is the author of “The Selling of Civil Rights: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Use of Public Relations.” She is teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in public relations and media history.

“This is an impressive group, and they bring a lot of positive energy to the school,” said Dr. Chris Campbell, the school's director. “They also bring great media experience as well as very impressive academic backgrounds. We're thrilled, and our students are already singing their praises.”

WUSM Tailgate Concert Series continues for 2013 football season

With the 2013 Southern Miss football season just months away, WUSM 88.5 is making plans for the third annual WUSM Tailgate Concert Series at all home football games at the Centennial Green located next to Cook Library.

Local and regional artists Vanity Furr, Dr. E and the Mississippi Voodoo Kings, and Oh, Jeremiah are booked to play this season. Performance times vary for each game, but they always begin after Eagle Walk and end 30 minutes prior to game time in order to give football fans time to be in their seats for kick-off.

The USM College of Arts and Letters, iTech at the University of Southern Mississippi, The U.S. Army, Aramark, Hattiesburg Coca-Cola, and The Fairfield Inn and Suites by Marriott, help sponsor the event each year.

Housed in the USM School of Mass Communication and Journalism, WUSM is committed to playing great music with American roots, highlighting local artists and building on Mississippi’s music traditions. WUSM hopes to continue building its profile in order to better serve its mission as the only local public radio station in the Pine Belt.

Beyond “the greatest music ever recorded,” the station airs community service programming “Southern Miss Today” which airs at noon on weekdays during the academic year. WUSM’s music format is a celebration of American roots music with a strong Mississippi influence, drawn from a 60,000-plus music library. Its programming and other information can be found streaming on the Internet at www.SouthernMissRadio.com.

Recently, the station was voted “Best of the Pine Belt” in the Signature Magazine/Festival South yearly poll.

“It's great to have our fans step forward and vote in such great numbers to help us earn this award, and we want to keep building on that,” said WUSM Station Manager Justin Martin.

To contact WUSM, including for program underwriting opportunities, the Tailgate Concert Series or other information on the station and how to support it, call 601.266.4287 or e-mail wusm@usm.edu. The station’s offices are located on the third floor of College Hall, and the physical mailing address is WUSM, 118 College Drive, Box 5121, Hattiesburg, MS 39406.
1960s

Ron Meyer (’62) is the former director for evangelism at the Illinois Baptist State Association. Meyer returned to the pastorate and retired in Rockford, Ill. He is frequently involved with theater at Rock Valley College, Rockford, Ill.

Clifton Topp (’69) retired from radio broadcasting in August of 2012. He lives in Wyoming with his wife, Barbara.

1970s

George Johnson (’70) is a professor at the College of Visual and Performing Arts at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Va.

Lester R. Potter (’70) is an accredited business communicator and senior lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication and Communication Studies at Towson University, Maryland. He is a candidate for a doctorate in instructional technology at Towson. At Towson, Potter teaches Public Relations Writing, Theory of Organization- al Communication and Strategic Public Relations and In- tegrated Communication, Public Relations for Nonprofit Organizations, and selected courses in Towson’s Master of Science in Communication Management. He also serves as faculty advisor to the Student PR Group comprised of PRSA and IABC student chapters.

Robert N. Armstrong (’71) retired from the Mississippi Department of Education after teaching high school for 20 years. Previously, he retired in 1991 from active duty in the U.S. Army after serving for 22 years. Armstrong is now the senior pastor of Mt. Evergreen, Camp Ground, and Rocky Springs United Methodist churches in Luka, Miss. He was selected as Teacher of the Year by the U.S. Army and Vicksburg High School prior to his retirement.

William McMichael (’72) is now a reporter for The News Journal in Wilmington, Del. McMichael spent 12 years with Gannett’s Military Times newspapers (nine with Navy Times and three as the papers’ Pentagon correspondent).

Steve Gardner (’78) released his sixth CD, “Hesitation Blues,” in January 2013 on Blues Cat Records of Tokyo, where he lives. He was inducted into the USM Mass Communication and Journalism Hall of Fame in 2007.

1980s

Melanie Robinson Noto (’80) had her eighteenth book published under the pen name Melanie Atkins at Desert Breeze Publishing. She has had two other books published by Whiskey Creek Press, as well as one book and short story published by Amazon.

