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M A G A Z I N E

SPRING 2009
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MTV Latin America's
Pierluigi Gazzolo '91 and José Tillán '90:

Behind the Music

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On the Cover



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Behind the Music

Golden Panthers Pierluigi Gazzolo '91 and José Tillán '90 enjoy what they do because they get to do it surrounded by lights, cameras and a healthy dose of fun. As the brain trust of MTV Latin America, they think outside the box on a daily basis to stay in tune with what is happening and keep the groundbreaking network relevant for audiences throughout the world.

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In the next issue



The "I" in FIU

An FIU degree uniquely educates our graduates to live and work

in the global marketplace. Our alumni are scattered across the globe, from Asia to Europe to Latin America, working in a variety of professions. We bring you the stories of our FIU alumni living abroad and explore how FIU helped prepare them for an international career. At the same time, we share stories of students and faculty who are living abroad to enhance their education and further their research.

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FIU

M A G A Z I N E

SPRING 2009 VOLUME 20

Letter from the Associate Editor



Dear Readers,

By the time you receive this issue of *FIU Magazine* in your mailbox, a lot will be different at FIU.

The university is in the midst of a national search for a new president. Construction is underway on the new College of Nursing and Health Sciences building opening later this year, which will house the College of Medicine, as well as the new School of International and Public Affairs building, which is expected to be completed in 2010. And newly opened to the public at University Park are FIU Stadium and the Frost Art Museum.

Change is in the air.

One of the most important constants, however, is our collective school spirit, which we celebrate in these pages. In our Green Issue in December, we introduced a new feature called "I 'Feel the Pride' Because..." in which some of our colleagues shared stories of what being a Golden Panther means to them. We continue this new tradition in this issue and hope to hear from you soon.

We also share with you the remarkable story of alumnus Lance Benson MBA '03, a real estate consultant and marathoner who has gone the distance in spite of being born without legs. We get inside the minds of babies through FIU's Infant Development Lab, and meet two businessmen who must think outside the box as leading forces at MTV Latin America. And we tell you about one of our faculty, Professor Erik Camayd-Freixas, who went above and beyond the call of his duty as a court-appointed interpreter for Guatemalan immigrants to blow the whistle on injustice.

As always, we bring you the latest news from your Alumni Association, and encourage you, my fellow alumni, to consider your *alma mater*, to recommit to it, and to support it in any way you can.

They say there is strength in numbers, so join our thriving community of alumni today and become an essential part of FIU life once again.

Together as Golden Panthers, we can continue to make FIU better.

Until next time,

Martin Haro '05

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Gifts to FIU: Contact University Advancement at 305-348-6298 or visit: <http://advancement.fiu.edu/giving.htm>.

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in brief



Sitting at the table: Richard Brilliant '93, Marcel L. Navarro '93, Carlos A. Duart '94, MS '99 and Ramon Flores are among the eight new members joining the FIU Foundation Board of Directors this year.

Foundation BOD members announced

Six FIU alumni are among the eight new members appointed to the FIU Foundation Board.

“These new members are leaders representing a wide range of talent in our community,” said Sandra Gonzalez-Levy, vice president of University & Community Relations and executive director of the FIU Foundation. “It is through their ingenuity, resourcefulness and dedication to FIU that we will continue to keep this university healthy and on course.”

Among the Golden Panthers joining the FIU Foundation Board of Directors are **David F. Alfonso '96**, founder, chairman and CEO of Empire Investment Holdings; **Richard Brilliant '93**, Carnival Cruise Lines' vice president of audit services and chief audit executive; **Nicholas G. Bustle '88**, SunTrust Bank's city president of Miami and manager for commercial banking line of business, South Florida region; **Carlos A. Duart '94, MS '99**, president and CEO of Metric Engineering; **Eileen Moss '82**, a partner at Shook, Hardy & Bacon Law Firm;

and **Marcel L. Navarro '93**, a principal at MMG Equity Partners.

Also appointed were **Ramon Flores**, area director of AT&T, Florida, and representative for AT&T, International, and **Carolina Rendeiro**, CEO of Business Centers International. ■

Frost Art Museum now open at UP

More than 1,500 visitors celebrated the opening of the new Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum at FIU in November with a series of special events for the community.

The 46,000-square-foot Yann Weymouth-designed building opened with six exhibitions, including the “Modern Masters” exhibit from the Smithsonian American Art Museum, a traveling show of more than 30 artists who transformed American art in the years after World War II.

“With the opening of the Frost Art Museum the basic elements of a great university are now in place,” said FIU President Modesto A. Maidique. “This museum is a magnificent architectural complement to the campus and a cultural jewel for all of South Florida to enjoy.”

The Frost is Miami's first new art museum in a decade and the only major Miami museum that charges no admission. The opening festivities culminated with the Frost's Art Basel-sponsored event, the sixth annual Breakfast in the Park, featuring sculptor Joel Shapiro. Since its opening, more than 6,000 guests have visited the museum.

“This building's inauguration marks an important moment in the life of this community,” said Carol Damian, the museum's director and chief curator. “We now have a world-class museum in this city that offers important exhibitions and art education free to the public. We're saying to our community, ‘This is your museum.’”

Throughout the year, the Frost will host Target Wednesday After Hours, a unique educational initiative created to promote an interdisciplinary approach to the arts.

Held every first Wednesday of the month, the Target Wednesday After Hours series is free and open to the public and designed to complement the museum's innovative exhibitions with lectures, films, panel discussions, music and dance performances, poetry slams, performance art and more.

For more information about the museum, visit <http://thefrost.fiu.edu>. ■

Provost Ronald Berkman, Phillip Frost, Yann Weymouth, Patricia Frost, Rosa Sugañes and FIU President Modesto A. Maidique inaugurate the Frost Art Museum.



in brief

SJMC, South Florida dailies form news service

FIU's School of Journalism and Mass Communication has partnered with the region's three largest daily newspapers to create a news service staffed by students.

The partnership brings together *The Miami Herald*, *The Palm Beach Post* and the *Sun Sentinel* with FIU journalism students eager for real newsroom experience. The students will enroll in FIU courses and work as reporters for the new South Florida News Service. Their stories will be published in all three newspapers and on newspaper Web sites.

"It's an unheard-of opportunity for students," said SJMC Associate Interim Dean Allan Richards. "It doesn't get any edgier than this."

In a joint statement, John Bartosek, Anders Gyllenhaal and Earl Maucker, the editors of *The Palm Beach Post*, *The Miami Herald* and the *Sun Sentinel*, said, "We are delighted and very excited about this venture, which will serve both the university and our newspapers with a new approach to covering the community – in stories, in video, in audio, in both English and Spanish. At a time when the news business is evolving every day, we can think of no better partners than the college students who will shape the media of the future." ■

RateMyProfessor.com ranks FIU among top faculty

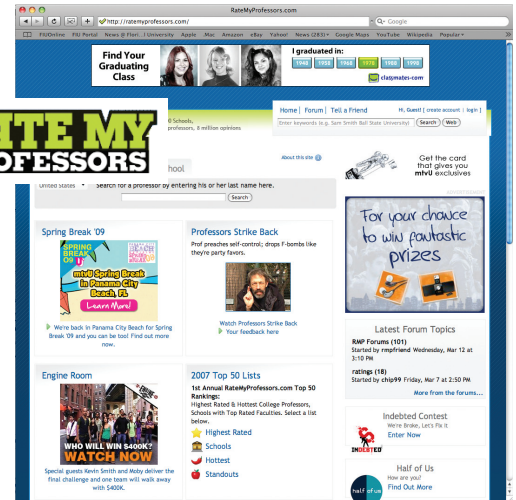
FIU professors are among the country's most highly rated by students, according to an annual ranking at RateMyProfessors.com, the Internet's largest destination for faculty ratings.

FIU ranked No. 6 on the Web site's annual list of Top Faculty released last fall.

Each year, the site's rankings capture the highest rated individual college professors and university faculties. In 2008, it culled lists from its database of more than 7.5 million student-generated ratings of more than 1 million college professors.

"It's important for us to shine a light on faculty around the country who are doing great work at every institutional level," said Carlo DiMarco, vice president of university relations for mtvU, which owns and operates RateMyProfessors.com. "The 2008 rankings mirror the voices of students sitting in classes and listening to professors' lectures. They have elevated the teachers they feel are the best to the top of these lists."

The complete list of RateMyProfessors.com's Top Faculty - Universities ranking is:



1. University of South Alabama
2. Louisiana Tech University
3. University of Houston
4. Southeastern Louisiana University
5. Kennesaw State University
6. Florida International University
7. Brigham Young University
8. Northern Kentucky University
9. Stony Brook University (SUNY)
10. Virginia Commonwealth University ■



Search for next FIU president in full swing

By Karen Cochran

Reiterating that FIU President Modesto A. Maidique can never be replaced but he can be succeeded, Board of Trustees (BOT) Chairman David Parker told the university community that he would like to have the next president of FIU identified by May 2009.

In late January, principals from consulting firm Greenwood/Asher met with FIU's Presidential Search Advisory Committee to identify some of the qualities and characteristics that FIU's fifth president should possess. In early February, the firm conducted the same exercise with representatives from FIU and the greater community in open forums at University Park and Biscayne Bay Campus. After a job description is drafted, the job will be posted and advertised nationally for the first time in 23 years.

The Presidential Search Advisory Committee, comprised of FIU faculty,

College of Engineering, FDOT partner to study live traffic data

Through a new partnership, the College of Engineering and Computing and the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) will share traffic information that will be used in a new Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) lab where students can observe and analyze live traffic conditions along roadways.

The new lab, located in FIU's new Lehman Center for Transportation Research on the Engineering Campus, includes a video wall, central software, servers and operator workstations that duplicate, on a smaller scale, those that are used at the FDOT's District 6 Transportation Management Center.

There, students can conduct research related to traffic management, ITS applications and traffic flow theory and operations using actual field data provided by the Transportation Management Center.

"We are so busy operating the actual system each day that we often don't have the time and resources to do internal research," said Javier Rodriguez, ITS operations engineer for the Transportation Management Center. "Now, FIU students will be able to assist us in that area in order to optimize our operations."

The state-of-the-art Lehman Center, which

is committed to conducting research and training to improve traffic mobility and safety, is the only one of its kind in South Florida.

"We have collaborated with the FDOT District 6 on ITS research and education activities for many years," said Mohammed Hadi, a research faculty member at the center and a professor in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering. "This facility takes these activities to a new level that has not been possible in the past." ■

Golden Panther gets made over by TLC's "What Not to Wear"

Last spring, hidden cameras followed Jackie Biver '05, a graduate student in religious studies, for "What Not to Wear," a popular makeover reality show on The Learning Channel. Biver's husband, Tom Gorrio, had written to the show asking for help with his wife's bad fashion sense.

After two weeks of clandestine footage, a camera crew, family and friends ambushed Biver in class at University Park. As the show's hosts Stacy London and Clinton Kelly and their crew entered her classroom in the MARC building, Biver, 30, who was in the middle of a presentation, became visibly shaken.

She clutched her notepad against her chest.



Stacy London and Clinton Kelly surprise Jackie Biver '05 for an episode of TLC's "What Not to Wear."