Steve Coleman (’81, ’98, ’07) had a gallery show of his photographic images from the 1996 Summer Olympics, and other works at Oddfellows Gallery in Hattiesburg, Miss., in August 2012.

Cheryl Jackson Cooper (’83) was installed as president of the Mississippi University for Women Alumni Association in April 2013. Cooper served as president of the Ocean Springs Education Foundation (OSEF) for the past year. OSEF is a local non-profit that awards grants to fund innovative classroom projects.

Joni Strickland McClain (’83) owns two event venues - Heart of Pines Bed & Breakfast Inn on the Reservoir in Brandon, Miss., and McClain Lodge & Exotic Hunting, which specializes in weddings and corporate events, as well as exotic hunting.

Flora Caldwell (’85) has completed her book titled: “Journalistic Approach on Teaching Grammar and Word Usage: An Alternative to Traditional Approach.” She is now writing a nonfiction novel to be titled: “The Hidden Flower in Mississippi.”


Brian A. White (’89) is area director for World Vision in North Texas. World Vision is an organization that seeks to build a better world for children and alleviate poverty. In this role, White is responsible for seeking financial resources to support the Christian humanitarian organization. White has worked in higher education and non-profits for more than 13 years. A broadcast journalism major at USM, White worked early in his career as a TV reporter/anchor with WHLT-TV and WDAM-TV in Hattiesburg, and WAPT-TV in Jackson.

1990s

Janet Mobley (’90) is now a programmer-analyst with the Public Employees’ Retirement System of Mississippi in Jackson after working 12 years with the Mississippi Department of Human Services.

Bud Kirkpatrick inducted into Southern Public Relations Hall of Fame

William E. “Bud” Kirkpatrick (’58, ’64), former director of public relations for The University of Southern Mississippi, was recently inducted into the Southern Public Relations Hall of Fame. A member of the university’s Alumni Hall of Fame, Kirkpatrick served Southern Miss for more than 40 years, including director of the University Union and Student Activities.

“This award is so special to me and my family,” Kirkpatrick said. “I thank my colleagues in PRAM Pine Belt for recommending me, and the members of my staff over the years, for making this award possible. I also thank God for his part in my life, as all glory goes to him.”

Among Kirkpatrick’s other professional honors are the Edward L. Bernays Best of Show from the Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association; the Innovation Award from the College Public Relations Association of Mississippi; and Hattiesburg Tourism Volunteer of the Year.

He founded the Pine Belt Chapter of the Public Relations Association of Mississippi and the annual Great Pine Belt Exposition. During Southern Miss’ 100th anniversary, Kirkpatrick served on its Centennial Celebration Committee and is a member of the university’s inaugural.

Kirkpatrick was also instrumental in securing Hattiesburg as a pre-Olympic Training Site in 1996, and in developing the Southern Miss Athletic Department’s famed “Eagle Fever” campaign of the early 1980s. He is an inaugural member of the university’s Centennial Legacy Circle and served on its Centennial Celebration planning committee.

He remains active in his community, including as a volunteer for the Historic Hattiesburg Downtown Association and the Hattiesburg Area Daylily Society.
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James Bowman (’94) is now the director for brand and retail at Eddie Bauer apparel in Bellevue, Wash.

Rolanda Michele Bates (’93) is a special projects officer with the Office of the Governor of Mississippi, Division of Medicaid.

Lorenzo January (’95) is a videographer at Grace Church in Dumfries, Va.

Vincent Parker (’95) is a photojournalist at WBRC-TV in Birmingham, Ala.

Jan Farve (’95) has accepted a position with United Blood Services as human resources director for the state of Mississippi. She received the Pinnacle Award in 2012 from the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) for excellence and leadership for her program called, “SKILLZ DRILLZ,” a boot camp that teaches sixth-graders workability skills, finding their passion for career choice, and basic workforce success skills.

Karen E. Segrave (’95) left a staff photographer position with the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette in March 2013 to devote herself in a career as an independent photographer specializing in weddings, commercial, corporate, advertising and food photography based in Little Rock, Ark.

Tracie G. Bertaut, APR (’96) Coordinates communications and marketing activities and manages media relationships for the American Cancer Society in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Birmingham, Memphis, Nashville and Louisville. She co-chaired the organizing committee of a new Public Relations of Louisiana chapter in New Orleans and currently serves as chapter president, State Board president-elect, and representative on the Southeastern Public Relations Federation Board of Directors.

Christa Clark Bell (’96) was awarded top graduate paper at the Northwest Communication Association 2012 conference for her paper titled “Tragedy and Touchdowns: A Fantasy Theme Analysis of Sports Coverage of the Alabama Tornadoes.” Bell presented the paper at the organization’s conference in Idaho in April.

Jim Carlson (’96, ’98) graduated with a doctorate in Education from Northeastern University on April 21, 2013.

Walt Denton (’96) is now the director of communications for the Gulf Coast Business Council Board of Directors. Since 2007, Denton has operated Denton Advertising in Biloxi. He previously was vice president of The Guice Agency, a senior account executive with Godwin Group in Jackson and executive director of The Partnerships in Prescott, Arkansas. The Gulf Coast Business Council champions common economic and business interests through identifying issues, convening resources, framing public policy and finding solutions for the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Sam Jones (’97, 02) is dean of student affairs at Jones County Junior College in Ellisville, Miss.

Scott Walker (’97) anchors the 4.5 and 10 p.m. newscasts at WDSU-TV, the NBC affiliate in his hometown of New Orleans. He joined WDSU in 2009 from WESH 2 News in Orlando, Fla.

Kimberly Nastasi (’99) has been appointed chief executive officer of the Mississippi Gulf Coast Chamber of Commerce by the Institute for Organization Management, the professional development program of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation.

Stacey Smith Shagory (’99) is an enterprise security sales specialist at Hewlett-Packard in Houston for major accounts in oil and gas.

Don King (’99) is now a sales account executive with Clear Channel Media and Entertainment in Hattiesburg. A long time radio disc jockey, King was named Festival South’s “Best of the Pine Belt” winner for Best Radio DJ in 2012. He can still be heard on the radio doing production, voiceovers and mobile DJing.

Chanda Pitts Brandt (’00) is a database manager for the Alzheimer’s Association of Minnesota-North Dakota in Minneapolis, Minn.

Jana Bryant (’02) has recently joined Georgia-Pacific as public affairs manager at the Leaf River Cellulose mill in New Augusta, Miss. She previously spent nearly 12 years at Southern Miss in several communications roles including manager of public relations for the College of Business, director of social media and assistant to the president for University Communications.

2000s

Lauren Ashley Corey (’03) opened C Square Home in August 2012, in the Fayetteville, Ark., business district. C Square Home is a boutique furniture store providing unique handcrafted import furniture made from reclaimed building materials as well as unique products for the home made in the USA.

David Garraway (’03, ’10) received the Donna M. Maykowski Friend of the Student Award in recognition of his service to the student body in media production and marketing at Mississippi State University. He is the video program manager for the university. Garraway has also been selected as one of 14 participants in LEAP, the university’s staff development program. Over the next 9 months, program participants will be meeting with a variety of campus and community leaders and representatives to discuss, explore and understand the university’s goals and priorities.

Keith Wilson (’04) received a President’s Volunteer Service Award (Gold Level) during Volunteer Appreciation Week on April 24, 2013, during a recognition breakfast by the United Way of South Mississippi in Gulfport. He is serving in his third year as president of the North Bay Civilian Club of D’Iberville-St. Martin.

Jenna Jordan (’04) is the evening executive producer at WLBT/WDBD in Jackson as of October 2012. Before that, she was a producer at WLBST from 2006-2012.

Ashley Dupree (’05) recently earned a master’s degree in elementary education from the University of Mobile and teaches fourth grade at Fairhope Intermediate School.


Alison Foster Slade (’06), De- dria Givens-Carroll (’06) and Amber Reetz Narro (’06) recently had their book, “Mediated Images of the South: The Portrayal of Dixie in Popular Culture,” published by Lexington Books.

Charmaine Williams Schmermund (’06, ’10) was promoted to assistant director of public relations for the Gulf Coast Office of University Communications at Southern Miss in 2012.

Shaun Walker (’06), along with his Hero Farm partner, Reid Stone, were selected to Gambit Weekly’s 2012 40-Under-40 for New Orleans.