Her eyes darted back and forth around the room. And she smiled nervously when she realized they were coming for her – after all, she was in classic campus attire: a T-shirt, blue jeans and sneakers.

"At first I didn't think there was anything wrong with my fashion," she said. "But when I stepped into the 360-degree mirror, I could see that the clothes were faded and run down."

In July, "What Not to Wear" flew the Golden Panther to New York City for a week of advice and shopping, with a \$5,000 budget courtesy of the show. London and Kelly gave her tips on choosing suitable clothes for her petite frame. The most important rule, according to producers, is that clothes fit well.

Producers also pushed Biver to dress more age-appropriate and for the career she wants – that of a professor. No more socks with sandals, please.

"I feel much more confident and put together now," she said upon returning from the Big Apple (her episode aired last September). "Shopping is also a lot easier because I know what to avoid." ■

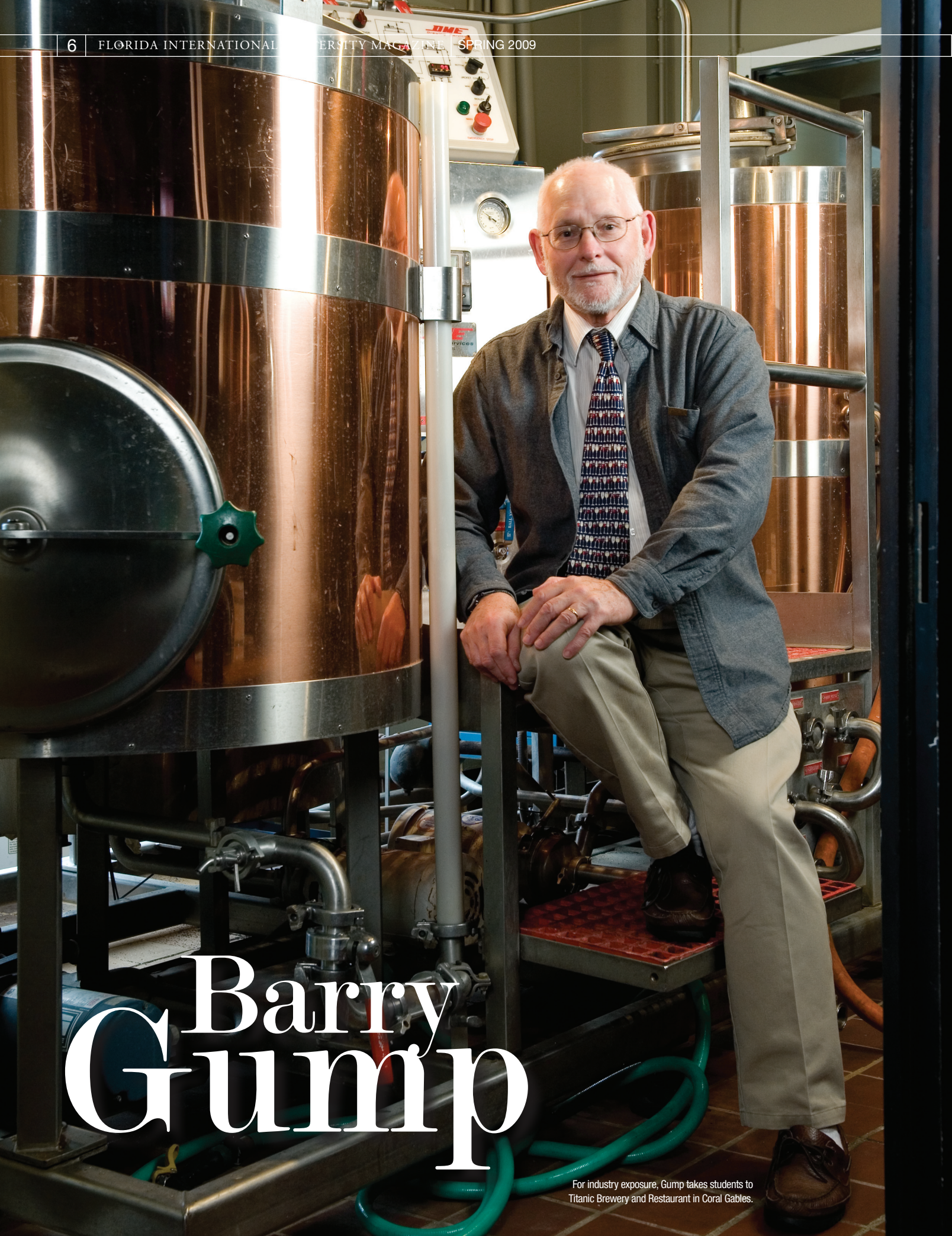
staff, students and alumni as well as members of the community, will review the qualifications of all applicants and narrow the list down to two to five candidates, said Parker, who also chairs the BOT Presidential Search Committee. Finalists will then be invited to campus for interviews. Ultimately, it is the BOT Presidential Search Committee that will make its recommendation of a candidate to the full FIU Board of Trustees. If the BOT accepts the recommendation, the candidate will appear before the Board of Governors for final ratification.

The new president will join FIU in the midst of the most financially challenging time in the university's history. The country's economic downturn has left no sector of society untouched and public universities have been hit particularly hard. With its endowment being squeezed by the stock market (the hit to FIU's endowment mirrors the average loss to university endowments across the

country, in the 25 percent range) and a steady stream of budget cuts due to decreased funding from the state, the university is grappling with tough decisions.

In spite of the challenges, it's a given that the new president will look to build upon the remarkable successes of Maidique, who collaborated with some of the best executives and administrators South Florida has ever seen, to help carry out his vision. Under his leadership, FIU has tripled in physical size and more than doubled enrollment to nearly 39,000 students, and added 22 new doctoral programs and 18 undergraduate programs. Research expenditures have grown from about \$6 million to nearly \$110 million.

During his tenure, the university also established accredited colleges of Law, Engineering, Architecture and Public Health. In August, the new College of Medicine will welcome its first class of 40 students from a pool of 3,000 applicants. ■



Barry Gump

For industry exposure, Gump takes students to Titanic Brewery and Restaurant in Coral Gables.

The Science of Beer

Analytical chemist teaches students the craft of brewing

By Sissi Aguila '99, MA '08

These Golden Panthers meet twice a week, surrounded by jugs of beer and refrigerators packed with alcohol. They delight in home-brewed light ales, porters and stouts. Within the hour, empty bottles and glasses litter the room. This is not a fraternity or sorority mixer. This is professor Barry Gump's Brewing Science class, HFT 3864.

In an effort to provide its graduates with hands-on practical experience in the beverage management field, the School of Hospitality and Tourism Management developed a curriculum that includes courses such as Brewing Science, where students learn to brew their own beer. It's quickly becoming a favorite among Golden Panthers. Much has to do with Gump, the first Harvey R. Chaplin Eminent Scholar Chair in beverage management studies and a world-recognized authority on wine and wine sensory evaluation.

Gump clearly enjoys the camaraderie of brewing and sampling as well as the enthusiasm of his students, all of whom must be 21 or older to enroll. But don't be fooled by all the fun: Gump and his brew masters-in-training are serious about beer – the smell, the taste, the clarity.

"Students have to learn a number of technical aspects concerning the chemistry and biology of brewing," Gump said. "If they don't, their attempts at brewing would be hit or miss, and we would have a lot more spoiled beer around."

Prior to coming to FIU, Gump was a professor of analytical chemistry at California State University in Fresno for 40 years. His lifelong passion for

the study of wine developed into a parallel career as a professor of enology, an expert witness in cases involving wine and a judge at American and international wine competitions.

Beer 101

On a cool afternoon last October, more than 30 students met for class in the school's teaching kitchen at Biscayne Bay Campus. Some listened to the lecture, others got right to work on their beer.

It takes the class seven to 10 days to brew and bottle a beer. First, grains are mashed and soaked in warm water in order to create an extract of the malt. The mash is then held at a constant temperature long enough for enzymes to convert starches into fermentation sugar. Water is filtered through the mash to dissolve all of the sugars. The darker, sugar-heavy liquid is called the wort, which adds flavor, aroma and texture to the beer.

"The wort is boiled to remove any excess water and kill any types of microorganisms" said Craig Feigon, a senior in business management, as he stirred his brew in a large boiling pot. Hops, which add bitterness, and additional spices are also added at this point.

Creativity is keen among students. Religious studies senior Alexandra Nowell, who took the class in search of a hobby, and her partner Chris Lawson, a senior in liberal studies, checked on their unique blend, a spiced pumpkin ale that was fermenting in a large jug. Their brew included six pounds of cooked sugar pie pumpkin, six sticks of cinnamon, three tablespoons of nutmeg and one

Professor Gump enjoys the camaraderie of brewing and sampling beer, as well as the enthusiasm of his students.

tablespoon of coriander. During the summer semester last year, another team made a jalapeño beer that the class agreed would taste great with Mexican food.

During primary fermentation, the yeast is added. The process lasts approximately four to six days. The beer is then transferred to another container to remove sediments settled at the bottom. It's then bottled. Students use recycled bottles and label them, often with unique names such as "Damn Good Beer" and "Four Guys and One Chick."

It's 5 o'clock somewhere....

Professor Gump allows students to keep most of the five-gallon batches they brew. The rest is shared with the class. Gump wants them to begin to distinguish the different flavors in each beer. For their midterm exam, students blind-taste and are asked to identify and evaluate seven different brews.

"The class is a lot of fun," said Arturo Macias, a senior in beverage management, "but it's actually also very educational."


Nick Sterling, a senior in hospitality management, wants to apply the knowledge he acquired in this class to a career in private catering or restaurant consulting.

Students are already seeing their brew enjoyed outside the classroom. At a recent school luncheon, an American ale and stout were served. In December, at a beer tasting for the FIU BBC Circle of Friends, several student beers were on the menu. And samples were also available at the Food Network South Beach Wine & Food Festival in February. ■



Breaking the Silence

Interpreter and FIU professor Erik Camayd-Freixas gave voice to undocumented workers in court and found his own voice in the process



By Dan Grech

Erik Camayd-Freixas is an interpreter. For nearly three decades, the Spanish professor at Florida International University has worked with judges, lawyers and defendants in state and federal courts. His job is to act as his client's ears and mouth. His job is to be invisible. His job is to never take sides.

This is the story of a case unlike any case Camayd-Freixas had witnessed in 27 years. It's the story of an interpreter who spoke out, and in so doing found a new voice.

Camayd-Freixas got the assignment in May 2008: The U.S. District Court wanted him to participate in a two-week "continuity of operations" exercise in Waterloo, Iowa. A temporary court would be set up at the National Cattle Congress to conduct business as usual.

He didn't learn the real purpose of the assignment until he arrived in Iowa. Four hundred undocumented workers, mostly ethnic Mayans from small villages in Guatemala, had been arrested at a kosher meatpacking plant called Agriprocessors in nearby Postville. It was the largest immigration raid of its kind in the nation's history.

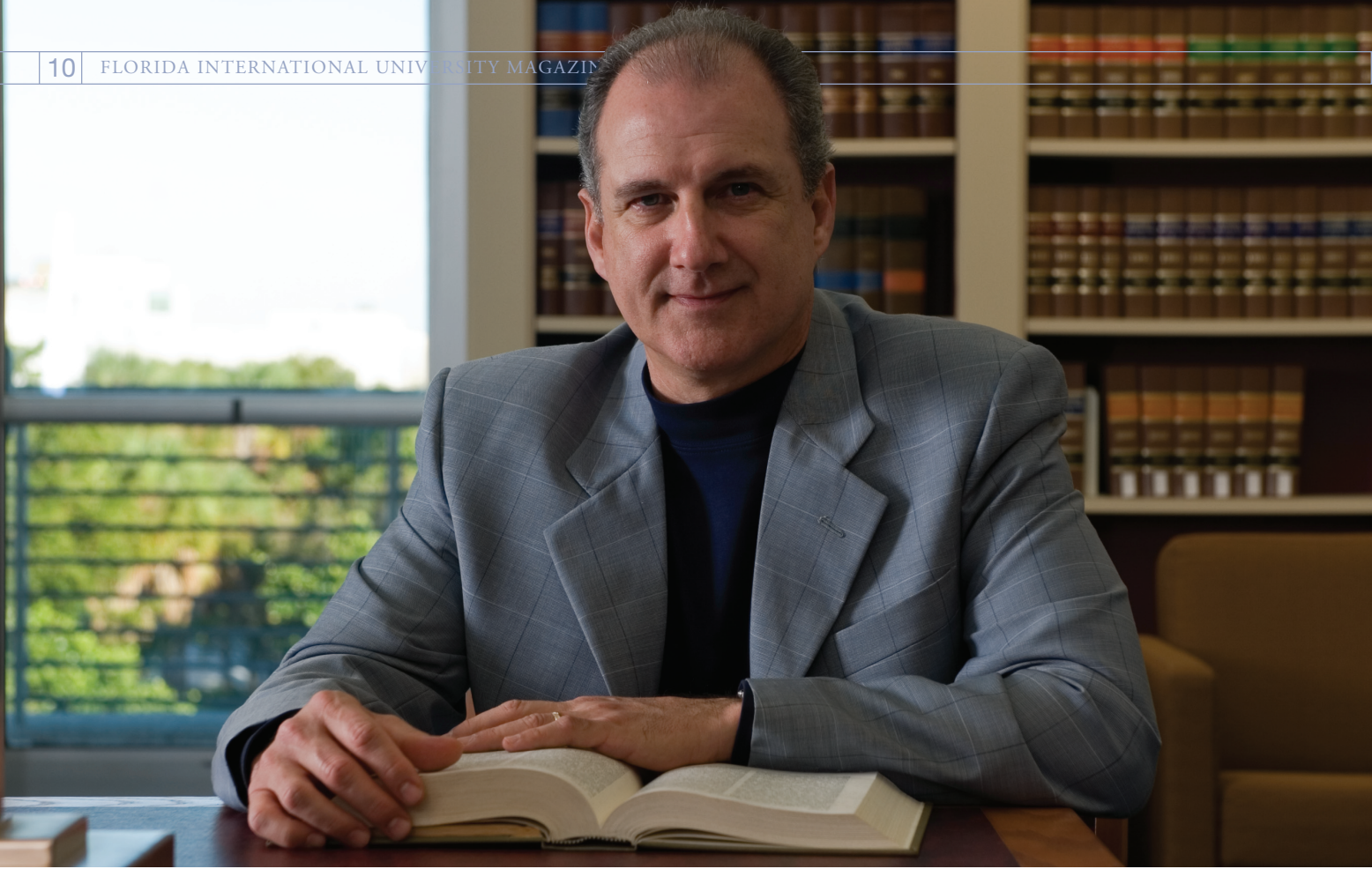
In the past, the workers would have been detained and deported. This time, the authorities had something much harsher in mind. They would charge the workers with aggravated identity theft. A felony intended for people stealing credit card numbers would be used to send workers without papers to prison.

Court-appointed lawyers presented the workers with a choice: They could fight the charges, wait months in detention for a trial and risk up to 10 years in jail. Or they could take the government's plea bargain: plead guilty to a lesser charge, Social Security fraud; serve five months in federal prison; then be deported without a hearing. Twenty-six interpreters, including Camayd-Freixas, translated into Spanish.

Workers told Camayd-Freixas they had traveled on foot from Guatemala to earn a decent wage in Iowa. While they sat in jail, their families starved. They were desperate to get back home. In a single week, 262 workers pleaded guilty to Social Security fraud.

"They were coerced into pleas by holding their family's survival over their heads," he says. "It was shameful. It was a Kangaroo Court."

Camayd-Freixas says the workers didn't commit a crime. A person charged with identity theft must "knowingly" steal another person's identity. But after several jailhouse interviews, he says, "it became clear the workers didn't even know what a Social Security number was." Also, federal law requires that the stolen identity be used for an "unlawful



As director of the Translation and Interpretation Program at FIU, Spanish professor Erik Camayd-Freixas tells students that interpreters may be impartial, but they should not be mute.

Continued

activity.” He says working at a slaughterhouse is not illegal.

He faced an ethical dilemma: Should he drop his impartiality? “I could go straight to the media – and end my career as an interpreter. Or I could bite my tongue until the cases were over.” His blue eyes stare straight ahead. “I wrestled with whether to be a citizen or an interpreter first. I chose to be an interpreter.”

Camayd-Freixas directs the Translation and Interpretation Program at FIU. He tells his students that interpreters may be impartial, but they should not be mute. So he took his concerns to one of the judges presiding over the case. And the judge said his hands were tied. The workers had signed a binding plea agreement.

“The judge was as shackled as

“When you see a little bit of injustice, you can’t turn away from it. You cannot.”

—
FIU
Professor
Erik
Camayd
Freixas

the defendants,” he says. “That was devastating to me. It was like the world crumbled right then and there. I was witnessing the breakdown of the U.S. justice system. I left the meeting profoundly concerned.”

What he was witnessing in Iowa reminded Camayd-Freixas of what he had left behind in Cuba. “I grew up in a totalitarian regime,” he says. “I know what it’s like. I can read the signs a mile away.”

The trials ended and the appeal period ran out. Media attention focused elsewhere. The Postville raid was being forgotten.

But Camayd-Freixas says he couldn’t sleep. His mind kept returning to a video clip on *The Des Moines Register* Web site. It was an interview with Sister Mary McCauley of St. Bridget’s

Catholic Church in Postville. After the raid, hundreds of immigrants, young and old, had sought sanctuary in her church. They slept under pews and lived off donations and refused to leave. They feared the authorities were rounding up immigrants. The 70-year-old nun begged for a measure of humanity and basic justice.

“Seeing her speak out was an incredible lesson,” he says. “How could I keep quiet about this whole thing?”

He found himself writing about his experience. He described in stark terms what he had witnessed. “Driven single-file in groups of 10, shackled at the wrists, waist and ankles, chains dragging as they shuffled through, the slaughterhouse workers were brought in for arraignment, sat and listened through headsets to the interpreted

initial appearance, before marching out again to be bused to different county jails, only to make room for the next row of 10.”

He argued that in its zeal to criminalize immigrants, the government ignored the profound difference between stealing people’s identities to rob them and using false papers to get a job. “A line was crossed at Postville,” he wrote. “One could feel the moral fabric of society coming apart beneath it all.”

Camayd-Freixas decided to circulate the 15-page essay among the other interpreters. But the essay got passed around and posted on blogs. E-mails began pouring in, hundreds of them, from attorneys and advocates around the country.

“I became a clearinghouse of information, connecting people together,” he says. The essay made it to Capitol Hill, prompting the House immigration subcommittee to hold a hearing on the prosecutions in July. He was the main material witness.

A man whose job was to recede into the background was profiled on the front page of *The New York Times* in July. Speaking requests poured in. An agent asked him to write a book. In a matter of months, Camayd-Freixas became a leading advocate for immigrant rights. The interpreter had found his own voice.

“This is a life-changing matter,” he says. “When you see a little bit of injustice, and start digging up a whole lot affecting millions of people, you can’t turn away from it. You cannot.”

Three months after Postville, Camayd-Freixas got word of an impending raid in southern Mississippi. He sent word to the legal community. On Aug. 25, authorities rounded up 595 illegal immigrants in Laurel, a new record for a raid. But the nation’s top immigration lawyers were already

on the case. Only eight workers were charged with identity theft.

He believes that the Postville raid may become an inflection point in the immigration debate in this country. Federal authorities had hoped Postville would establish a new model for criminalizing undocumented workers. Instead, the raid mobilized the immigrant rights community and prompted congressional scrutiny. “They went overboard in blind enforcement of the law,” he says.

His stand could even influence legal history. In October, the U.S. Supreme Court decided to hear the Flores-Figueroa case on the proper legal definition of identity theft. Prosecutors could be barred from using identity-theft laws to criminalize immigrants for getting a job.

The workers from Postville have served their time and most are back in Guatemala. Agriprocessors, the kosher meatpacking plant, has gone out of business. But Camayd-Freixas says his work is just beginning. He has gone beyond court interpreting to become an advisor to Congress on immigration issues.

“I found that I had a national voice. That’s a very big responsibility,” he says. “Ever since the court hearings, I have not slept more than five hours. This is something urgent. If I don’t send that e-mail, somebody suffers.”

Last fall, Camayd-Freixas gave a talk at Luther College, and Sister McCauley, the nun who had called for humanity and basic justice, was in the crowd. After the speech, he gently took her hand. “I want you to know, Sister,” he said. “I’m on your side.” ■

Dan Grech is Americas reporter for the public radio show “Marketplace” and co-senior producer and co-host of “Under the Sun,” a new radio show telling the stories of South Florida.



The Voice of Obama

For millions of Spanish language television viewers, President Barack Obama speaks with the voice of FIU professor Erik Camayd-Freixas.

Camayd-Freixas, a Spanish professor and director of the Translation and Interpretation Program at the university, provided the live simultaneous translation of Obama’s speech during Telemundo’s broadcast of the Jan. 20 inauguration. He also provided Obama’s Spanish-speaking voice during the three presidential debates broadcast on Telemundo and he translated a press conference held by Obama to announce his economic advisers on Univision.

Camayd-Freixas also interpreted for Democratic vice presidential candidate Joe Biden during the vice presidential debate, opposite his former FIU student, Maria Isabel Rodriguez, who translated for Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin and, during the primaries, for Sen. Hillary Clinton.

“Obama is one of the best people to interpret for,” Camayd-Freixas said. “He’s a little on the fast side, but he’s very clear and very logical. Biden is difficult. He’s a very good speaker, but he speaks very fast and has a lot of colorful, idiomatic expressions and very complex sentences.”

Camayd-Freixas’ international television career began five years ago when he went on an audition for Univision and was selected to translate President George W. Bush’s State of the Union address of 2003.

“That’s when I declared war on Iraq,” he said jokingly.