Shannon Odom Sumrall (’07, ’08) is the corporate communications manager for the Metropolis Nashville Airport Authority (MNAA). She serves as MNAA
USM-MCJ grad busy with Japan earthquake, Sandy victims

By Carly Tynes

When Kathleen Koch graduated from Southern Miss in 1981, she left campus and vowed to leave the rest of the world better than she found it. After a stint at WLOX in Biloxi, Koch worked as a freelance reporter and correspondent for CNN in Washington, D.C. After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, she exclusively covered the recovery efforts of the Gulf Coast for CNN, where she grew up.

Koch went on to write, "Rising from Katrina: How My Mississippi Hometown Lost It All and Found What Mattered." The book discusses her Mississippi hometown’s recovery from Katrina and her experiences while covering the storm’s aftermath in Mississippi.

The Gulf Coast native didn’t stop helping storm victims after Katrina. Koch made the decision to share what she saw and heard during her time covering Katrina’s aftermath with the victims of the tsunami and earthquake earlier this year. She was sent to Japan in March 2013, the two-year anniversary, as a guest of the U.S. State Department. Koch said she noticed a similarity in how the people of Japan and the Mississippi Gulf Coast were coping and recovering from the tragedy the storms left behind.

Koch told a WTOP reporter, "People are anxious to get their lives back. They want to rebuild. They want a sense of normalcy. But just like us, they're wrestling with shortages of manpower, shortages of building supplies and real gridlock with the government."

In an effort to help the Japanese people know they were not alone in their recovery efforts, Koch started a nationwide letter-writing campaign in 2011. She was able to hand deliver some of the letters to a Japanese community where most of its residents are still living in temporary housing. She said she could tell how touched the people were to receive the letters.

In the wake of Superstorm Sandy on the east coast last year, Koch joined a group of AmeriCorps volunteers in December 2012 helping those impacted by the storm. Koch and other volunteers removed walls, damaged insulation, furniture and other household items from flood and wind-impacted homes, including from inside narrow crawl spaces.

Upon returning from Japan, Koch created “Mayors Helping Mayors Mentoring Program,” which brought mayors of Mississippi coastal towns affected by Katrina to the Jersey Shore. The Mississippi delegation was flown to the Bayshore (N.J.) Conference of Mayors on May 17, 2013. The group was comprised of former Congressman Gene Taylor of Bay St. Louis and former mayors Brent Warr of Gulfport, Eddie Farve of Bay St. Louis and Tommy Longo of Waveland.

The idea behind the program was for the Mississippi mayors who led their towns to recovery after Katrina to speak with and give advice to New Jersey mayors and senior municipal officials who are still dealing with the aftermath of Sandy in their areas.

Matthew Godfrey ('07, '08) will be entering his third semester in the advertising master's program at the University of Texas at Austin in the fall of 2012. He was one of approximately 30 students to recently advance in the Texas Creative Sequence at UT. He currently works with UT Austin sororities and fraternities in the Office of the Dean of Students. Godfrey was also recently hired as the advertising & marketing intern for Noodles & Company in the Austin, Texas region.

Markus Jones ('06) is a senior vice president at the Sigma Nu Educational Foundation. He manages relationships across the country on behalf of the fraternity and fosters major gift development.

Marcus Baker ('07) has accepted a job with Adobe Systems LLC in San Jose, Calif. as a human resources analyst. He graduated from Vanderbilt University on May 10, 2013, where he earned an MBA.

Noel Wilkinson ('08) is honored as the 2012 Utah Campus Compact AmeriCorps VISTA of the year. He is the Nontraditional Student Center advisor at Weber State University in Ogden, Utah.

Bradley Charlesworth ('08) is the associate director of alumni reunions at the Tulane University Office of Alumni Relations. He will oversee the implementation of the university’s alumni reunion program, marketing and planning a total of 11 reunion classes for 12,000 graduates each year. Prior to this position, he worked with Gambel Communications in New Orleans.

Katharine Rudzki Uhle ('08) began working for the University of New Orleans in June 2012, as an admissions counselor. Previously, Uhle worked at a New Orleans advertising agency for over two years.

Patrick Lowery ('08) is the social media/web specialist for the Marketing and Communications Department at Forrest General Hospital in Hattiesburg.

Catherine Hager Lott ('08) returned to her alma mater in the summer of 2012 to work as communications coordinator for the DuBard School for Language Disorders at the University of Southern Mississippi. Lott is also currently pursuing a master’s degree in public relations at Southern Miss.