Since then, he has interpreted for both Telemundo and Univision on a number of high-profile broadcasts, including subsequent State of the Union addresses, the Bush-Kerry debates in 2004, political conventions in 2004 and 2008, and Pope Benedict XVI’s visit to the United States last year. ■

BEHIND THE

FIU alumni lead the music industry at the top of MTV Latin America

By Martin Haro '05

Golden Panthers Pierluigi Gazzolo '91 and José Tillán '90 sit at opposite corners of a colorful, high-energy, sun-kissed office on South Beach's Lincoln Road. They often meet to discuss important matters in a sprawling conference room adorned, appropriately enough, with a giant silver MTV Moon Man. Their agendas on any given day may be filled with meetings about branding and creative development, or details that need attention, such as the color of the floor or the height of the stage for a Ricky Martin concert special.

Gazzolo and Tillán are not your typical suit-and-tie businessmen. As president of MTV Networks Latin America (MTVNLA) and vice president of creative, content and music, respectively, they do what they love to do and have quite a fun time at it, too.

MTVNLA is a division of Viacom, Inc., that owns and operates MTV, VH-1 and Nickelodeon, Nick Jr. and Nick at Nite in Latin America, as well as Viacom Networks in Brazil and the MTV Networks Digital services.

If music makes the people come together, then music – or Music Television – definitely brought together these two FIU alumni. The two enjoy working together almost as much as they enjoy cracking jokes at each other's expense.

"I'm younger and I'm better looking," said Gazzolo, 40, when we met last fall. "But we have a great

"Having Grammy Awards gets a 'Wow' from people, which is fun."

—
José Tillán, vice president of creative, content and music for MTV Latin America

collaborative spirit."

"Pier's my boss and we work well together. He's a great leader," said Tillán, 42. "I go the distance for him because there's no malice, only trust, but I'm not afraid to challenge him."

"I welcome that," Gazzolo added. "Jose's a fair leader who knows how to connect the dots with the people who work with him."

Gazzolo, an alumnus of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, joined the network in 1994. Tillán, a College of Business Administration graduate, followed three years later. They come from rather similar backgrounds.

Gazzolo was born in Rome and was raised in El Salvador. He attended the Istituto Europeo di Design and later Miami-Dade Community College, eventually graduating from FIU with a degree in communication. A Cuban native, Tillán grew up in Spain, moved to Miami with his family in fifth grade and went to MDCC as well. At FIU, he studied business marketing and international business. He was the bass player in the local band Forget the Name and even went on tour with Maria Conchita Alonso. "I have a full recording studio in my home and I still compose and record, but I don't play out often nowadays. But I want to find the time to," he says.

Prior to joining MTVNLA, Gazzolo helped launch Telenoticias, Telemundo's 24-hour Spanish language news broadcast. He then joined MTV Latin America as senior

vice president of distribution and oversaw its distribution strategies via digital and traditional media, increasing MTV and Nickelodeon's market reach by 55 percent and 98 percent, respectively.

In 2004, Gazzolo helped launch VH-1 Latin America, which is seen in 17 million households throughout the region, including Brazil. A year later, he was appointed president of MTVNLA. In this role, he is responsible for the brand and the company's creative developments across all lines of business; sits on the boards of MTV Brazil and MTV Italy, managing Viacom's ventures within local media; and oversees offices in Buenos Aires, Mexico City and São Paulo.

His job demands a lot of him – Gazzolo works a minimum of 60 hours a week if he is in Miami and often travels for 4-5 days, coming home for the weekends, which he spends with his partner, Alex, and their wirehaired fox terrier, Tin-Tin.

Under his leadership, MTVNLA has increased its development of locally produced programs such as documentaries and in-studio artist interviews and performances at studios in Mexico and Argentina, including "MTV Unplugged," as well as the network's signature "Premios MTV." These efforts also include an ongoing dialogue with young people about issues they most care about through initiatives like "Sex Tu Mismo" and "We are 30

MUSIC

Million: Conversations with Mexico's Presidential Candidates."

"I like the brand, the company, the freedom of thinking," Gazzolo said. "I love the Latin American market with all its ups and downs. There's more uniformity and stability in the American market, but Latin America is different. Mexico and Argentina don't have anything to do with each other in marketing, for instance. But I love managing my teams."

Meanwhile, as vice president of creative, content and music, Tillán oversees "everything that goes on screen for MTV and VH-1."

Prior to this position, he was senior vice president of music and talent relations for MTVNLA, where he devised and led music strategy for MTV, VH-1, Nickelodeon Latin America and MTV Tr3s, a channel for bilingual Latinos and non-Latino Americans. He honed his marketing skills running a full-service management and entertainment company before that.

"My goal," he said, "is to deliver good ratings and help earn ad revenue while staying true to the MTV brand with content that connects with our audience. There are a lot of wannabes, and there's reality TV everywhere.... You have to find the hidden jewels that are going to stand apart and work well with our brand."

Tillán, who has been married to his wife Melanie for three years (they have been together for more than

13), keeps a coffee maker in his office – and a packed suitcase at the ready.

"Lately, the hours at work seemed to have increased. We have more meetings and more things getting done remotely, so I travel more and spend more time on the phone," he said. "I don't really spend too much time in the studios since I have a solid team and they are at the front lines, but I do get very hands-on with the big projects like the awards shows and the "Unplugged" specials. My wife is great and totally gets it. She's an artist manager. We're very supportive of each other."

Tillán's role calls for him to wear many hats, including that of executive producer for "Los Premios MTV"

JOSÉ TILLÁN '90





PIERLUIGI GAZZOLO '91



and “MTV Unplugged,” the latter of which has featured Latino superstars such as Shakira, Maná and Alejandro Sanz and has brought him his own share of accolades. In 2007, Tillán won a Latin Grammy Award for video-producing “Ricky Martin: MTV Unplugged.” Last year, he picked up a second Latin Grammy for his work on singer Julieta Venegas’ “Unplugged.”

“Having those awards in your list of accomplishments gets a ‘Wow’ from people, which is fun. I definitely was excited when I went to the podium both times to get the award,” Tillán said. “Working for MTV, celebrating music, is very rewarding. I’ve learned a lot about working in a collaborative environment. I meet a lot of people, some who happen to be famous, but there’s always a lot of respect, both personally and professionally, at all levels.”

Both Gazzolo and Tillán have fond memories of their time at FIU. Gazzolo recalls *professor emerita* Pat Rose, who used to be his advisor.

“She helped me a lot,” he said. “She steered me the right way. I loved her.”

And Tillán, who is a lifetime member of the FIU Alumni Association and returned to campus for the opening of FIU Stadium, remains committed to the university.

“I’m a supporter of education,” he said. “I believe it’s important to give back to your own community, so I support my school in any way I can.” ■



BEHIND THE MUSIC

A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Architecture students present designs for future Alumni Center



From left to right, the three winning design proposals for an FIU Alumni Center were created by Golden Panthers Geraldine Peña, Andrew Santa Lucia and Susan Aguerri.

By Sissi Aguila '99, MA '08

Imagine this: A grand ballroom welcomes distinguished guests who glide across the dance floor at an evening gala. The next day, the ballroom doors open out into a courtyard to greet blue-and-gold tailgaters ready to watch a sold-out game on a projection screen, shaded by FIU Stadium. And not too far from there, a hall of fame salutes Golden Panthers' accomplishments and history.

This was the vision that FIU architecture students were asked to bring into focus last year by the Office of Alumni Relations.

More than 30 students in the first-year graduate design studio class that Assistant Professor Jason Chandler coordinated and co-taught with Professor Nathaniel Belcher and instructor Nikolay Nedev were up to the challenge. They created concept boards taking into account the smallest detail of the proposed Alumni Center to be built just east of the new football stadium at University Park.

The students presented their designs to a jury of alumni, administrators and staff last December. The Top 3 won \$500 and the opportunity to share their ideas with the FIU Board of Trustees.

Alumni Relations contributed

\$10,000 to the architecture program for research and technology. The department brought in experts such as Michael Dennis, a campus planner from Boston, to FIU and held a three-day workshop on Revit, a 3D-design software that automatically coordinates changes to a project and includes construction elements such as plumbing. The architecture students were able to do all their work using this software.

"This was an envisioning exercise," said Chandler. "These designs will help planners get a sense of what the Alumni Center could be."

"I couldn't think of a better place to start than with our students," said Associate Vice President of Alumni Relations Bill Draughton of the first phase of planning for the multi-story center.

Draughton emphasized the Center should be a "warm and welcoming place," offering the comforts of home to the university's 120,000-plus alumni. In 2008, the alumni association ranked No. 1 for membership growth in a national survey of 76 major universities, and exceeded expectations with more than 10 percent of them active, significantly higher than the average for urban public research institutions. Still, FIU is the only university of its size in Florida

"These designs will help planners get a sense of what the Alumni Center could be."

—
FIU
Assistant Professor
Jason
Chandler

without an alumni center.

At last year's Torch Awards Gala, alumni showed their dedication by donating \$90,000 for the Alumni Center in one evening without even seeing a rendering. Betty Perry '74, FIU's first First Lady, challenged alumni to meet her \$10,000 grant in the hopes of raising funds for "a gathering place for [alumni] who have graduated and/or moved away or maybe aren't on campus often." Ten months later, they got their first peek at their investment.

"I'm very impressed with the quality of their work and the diversity of the designs," said Gayle Bainbridge '75, past president of the Alumni Association.

The judges – who included Bainbridge, Draughton, Alumni Association President Jose M. Perez de Corcho '93, Vice President of University & Community Relations Sandy Gonzalez-Levy, Stewart L. Appelrouth '80, Cookie Gazitua and Michael R. Méndez '03 – considered every detail during their deliberation. The winners were Geraldine Peña, Andrew Santa Lucia and Susan Aguerri. "I'm amazed at what they came up with and very proud of them," Draughton said. "We hope to incorporate some of their ideas."

Soon, alumni and friends will have a place to call home on campus. ■



The Minds of



Babies

Professor Lorraine Bahrck's Infant Development Lab explores how babies learn and what they understand

By Deborah O'Neil

For every new parent, the miracle of birth is soon enough replaced by a mystery: I wonder what my baby is thinking.

More than you might imagine, according to psychology professor Lorraine Bahrck. As the director of the FIU Infant Development Lab, Bahrck has spent the last 30 years researching how babies learn to perceive and organize the world around them. Her work has shown that babies listen, remember and make connections in ways that might surprise their parents.

Most of us would assume that the world is a jumble of disconnected sights and sounds for infants. Bahrck's research has shown, however, that this isn't correct. "It's well organized from the start," she argues. "When babies select out and attend to something, they attend to unified events." The world of babies may be limited, that is, but it nevertheless consists of coherent actions, objects and relationships.

Her research has shown babies can

discriminate between emotions like happiness, sadness and anger when they see a face and hear a voice together. By 5 months, they can make those distinctions based on a voice alone. And by 7 months, they know just by looking at a face.

Since founding the Infant Development Lab when she came to FIU in 1983, Bahrck has had continuous funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). This has allowed her research to gain momentum in a way that is now bearing fruit. Her studies have been widely published in the field's top journals. And during the past year, her lab was rewarded with another \$1.6 million grant from the NIH to continue her developmental research.

Working with babies is admittedly fun for Bahrck and her staff. But the attraction of this specialization has more to do with an interest in human cognitive development.

"If we're going to understand how we think and perceive and learn, it isn't

Since its founding, some 12,000 babies have participated in the lab's studies.

going to be with adults who are already socialized," she said. "The initial stages of any developmental system have a huge impact on the nature of that system."

In 2008, the lab further expanded its research agenda to explore the development of autistic children with a \$500,000 grant from Autism Speaks, a non-profit foundation devoted to autism research. Autism is a developmental disorder that impairs a child's social and communication skills.

The three-year study aims to find better methods of diagnosing autism early and predicting its severity in children. Since there are no medical tests for diagnosing autism, FIU's researchers are interested in assessing the developmental precursors – specifically, attention deficits – that distinguish autistic and typically developing babies.

"It is a very captivating approach to trying to understand autism," said post-doctoral researcher James Todd, who joined the lab in 2008 to work



Professor Bahrnick and graduate student Mariana Vaillant-Molina '01 with her son, Alec, who participated in the lab's research.

Baby Development

Research at the Infant Development Lab has shown a great deal about what babies understand:

2-month-olds:

- Can discriminate between the faces of two unfamiliar women.

3-month-olds:

- Can tell which of several people is speaking by detecting face-voice synchrony.
- Can remember the movement of an object they saw for only two minutes after more than a three-month delay (i.e., when they are tested at 6 months old).

4-month-olds:

- Distinguish between phrases of approval versus prohibition by detecting the rhythm, tempo and intonation pattern of speech.

5-month-olds:

- Distinguish themselves from other babies and prefer to look at other babies.
- Distinguish between Spanish and English speech.
- Are particularly interested in watching everyday actions such as brushing hair and teeth and they remember the actions across at least a two-month period.
- Know when an object is used correctly (e.g., brushing hair with a hairbrush) versus incorrectly (e.g., brushing hair with a cup) in everyday actions.



“The world of babies is well organized from the start. It may be limited, but it consists of coherent actions.”

—
FIU
Professor
Lorraine
Bahrnick

Continued

with Bahrnick on this project. “What we know about autism is that the earlier it can be diagnosed and treatment can begin, the more effective those treatments can be.”

The challenge with all infant research is that, at least superficially, babies appear to give only very limited information to researchers. “There is room for creativity in this area,” Bahrnick said. “It poses a unique challenge that infants cannot talk and you have to develop methods to get at what they’re thinking and experiencing.”

Much of the testing involves presenting a baby with a videotaped event and/or actual object, sometimes with a soundtrack. A trained observer watches the baby’s eye movements and records how long the baby looks at each display. Babies generally lose interest in a stimulus the longer they are exposed and the more familiar it becomes. The “habituation method” used in the lab takes advantage of this. As soon as babies’ looking to a stimulus goes down, a new stimulus is presented. Then, if their looking goes up to the new stimulus, researchers conclude that babies can tell the difference between the two stimuli.

Bahrnick supervises eight to 12 undergraduates and five doctoral students who are trained to administer the various research procedures with the babies. At any given time, 15 different studies are underway at the lab, a suite of offices in the DM Building at University Park. Since its founding, some 12,000 babies have participated in the lab’s studies.

From day to day, the students are also involved with any number of research tasks, from scheduling and record-keeping to analyzing data.

“We mentor the undergraduate students and get them as excited as we are about the research,” said doctoral student Irina Castellanos, who started working in the lab as an undergraduate. “It’s been really great. I feel like we have been exposed to more than other students.”

Doctoral student Melissa Shuman, who also began in the lab as an undergraduate, is building her doctoral research on Bahrnick’s studies of face recognition with preschoolers. “She has fostered our interest and allowed us to do the research we are interested in,” Shuman said. “We’ve learned so much about having a lab and writing grants and university bureaucracy.”

Parents who visit the lab with their babies regularly ask for insights or advice. Bahrnick tells parents they don’t need to speed up learning in babies.

“They do just what they are supposed to do. You don’t need flashcards,” Bahrnick said. “The natural exploration of their world and interactions with people promote learning.”

Any parents with infants (full term) between the ages of 2 and 7 months can participate in research at the Infant Development Lab. For more information or to make an appointment, call 305-348-2842 or e-mail babylab@fiu.edu. It takes only 15 minutes and there are reserved parking spaces on campus near the lab. ■

THE FIU WAY

FIU's new Advancement VP looks to establish a model for fundraising success



By Deborah O'Neil

Everywhere he goes on campus these days, new Advancement Vice President Robert Conrad is greeted with a smile and the same refrain: "We are so glad you are here."

FIU's new chief fundraiser jokes that he has never felt more welcome, saying "I have to tell you, as a fundraiser, you don't usually hear that." But Conrad is quick to add, "It's not just me who is going to get this done. It will be all of us together."

With more than 20 years in the advancement profession, Conrad joins FIU from the Florida State University Foundation, where he began as vice president of the Office of Planned Giving in 2004 and was promoted to vice president of Central Development Services two years later. In his most recent position, he managed planned

giving, corporate/foundation giving, regional giving and annual giving programs, and was the lead fundraiser on the largest gift in the history of FSU – \$50 million.

Conrad will lead FIU's efforts in development, prospect management, advancement research, donor relations, the annual campaign, annual and planned giving, and corporate/foundation giving. In the last fiscal year, FIU raised \$52 million (including state match), exceeding its fundraising goal by more than \$20 million. That includes FIU's largest gift to date, \$10 million for the College of Medicine from Miami's León family.

Fundraising is critically important to FIU's future. Conrad's arrival coincides with a new strategic direction for FIU laid out by President Modesto A. Maidique

"It's not just me who is going to get this done. It will be all of us together."

—
Robert Conrad,
vice president
for
Advancement

that shifts the university's traditional dependence on public funding to greater reliance on private support.

"I am confident that under Vice President Conrad's leadership, we will take our fundraising efforts to the next level," Maidique said.

Conrad says he was attracted to FIU by its impressive growth and its promise for the future.

"The energy and growth FIU has seen in a very short period of time is tremendous," Conrad said. "There is strong leadership here. The fundraising here is ready for a next step."

He says he's also impressed by the success of FIU's alumni relations. In 2008, FIU ranked No. 1 in the nation for membership growth. "The alumni are the solid foundation that everything we do will be built upon," Conrad said. "A university is a family. You're born into it as a student and when you graduate, you're still in it."

Initially, Conrad will focus on strengthening FIU's fundraising infrastructure.

"We are to a point where the institution is ready for it," he said. "We want people to do things in what I hope will become 'The FIU Way.' We are going to do fundraising right. You are going to be reading about gifts doing good in the community because we've built an internal infrastructure that is getting gifts that are good for the donors and good for the institution."

This economy presents only a temporary challenge, Conrad says. "These things come and go," he said. "I've been telling my development officers to be positive. We have a positive story to tell, that story is FIU." ■

alumni profile

Life Without Limits

For the alumnus, life without legs calls for focus, determination and creativity

By Sissi Aguila '99, MA '08

On a beautiful November morning with temperatures in the mid-40s and no wind, Lance Benson MBA '03 joined 37,000 marathoners on the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge for the start of the 2006 ING New York City Marathon. Like his fellow competitors, the Golden Panther had a well-planned strategy for the race, but his technique would be vastly different. Benson was born without legs.

To go the distance, he would brave the 26.2-mile course through the Big Apple's five boroughs by skateboarding with an injured shoulder and bludgeoned hands. He would balance his body weight on the board while literally pounding the pavement with his fists to propel himself to the finish line in 3 hours and 48 minutes.

Of the 14 marathons Benson, 35, has completed, he says this was the most difficult to date. "Like in life, different races affect you differently," Benson says. "But I put my mind to it, focused and finished."

The winning mindset

The marathoner learned at an early age that focus, determination and a little bit of creativity could yield unimaginable results. Specialists told Benson's parents that he would be wheelchair-bound for life, but by his first birthday, doctors had operated on his deformed right leg and fit him with prosthetics for both legs. By the time he was 8 years old, he was rounding the bases in a T-shirt league baseball game.

In high school, the North Carolina native realized that his upper body strength made him a force to be

"I was raised never to ask if I could do something. Instead, we figured out how to do it."

—
Lance Benson,
vice president,
Grubb & Ellis Co.

reckoned with on the wrestling mat. The summer before college, he took top honors in wrestling in the state's largest multi-sport festival.

He then attended North Carolina State University and earned a degree in mechanical engineering.

"After graduation, I knew I needed to move somewhere with more opportunities, that offered more," he says. Benson grew up in Knightdale, a 5-square-mile town, outside Raleigh. He wanted to expand his prospects.

In 1997, Benson moved to South Florida and began a career in commercial real estate. He earned an MBA from FIU six years later. Today, he is a vice president at Grubb & Ellis Co., a commercial real estate advisory firm, where he develops and implements strategic real estate plans for local and multinational companies.

"Lance is focused and very reliable," says business colleague Albert Santalo EMBA '97, president and CEO of Avisena, and member of the Dean's Council for the College of Business Administration. "We met at an FIU function five years ago and developed a successful business relationship right away. He's a win-win negotiator."

It's not a spectator's world

The NYC Marathon is the largest spectator-sporting event in the world. About 3 million people come out to see the race yearly. But it's not in Benson's DNA to watch. He believes in baseball hall-of-famer Jackie Robinson's philosophy, "Life is not a spectator sport. If you're going to spend your whole life in the grandstand just watching what goes

on, in my opinion you're wasting your life." Benson wants into the game. He wants to push the limits of what he can do – body, mind and soul.

Benson started his marathon career and skateboarding technique after volunteering for Shake-A-Leg Miami, a group that provides services and programs to disabled individuals and their families. Friends encouraged him to participate in a 5K run, but he had never used a wheelchair. In his first race, Benson instead used a standard skateboard and gardening gloves. (His hands were a bloody mess afterward because the gloves were too thin.)

Soon, the CBA graduate designed a board that was lighter, wider and outfitted with rollerblade wheels. He also began to use hockey gloves that were thicker and offered better protection.

"I was raised to never ask if I could do something," he explains. "Instead, we figured out how to do it."

Much like in his professional and athletic endeavors, Benson refuses to be a spectator when it comes to helping the community. With his wife, Yurlaimes Caballero, Benson hopes in the next few years to increase their charity work, as well as help companies effectively reduce their carbon footprint.