Dr. Sharee Broussard ('09) was given the Philip R. Forrest Professional Achievement Award from the Public Relations Council of Alabama (PRCA) at its annual state conference on April 17, 2012. Broussard is an assistant
Alumni News, Continued

professor of communication arts at Spring Hill College in Mobile, Ala.

Andy Geswein (’09) is the commercial production supervisor for the CW, My Network, NBC and Fox affiliates in Little Rock, Ark. following the acquisition of KLRT by Nexstar.

John Leek (’09) graduated from Asbury Theological Seminary with his master of divinity degree on May 2013. He has been commissioned as an elder in the Mississippi Conference of the United Methodist Church and began his first pastoral appointment as associate pastor at Jefferson Street United Methodist Church in Natchez.

Lisa Parker (’09, ’10) is a public relations specialist at Mississippi Public Broadcasting in Jackson.

Matt McGovern (’09) worked in production control at WDAM-TV in Hattiesburg, Miss., from 2011-2012, worked as a news photojournalist at KCEN-TV in Temple, Texas, in 2012, and recently accepted a job at KGNS-TV as a news photographer in April 2013.

2010s

Olivia Ann Hurst (’10) is the new social media specialist with the Office of University Communications at the University of Southern Mississippi. She creates, executes and monitors social media for the primary university social media accounts. Hurst is also a resource for other units on campus wishing to maintain a social media presence.

Scott W. Thornburg (’10) began working as an account coordinator for Eastwick Communications in San Francisco in the spring of 2013. Prior to joining Eastwick, he worked with Red Square Agency as a public relations coordinator in Mobile. Scott is a member of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and currently serves on the PRSA New Professionals Section national executive committee as a liaison to the student organization, PRSSA.

Sophie McNeil Wolf (’10) is currently working at Millsaps College in Jackson, Miss., as the marketing coordinator, social media manager, official photographer and writer. Previously, she was the marketing manager for the Jackson Convention and Visitors Bureau, Capital/River Region and was awarded the 2012 Mississippi Tourism Association Research-In-Action prize for research advancing the Mississippi Development Authority’s tourism division.

Brittney Cooley Dykes (’10, ’12) began working as communications manager for the Hattiesburg Clinic in December 2012. She prepares all written communications for the organization, manages media relations and writes and designs the clinic’s internal publication, The Pulse.

Andy Hess (’10) was recently promoted to a full-time music programming coordinator from a part-time associate producer for College Sports Nation at SiriusXM Satellite Radio in Washington, D.C. He is also a freelance music journalist for national and local publications.

Alex Creel (’11) is working for Margaritaville Casino and Restaurant in Biloxi as an entertainment technician. He is in charge of audio and lighting for various artists at Landshark Landing and the Volcano Bar.

Taneshia Johnson (’11) is a branch manager with Tower Loan in Lexington, Miss.

Sicily Axtom (’11, ’12) is the digital and social media manager at StrategyCorps in Brentwood, Tenn. Axtom’s job is to help banks across the country connect with their customers through marketing campaigns, social media, email communication and other digital media.

Dr. Jason Peterson (’11) won honorable mention in the American Journalism Historians Association’s dissertation competition for 2011. The AJHA’s Margaret Blanchard dissertation prize honors the best doctoral dissertation in media history. Peterson is currently an assistant professor at Berry College in Mount Berry, Ga.

Lyndie Bishop (’12) is the web content and program promotions manager for the American Heart Association in Dallas.

Dr. Melody Fisher (’12) was given the Humanities Teacher Award by the Mississippi Humanities Council. Fisher is an instructor in the Department of Mass Communication at Tougaloo College in Jackson.


Dr. Donna Stephens (’12) won honorable mention in the American Journalism Historians Association’s dissertation competition for 2013. The AJHA’s Margaret Blanchard dissertation prize honors the best doctoral dissertation in media history. Stephens is currently an assistant professor at University of Central Arkansas in Conway, Ark.

Carissa Williams (’12) is an admissions representative at the University of West Florida in Pensacola.

Christopher Bostick (’12) is a copy editor and page designer at the Sun-Herald in Biloxi.

Martina Lindstrom (’12) is working on an accounting degree in Stockholm and plans to work as an accountant in the entertainment industry. She lives in Handen Stockholm.