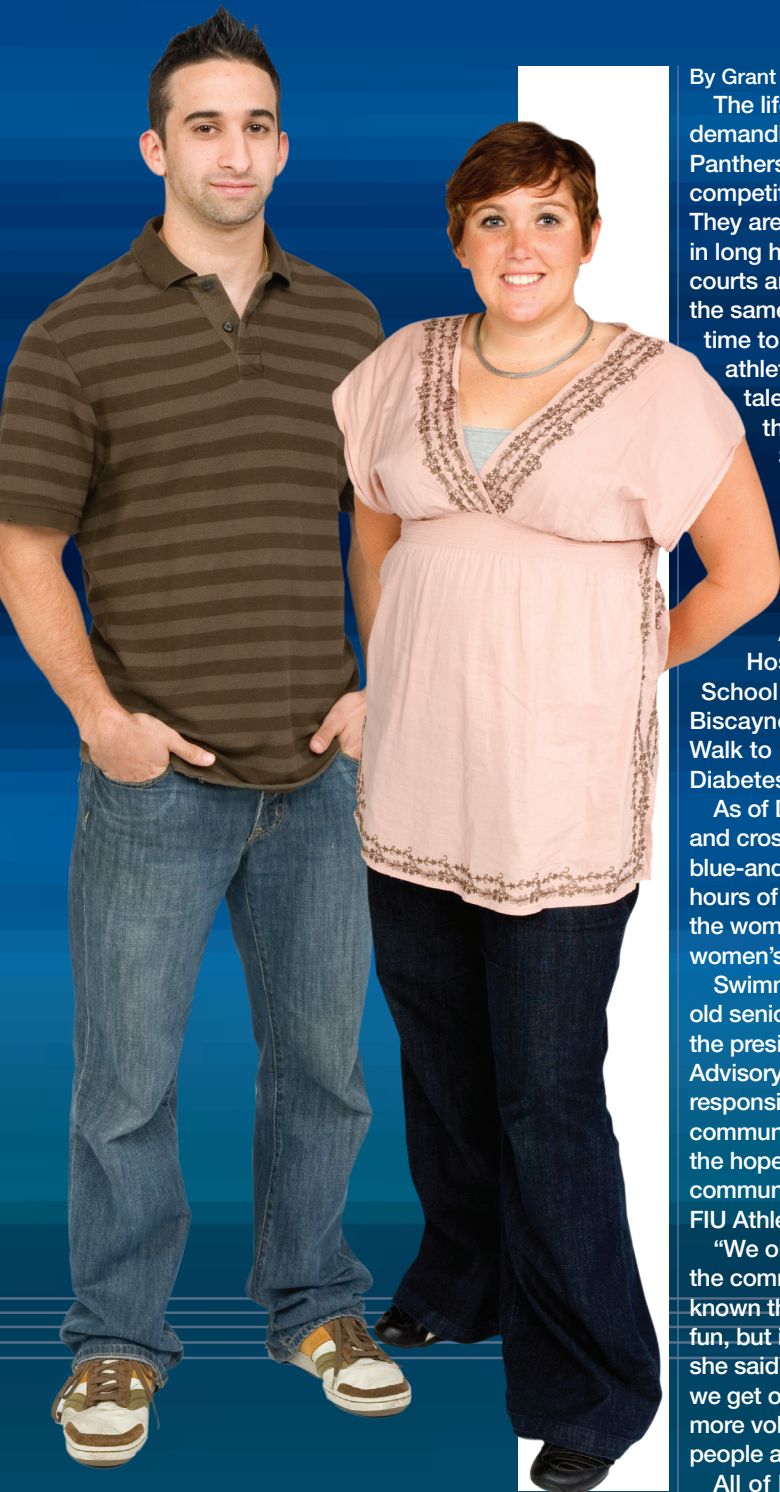
As an accomplished athlete, Benson sees sports and life much in the same way – "it's all mental." In 2005 he founded the South Florida chapter of the Achilles Track Club, an organization that aides athletes with disabilities from Palm Beach to Miami, to share his experience and philosophy. ■



Lance ^{MBA '03} Benson

DOING GOOD IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

FIU STUDENT-ATHLETES MAKE TIME FOR MIAMI-DADE COMMUNITY



By Grant Smith

The life of a student-athlete is a demanding one and FIU's Golden Panthers demonstrate this in competition and in the community. They are expected not only to put in long hours on the field or in the courts and maintain high GPAs at the same time, but also to take the time to do more. Our student-athletes volunteer their time and talent working with children through Big Brothers Big Sisters or bathing puppies at the Humane Society.

Among the organizations where FIU student-athletes volunteered last fall are South Florida After School All-Stars, Miami Children's Hospital, Kidz XL Sports After-School Program, Crandon Park Biscayne Nature Center and the Walk to Fight Diabetes-American Diabetes Association.

As of Dec. 9, the men's track and cross country team led all blue-and-gold teams with 186 hours of community service, while the women's soccer team led all women's teams with 154 hours.

Swimmer Chrisna Luus, a 22-year-old senior psychology student, is the president of the Student Athletic Advisory Committee. One of her responsibilities is organizing several community service activities with the hopes of fostering stronger community and student ties within FIU Athletics.

"We organize events to get out to the community, so that we're more known throughout FIU. It's a lot of fun, but it's a lot of hard work too," she said. "I think in the long run if we get out to the community, do more volunteer work, we'll get more people at our games."

All of FIU's teams participate

enthusiastically with Athletics' volunteer program. Their participation begins with each team appointing two representatives who receive e-mails from Liz Borrell '01, director of student-athlete development and community relations, about different community events. The representatives and their teams choose which events they will volunteer for in the near future. Luus adds to the mix by continually seeking out new contacts and opportunities.

"I challenged the student-athlete population to be more involved within the university and the surrounding community," said Borrell. "Without a doubt, their response has been exceptional. We have a great group of student-athletes that take pride in giving back."

Luus and fellow psychology student Chris Altieri, 21, exemplify this involvement, balancing 12-16 credits and practicing a minimum of 20 hours each week during their respective seasons. She has worked with Lotus House and Big Brothers Big Sisters and will participate in the 2009 Race for the Cure. Altieri worked with Race for the Cure last October and is a fixture at Tamiami and Suniland parks where he and his teammates teach free baseball clinics for kids ages 4-12.

"We split up into different stations, such as bunting, hitting, base running, fielding and pitching," he said. "The children are put into groups and rotate until they have gone through all of the stations. At some parks, we are invited as guests to the opening ceremony of the Little League season and talk about our program and meet with the children."

The infield baseball player strives to set a good example for the kids, remembering how much he looked up to college athletes when he was young.

"You look at these kids and you see something there," Altieri said. "Baseball showed me how to be a better person, not just a leader but also a team player. It keeps me out of trouble and busy. You have to learn how to work with others. And it helps you in the classroom, it gives you structure."

Luus also finds the experience rewarding. She recalls a successful book drive she organized last year where her peers donated and collected books to send to countries in northern Africa.

Not surprisingly, the athletes have turned volunteering into a competition, sparking a friendly rivalry between teams over who could clock the most hours every month.

"It's important for us because it's so easy to give your time," Altieri said. "Anytime we can help out we're there. We compete against one another, but we also want to volunteer."

Borrell says it's common for coaches to leave monthly meetings displeased if their team has a low community service ranking. And in the spirit of competition, they inevitably pledge to have their team put in more volunteer hours.

"We really stress the importance of volunteering, in addition to academics and performance on the field," says Assistant Baseball Coach Scott Humes. "These guys have an opportunity to give back because they are such huge role models to younger kids and can make lasting impressions on them. It helps [my] players grow. It's good for the team and it's good for FIU." ■



SPIKING HISTORY

THE FIU VOLLEYBALL TEAM HAS BANNER SEASON IN 2008

By Grant Smith

After returning to the NCAA Championships for only the second time in FIU volleyball history, head coach Danijela Tomic looks back at the hard road her team took to qualify for the tournament. The struggle came at the beginning of the 2008 fall semester.

"We had a big disappointment because our second best player was declared ineligible," Tomic said. "We found out the week before our first competition and that was a major hit for the team. I told them it's up to us to decide, we can say our season is over or we can do the best we can with what we have."

Player and team leader Yarimar Rosa struggled with this as well, but put it behind her for FIU's first game against Charleston, South Carolina at Clemson's Big Orange Bash Tournament. When they won, the junior hitter remembers her mind clearing and having no doubt that this team could go far. She was right, and went on to lead the team to a record-breaking 28-win season.

"[Yari] knew the pressure was on her and the team knew they could rely on her," Tomic said. "She's a competitor. If you give her a challenge she's going to step up."

"I just tried to play my best in every single game," Rosa said. "If we play happy and support each other we will be fine and we will have success as well." Each weekend, Rosa led the country in kills per game, totaling 657 for the season and 5.2 kills per set, proving that she was not a streaky player, either.

"I have to admit that in some of the games I did have pressure," she said. However, "when I knew I had to put the ball down, I just visualized myself hitting that ball and celebrating after that."

Tomic adds that the Golden Panther is the first to say she couldn't have done it without her teammates.

When FIU beat Clemson, ranked 19th in the county, the team forced volleyball fans around the nation to pay attention.

About two months later, FIU hosted Middle Tennessee and beat them in a heart-pounding five-set match. Not only does Rosa attribute that win to her teammates, but also to blue-and-gold fans who were on their feet, cheering for their Golden Panthers.

"Our fans have been coming now for three or four years and they understand volleyball, so it's a really great atmosphere," Tomic said.

Last fall, the university's support and the team's efforts carried FIU to the NCAA Championships in Gainesville, Fla., for the first time since 2001, where the Golden Panthers lost to Colorado State, 1-3. The bar has been set for 2009. ■

ALUMNI



**A Message from Alumni Association
President Jose M. Perez de Corcho '93**

Dear FIU Alumni, Family and Friends,


At the start of the new year, most of us reflect on the accomplishments of the last year and look forward to our goals for the months ahead. And indeed, the FIU Alumni Association can proudly look back on our many accomplishments for 2008. At the same time we resolutely look forward to increasing our membership numbers and to providing a variety of programs and opportunities for our alumni to stay connected in 2009. One of the most beneficial events is our annual FIU Alumni Career Fair, which was held last month. This event is not only open to our recent graduates, but to all FIU alumni. There is no better way to give back to a fellow Golden Panther than by providing them with opportunities to compete for jobs.

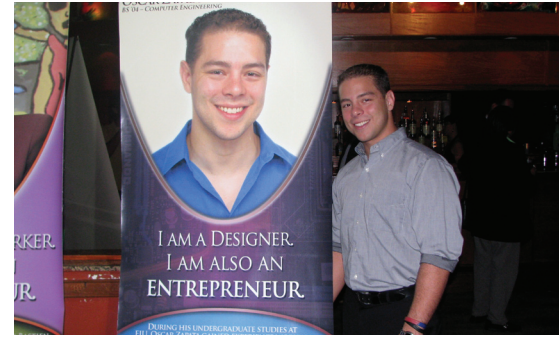
This coming year also brings a significant change to FIU: President Modesto A. Maidique will be stepping down as the university's president. President Maidique has unwaveringly carried out all his goals for our university. His support has been instrumental in the growth and success of our Alumni Association. As with most great leaders, establishing a solid foundation that can be built upon is a testament of their leadership for generations to come. As our FIU and South Florida communities set out in search of a new president, we are not looking for someone to replace Maidique, but rather for someone who can continue to build upon the groundwork that he has set. Our Alumni Association looks forward to working with our next president in taking us to new heights.

The 2008 football season brought on a significant turnaround for the 2009 season. As coach Mario Cristobal continues to build a first-rate football program, we look forward to many new firsts for the team. With games against Alabama and Florida next season, FIU once again demonstrates that we are not afraid to play anyone. While we as the university's Alumni Association can do much to generate excitement for the program, there is nothing that will generate more excitement than upsetting Alabama and their head coach. All I know is that this loyal FIU fan is not making travel plans for next December, as it is my intention to personally witness FIU's first Bowl Game. I hope to see you all there. Don't forget to bring your FIU Alumni Membership cards.

We would love to hear from you! Get connected with our Alumni Association at 305-348-3334.

In the Spirit of Blue & Gold,


Jose M. Perez de Corcho '93



Entrepreneur Oscar Zapata '04 was featured in the Pino Center's 2007-'08 Alumni Entrepreneur banner campaign.

Pino Center celebrates alumni entrepreneurs

Last September, the Eugenio Pino and Family Global Entrepreneurship Center at FIU and the Alumni Association partnered to host a Fall Alumni Entrepreneur Happy Hour.

Twice a year, the Pino Center and the Alumni Association celebrate the success of FIU's alumni entrepreneurs. This partnered effort seeks nominations to identify emerging entrepreneurs among our growing alumni base. Some of them, like designer Oscar Zapata '04, were featured in an Alumni Entrepreneur banner campaign last year. These banners were unveiled and launched at Alumni Entrepreneur Happy Hour events, exhibited around campus, and e-mailed to a database of more than 10,000 entrepreneurs, community organizations, students and faculty/staff.

This year, the Pino Center is seeking alumni who have founded businesses that are making a difference in the South Florida community and beyond. The center is seeking to profile five to 10 innovative and creative FIU alumni entrepreneurs, whose campaign banners will be revealed during the upcoming 2009 Alumni Entrepreneur Happy Hour celebration.

For more information about the Alumni Entrepreneur banner campaign or to nominate an FIU alumni entrepreneur, visit <http://www.entrepreneurship.fiu.edu/alumni>. For information about Pino Center events, call 305-348-7156 or visit <http://www.entrepreneurship.fiu.edu/events>. ■

Members of the inaugural Everglades Hall Staff. Front Row: Luchana Procaccio, Vonreya Shaw, Krystal Murphy and Justin Low. Back Row: Tracey Fisher, Shayra Quezada, Sanjay Dhaway, Raquel Putulin, and Chrystal Rambarath.



Residential Life alumni reconnect at reunion

The Department of Housing and Residential Life and the Alumni Association welcomed back approximately 140 resident assistants and professional staff members last September for the inaugural RA Reunion.

The group gathered at Dave & Buster’s at Dolphin Mall for a good time filled with laughs and memories. Attendees included resident assistants, graduate assistants and Residential Life coordinators from as far back as 1991.

John and Robin Bartleman of Weston took the honor of being the most senior RAs (1991-’94) and Vonreya Shaw, Xaila Navarro and Nicola Alcantara traveled the farthest from New York City, Mexico, and the Cayman Islands, respectively, for the occasion.

If you are interested in helping the Alumni Association develop a Housing and Residential Life Alumni Chapter, contact Vanessa Baldomero at 305-348-1613 or vbaldome@fiu.edu.

Young alumni members Diego Guajardo '05, George Corton '03 and Arturo Neto '93.

Deirdre Nero Valladares, former chair of the 20/30 Group Committee; Mark A. Trowbridge, president and CEO of the Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce; Vanessa Baldomero '06, Alumni Association assistant director of Chapter and Young Alumni Relations; and Sylvia Pozo, Alumni Association assistant director of Membership and Marketing.

Coral Gables chamber partners with Alumni

The Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce’s 20/30 Group recently partnered with the Alumni Association for a Wind Down Wednesday at The Globe Café & Bar.

FIU’s young alumni enjoyed an evening of networking with other local young professionals at the event held last October.

For more information about YUPA!, FIU’s Young Urban Professional Alumni chapter, visit <http://www.fiu alumni.com>.



I “FEEL THE PRIDE” BECAUSE...

FIU is pretty great – and the success stories of our alumni, students, faculty/ staff and administrators, family and friends are the best testament to that fact.

In our last issue, *FIU Magazine* launched a new section called “I ‘Feel the Pride’ Because...” in which Golden Panthers in the Division of University & Community Relations shared their own stories of how they “Feel the Pride.” We hope that you will be inspired to do the same.

To tell us how you “Feel the Pride,” visit <http://magazine.fiu.edu> and post a story with your name and year(s) of graduation in the comments box of the feature “I ‘Feel the Pride’ Because...”. (Stories may be edited for length and clarity and may appear in *FIU Magazine*.)



Crystal McAdams '08, founder and president of The McAdams Group:

Growing up we all knew the saying, “When you wish upon a star, your dreams come true.”

For some, that dream becomes more difficult due to variables they cannot control such as family, finances or the lack thereof. Long story short, as an orphaned teenager with no real home or car, I dreamt of sororities, a degree and all of the experiences of a college student I read about. FIU is where I made my dreams come true. I worked full time and often took on a few additional part-time jobs where possible, all the while meeting the responsibilities of a full load of credits, mixers and philanthropic events. I became a founding member of Alpha Omicron Pi, participated in many of the school events, joined intramural sports, made friends for a lifetime, achieved a degree in psychology and picked up a few languages. Today, I own and operate a consulting firm dedicated to the prevention of money laundering and financial regulations with clients globally. FIU was my home, my heart, my pride – ultimately, it was my family, from the professors and my friends to the caring janitorial staff. FIU was a life-changing experience for me. It provided everything I could have ever wanted – it was the

I "FEEL THE PRIDE" BECAUSE...

Continued from page 25

ultimate college experience. I should have been a statistic of society, but thanks to the university I became an example to others. Dreams do come true. They require hope, perseverance, hard work and people who take the time to care. All the professors at FIU inspired me and for that I "Feel the Pride" and remain forever thankful.



Aurora Lydia Rodríguez-Domínguez MA '05,
Miami.com assistant editor and editor of Miami.com En Español:
FIU is more than my *alma mater*, for it was the place

that lured me to leave my native Puerto Rico in 2004 carrying only three suitcases and a dream. While working at *The San Juan Star*, I received one of 10 Latin American and Caribbean Scholarships to pursue my master's in Spanish language journalism at Biscayne Bay Campus and decided to take the risk, leaving old friends and family behind to start a new life. And what an adventure it was. While investigating for class stories and developing my niche of feature writing with classes by standout professors such as Carlos Suric, Mercedes Vigón and Mario Diamant, I decided that Miami was where I wanted to stay. Many nights were spent with new best friends from the journalism and hospitality programs at the BBC dorms, huddled over laptops and taking breaks to hit up local nightspots, learning everything about the culture of this vibrant and multicultural city. I still recall receiving an FIU/*The Miami Herald* Neighbors internship and covering Hialeah and Miami Lakes, and then taking over as a music bibliographical translator and writer for MTV Networks in Miami Beach, which led to my stint as a talent escort at the 2005 Video Music Awards. Right after, I left to work as a features reporter for *The Ledger*, a New York Times Company newspaper, in Central Florida, where I covered art, music, fashion, and wrote about local museums while gaining my own weekly music column. Then last year, *The Miami Herald* came calling and I became a part of one of the biggest online

Continues on page 29

London (Dover) cruise providing a wealth of opportunities to explore Northern Europe and Scandinavia with ports of call such as St. Petersburg, Helsinki, Tallinn, Copenhagen and Amsterdam.

- On July 11, the Black Sea Serenade will delve into a region of the world that has fascinating culture, captivating beauty and mystique on this 12-day cruise that begins in Istanbul and ends in Athens. You will visit the folklore-rich countries of Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Russia and the Greek isle of Santorini on this voyage.
- And finally, on Oct. 31, Roman Revelations will make your senses come alive with a kaleidoscope of sights, sounds and tastes on this 14-day grand voyage as you discover ancient wonders of the world. Your journey begins in Istanbul

and takes you to Cyprus, Israel, Egypt, Crete, Malta, Tunisia and your final destination of Barcelona.

For information or to reserve your trip, visit <http://www.fiu alumni.com/travel.htm>. ■

College of Law welcomes back alumni

Last September, the College of Law Alumni Board held its 2nd Annual College of Law Alumni reception.

The 2008 event was hosted by Piedra & Associates and drew approximately 100 guests. Presentations were made by College of Law Dean Leonard Strickman, Law Alumni Board President Alex Alvarez '05 and College of Law Director of Development and Alumni Relations Adam Owenz. ■



The 2nd Annual College of Law Alumni reception brought out Maria D. Garcia '08, Alex Alvarez '05, Carolina Suarez '07, Christina MacRobert '07, Benjamin Guerrero '07, Rafael Alonso '07, Eduardo Rodriguez '06, Susan Capote '06, Adrian Nunez '07, Luis Fuste '06 and Edwin Cruz.

7. Approximately 460 students, faculty and staff have signed up to save energy and reduce their carbon footprint in FIU's new GreenRide carpool program.
8. The FIU men's basketball team beat Sun Belt Conference power Western Kentucky University, 81-79, in a Jan. 8 home game at U.S. Century Bank Arena at University Park.
9. *Reform Judaism* magazine has ranked FIU No. 10 in its list of the Top 30 Public Schools with the largest Jewish populations.
10. FIU Theatre's production of Eduardo Machado's "The Cook" recently won Best Show honors at the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival regional competition in Greensboro, N.C.

ALUMNI FIU GOES WEST

FIU Alumni Association celebrates the new year with alumni living in San Francisco/Oakland and Los Angeles, Calif.



More than 45 FIU alumni and friends enjoyed cocktails and hors d'oeuvres at JC Cellars in San Francisco.



More than 100 FIU alumni and friends came out to meet "American Idol" finalist and theatre alumna Syesha and her fiancé and manager Hess Wesley '08 during our visit to Los Angeles.



Alumni received tours of San Francisco's JC Cellars.



Golden Panthers living in the L.A. area reconnected at the get-together.



Alumni and friends received FIU giveaways at a cocktail reception at the Napa Valley Grille in Los Angeles.



As a result of both events, official alumni chapters will be developed in an effort to reconnect alumni and continue the excitement and enthusiasm for FIU on the West Coast.



Robert Stempel College of Public Health and Social work alumni and students celebrate the launch of the school's official alumni chapter.



Public health, social work launch new chapter

The Robert Stempel College of Public Health and Social Work has launched an official alumni chapter. Alumni interested in joining the chapter's steering committee should contact Carrie Sanchez at csanchez@fiu.edu for more information.

The chapter hosted a kick-off party at The Grape in the Village of Merrick Park last fall, where the chapter's official charter was presented.

The launch was a true celebration with more than 50 guests including alumni and faculty/staff from both the Stempel School of Public Health and the School of Social Work.

Together they enjoyed an evening of hors d'oeuvres and networking. ■

College of Engineering alumni enjoy cigars, live music

Art District Cigars, in the heart of Little Havana, has been hosting Engineering Nights, once-a-month gatherings for engineering alumni, cigar aficionados and their guests to enjoy cigars, live music, dancing, karaoke and networking.

While in season, Art District Cigars will be hosting FIU football and baseball nights. For more information, contact Marco A. Incer '02 at 305-644-044 or marco@artdistrictcigars.com or visit <http://www.artdistrictcigars.com>. ■

I "FEEL THE PRIDE" BECAUSE...