Dr. Leslie Rasmussen (Ph.D, ’12) won the 2012-2013 Full-time Faculty of the Year Award at Utah Valley University.

In Memoriam

Newspaper editor
Kershner dies

By David Tisdale

Charles “Chuck” Kershner, a Southern Miss alumnus who served as executive editor of the Clinton (N.Y.) Courier, died April 14, 2013, after a lengthy battle with cancer. He was 70.

Kershner was an editor with the university’s student newspaper, The Student Printz, in the early 1960s when school administrators censored the paper’s coverage of the attempted enrollment by John Frazier, an African American. He was inducted into the university’s School of Mass Communication and Journalism Hall of Fame in 2007 and served on the school’s advisory committee.

Dr. Christopher Campbell, director of the school, said Kershner studied journalism at Southern Miss under department chairman Frank Buckley while helping The Student Printz win top national awards.

“Chuck was one of a number of journalism students here from the 1960s – including Gene Wiggin, Bill Phalen, Jean and Goodloe Sutton, for instance — who went on to remarkable careers,” Campbell said. “He was a great friend of the School of Mass Communication and Journalism and returned regularly to speak to students in our journalism classes. He even came to Hattiesburg several times after he’d started his cancer treatment, probably against the advice of his doctor.”

In 2007 Kershner was inducted into the School of Mass Communication and Journalism’s Hall of Fame and spoke at a symposium held along with the induction ceremony titled “Social Justice and the News.” John Frazier joined him at the symposium, after he happened to be on campus participating in the Trent Lott Center’s Minority Entrepreneurs Lecture Series. It was the first meeting between the two, who discussed the university’s censorship of the school newspaper’s coverage of Frazier’s failed attempt to break the color barrier at Southern Miss.
The strength and future of Southern Miss lies in its alumni, and by joining the Southern Miss Alumni Association, you too can play a significant role in Southern Miss’ journey to the top! From athletics, to academics and the arts, the Association annually provides essential support to the University.

Show your pride and loyalty today by joining those who are committed to creating a stronger Southern Miss for years to come.

JOIN TODAY! Visit SouthernMissAlumni.com to become a member.
Bennett named 10th president at USM

Dr. Rodney Bennett officially began his duties as the new president of The University of Southern Mississippi on April 1, 2013, and said one of his primary duties as the school’s leader will be helping its students succeed in meeting their academic goals through “pathways for completion.”

Bennett, who was previously vice president of student affairs at the University of Georgia, was selected by the State Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) Board of Trustees as the institution’s 10th president following a national search. He is the first African-American to lead the university or any of the state’s historically white institutions of higher learning.

IHL Board President Ed Blakeslee announced Bennett as Southern Miss’ next president in February following a series of listening sessions attended by students, faculty, staff, alumni and community members.

“Students today face many challenges,” Bennett said, citing financial, work and family circumstances and obligations, among others. “We need to work together as a university community to help them overcome those challenges and secure their degree.”

Bennett, 46, succeeded Dr. Aubrey K. Lucas, the university’s interim president. Lucas served his second stint as interim president after having served as the University’s sixth president for 21 years (1975-1996).

Based on the input he’s received from Southern Miss constituents, Bennett is confident the university can reach new and greater heights of success. “I feel very encouraged about our future after meeting with the various members of the university community, who all want this institution to become an even better place,” he said. Bennett said he’s grateful for the opportunity and excited about the task ahead. “This is just one of those moments in life that you dream about and hope and pray that one day will come true, and I’m so happy my dream has come true in Hattiesburg, Miss. at The University of Southern Mississippi.”

Dr. Bennett holds a Doctor of Education degree in educational administration from Tennessee State University in Nashville, a Specialist in Education degree and a Master of Education degree in educational administration from Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, and a bachelor of science degree in mass communication from Middle Tennessee State.

Dr. Bennett served as dean of students at Winthrop University in South Carolina. In 2001, he accepted the position as dean of students at the University of Georgia and then served as UGA’s chief diversity officer before becoming their vice president of student affairs.

Dr. Bennett served as chair of the UGA Athletic Association NCAA Recertification process, including the institutional self-study. In addition, he was a member of the on-site committee for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, reviewing compliance areas related to student life and student affairs at UGA.