Continued from page 27

initiatives – Miami.com – to have happened at the newspaper in years. Now, I proudly sit at the downtown office in Biscayne Bay working alongside some of my favorite writers in the features department and contributing regularly in their food, entertainment and fashion sections. I also pursue pinup modeling part time, a hobby that has led to fun stories on my site. FIU also led me to find the love of my life. Last August, I married fellow Golden Panther Sebastian Dominguez '03, whom I met in 2005 at a mutual friend's party. I am happy to share all my successes with him. I thank FIU every day for helping me follow my dreams and giving me confidence to always be myself while enveloped in blue and gold. In fact, I need a little banner for my desk! I'll make a note to get one so I can proudly display it and look at it when I meet a deadline goal or get dolled up for a photo shoot.



Korrin Stanek MS '05, assistant director of Orientation & Commuter Student Services at FIU:

I "Feel the Pride" as a Golden Panther because there is truly no other university like FIU. As a student affairs professional, I've had the opportunity to visit and learn about campuses all over the United States and across the world, and there are so many unique and wonderful things about FIU. Here's my Top 10 list of what sets FIU apart from the rest. 1). The number of services available in the university centers – salon, dry cleaning, spa, Credit Union and a flower shop just to name a few. 2). New, modern residence halls where you don't share a bathroom with 30 other people. 3). Art and sculptures everywhere to help beautify our campus, not to mention the Frost Art Museum and the Wolfsonian-FIU on South Beach. 4). The great diversity of the students, faculty and staff. 5). Having a campus on the beautiful Biscayne Bay. 6). Amazing student-run philanthropies like Dance Marathon, Charity Ball, Relay for Life and the B-HIVE Project. 7). The opportunity to be part of so many firsts like the first football game in the new FIU Stadium, the first graduates of the College

News from the Student Alumni Association



More than 150 students attended the Student Alumni Association's Ultimate Money Skills presentation last October. The event, presented by Bank of America and Monster Jobs, addressed issues such as identify theft, credit use, student loans and savings.

Students gathered around the Graham Center Pit last October as the FIU Cheerleaders, Dazzlers and Golden Panther Band cheered for coach Mario Cristobal's (second from right) football team. The Student Alumni Association's Fashion Police were in full force and event sponsor Dunkin Donuts gave out free donuts and coffee to guests. For more information about the Student Alumni Association, contact Dianne Cordova at 305-348-9050 or dcordova@fiu.edu.



ALUMNI

CLASS NOTES

1970s



Ingrid Smith '76, MS '89 is the associate dean of the College of Education and Human Development and an associate professor of educational leadership at Jackson State University in Jackson, Miss.

Joseph A. Fiorillo '77 passed away on Jan. 25, 2008, at the age of 89. Fiorillo, who was married to the late Helen H. Fiorillo '77, went back to school and received his college degree from FIU when he was 59 years old. The couple is survived by three sons, Joe Jr., Jim and Bill Fiorillo, and daughter Margie Schreiber.

Barbara Levenson '78 recently published "Fatal February" with Oceanview Publishing. A longtime Miami resident, Levenson currently serves as a senior judge in the circuit court of Miami-Dade County.

1980s



Leticia Valdes '89 has joined Constangy, Brooks & Smith's Tampa office as its newest associate attorney, bringing legal experience from her background in the state of Florida Office of the Attorney General in Tallahassee and the Office of the Attorney General in Washington, D.C.

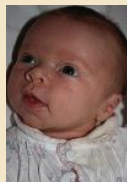
1990s

Jason P. Kroll '91 is a partner at KBW Financial Staffing & Recruiting in Bedford, N.H. KBW recently was named the No. 1 company to watch by *BusinessNH Magazine*.



Juan Martinez '91, a commercial litigator, has joined the Miami office of GrayRobinson, P.A., as a shareholder. Prior to joining the firm, Martinez was a partner at Fowler White Burnett, P.A.

Seth H. Bramson '92 recently celebrated the release of "L'Chaim: The History of the Jewish Community of Greater Miami," a tome recounting the dynamic and never-before-told stories of Greater Miami's Jewish community.



Ruth Bosch '94 welcomed daughter Luella on Sept. 9, 2008. Luella weighed 7 lbs. 6 oz. and measured 19 ¼ inches. This is Bosch's second child.

Jennifer A. Garcia '94, MA '98 has launched Logicreative Design, her own Web and graphic design business. Prior to her Web and graphic design career, Garcia was a senior academic advisor at the University of Maryland and an instructor at FIU. She is engaged to U.S. Army-retired SSG Paul A. Curtis, Jr.



Dayana (Laza) Toledo '94 is dean of students at Carrollton School of the Sacred Heart. Toledo married her husband Angel after graduation. The couple has two daughters: Sydney, 5, and Victoria, 3.

Ivon Brinis-Rodas '96 and Juan D. Rodas '96 welcomed daughter Adriana Isabel into their family on Dec. 10, 2007. Adriana Isabel weighed 8 lbs. 1 oz. and measured 19 inches.

Rita Maria Martinez '96, MFA '03, who recently published her first poetry chapbook titled "Jane-in-the-Box" with March Street Press, has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, recognizing the best of the small presses, for a poem titled "Saint John Rivers Pops the Question."

Frances M. Serpa '97, MS '06 is the founder and owner of Learning City, a Miami educational store located on S.W. 107th Avenue and 56th Street, and the Web site LearningCityOnline.com. Serpa is married and can be found at Learning City juggling work and motherhood with the youngest of her three children on any given day.

Corina M. Alvarez '98 recently was appointed agency multicultural director by New England Financial, a MetLife company. In her new role, Alvarez is dedicated to the recruit-

ment, retention and marketing of Hispanic financial services representatives. She also oversees the strengthening of the company's ties to Miami's multicultural community.



Maileen A. Ferrer '98 recently was named the new principal of Perrine Elementary School. Ferrer, a hometown resident of Palmetto Bay, grew up attending local public schools and has been in the field of education for 16 years. She has taught in grades K-5 and held several positions in school administration.



Jose Tezanos '99 recently was named tax manager by the Phoenix, Ariz., office of Grant Thornton, LLP, the U.S. member firm of Grant Thornton International. Tezanos is responsible for reviewing and drafting complex corporate, partnership and trust filings for federal and state taxing authorities and making recommendations on return preparation regarding accuracy and tax saving strategies.

2000s



Jennifer L. (Cordon) Alcantara '03 and Michael Alcantara welcomed their first child, Ryan Michael Alcantara, into their family on Sept. 25, 2008. "Big Baby Boy Ryan" weighed 8 lbs. 11 oz. and measured 20 inches. The family is doing well and enjoying its new blessing.

Michelle L. Palacio '03 recently was promoted to assistant vice president of state relations at FIU.

Victoria N. Fernandez '04 was married to Alex Martinez, an FIU Pi Kappa Phi alumnus, on Dec. 26, 2008. Fernandez started working as a paralegal at Ben-Ezra & Katz, P.A., a foreclosure law firm, in March 2008, and was promoted to executive assistant after only five weeks. She lives in Miami.

Rhea A. Olivacce '05 is a candidate for the doctor of musical arts degree at the Univer-

I "FEEL THE PRIDE" BECAUSE...

Continued from page 29

of Law, or the first incoming class of the College of Medicine. 8). Having the same university president developing his vision of the institution for more than 20 years. 9). Being located in the urban Miami setting, between the beaches and the Everglades. 10). The intense level of activity and noise in the university centers over the lunch hour. Obviously, this is a very limited list of the things that make FIU a great place to be, but they've all impacted me in various ways, as I'm sure they have others. These are all qualities that you will be hard-pressed to find elsewhere and reasons why I will continue to "Feel the Pride" for years to come. ■

Panther Perks

Pounce on 'em now

Panther Perk: Dunkin Donuts

The FIU Alumni Association recently teamed up with Fresco Development, a Dunkin Donuts operator in Miami-Dade County, to offer all members a 10 percent discount on all food and beverage items at the following locations:

- 10754 S.W. 24th St. (across from University Park)
- 18099 S. Dixie Highway
- 11506 Quail Roost Drive (1/2 mile west of Turnpike)
- 12930 S.W. 120th St.
- 8394 S.W. 40th St. (on 84th Avenue, west of the Palmetto)
- 2720 S. Dixie Highway

In order to take advantage of this exclusive Panther Perk, Alumni Association must show their membership card or key tag to receive discount. For more information on these locations or on Dunkin Donuts, visit <http://www.dunkindonuts.com>.

sity of Michigan. Olivacce sang the leading soprano role of Tatyana in the University of Michigan's opera production of Tchaikovsky's "Eugene Onegin," and made her Carnegie Hall recital debut in 2008.

Marta T. Montenegro '06 is CEO and editor-in-chief of MPG Publishing's *SOBeFIT*, the first bimonthly publication in South Florida dedicated exclusively to providing expert advice to men and women on fitness, nutrition, health and sports.

Zipporah A. Slaughter '06 has received a Fulbright U.S. student scholarship to study in Brazil.

Mohammed S. Oosman '07 was selected as the Bank of America Finance MAP spotlight last October. The Finance MAP (Management Associate Program) is a two-year associate development program that aggressively moves Finance MAP associates through rotational assignments within the field of finance, helping them to develop a solid knowledge base of the functional areas of the finance group and a broad range of skills.

Zachary E. Smith MS '07, of BSSW Architects, Inc., received the Individual Honor Award from the American Institute of Architects Florida Southwest Chapter during the chapter's 5th Annual Design Conference last September.



Amy I. Alvarado '08 took part in the Florence Voice Seminar in Italy last summer. Alvarado studied with a variety of international pedagogues in voice and opera, including the distinguished American soprano, Benita Valente. Later in the season, she also attended the Crittendon Opera Workshop in Washington, D.C.

Andria Asencio-Miranda '08 and her husband Michael Miranda, a member of Pi Kappa Phi, are expecting their first child due on March 24th, 2009.

Kelvin F. Rodriguez MS '08 has joined the National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations as the new director of Parliamentary Procedure. Rodriguez's position ensures that all NALFO business runs in accordance with the NALFO constitution, by-laws, policies and Robert's Rules of Order.



Advertise in FIU Magazine

Alumni, you now have the chance to promote your business in the award-winning *FIU Magazine* and support your alma mater at the same time.



FIU Magazine, the flagship publication of your university, is published quarterly

and distributed free of charge to more than 120,000 FIU alumni, students, faculty/staff, donors and friends of the university.

For more information and to access an ad rate sheet, visit <http://magazine.fiu.edu>. ■

"Feel the Pride" in your FIU Gear

Check out some of the latest FIU merchandise available for purchase both online and in stores at your official FIU Bookstore. There you will find T-shirts, polos, hats, sweatshirts, shorts and accessories for men, women and children.

For more information and more FIU Gear, visit <http://fiu.bncollege.com>. ■



**Individuals denoted with a  are members of the FIU Alumni Association.

To become a member, please visit the online membership site at https://web.fiu.edu/alumni/jointoday_form.htm.

Donor Profile: U.S. Century Bank



FIU administrators and U.S. Century Bank officials gathered in January to unveil U.S. Century Bank Arena at University Park.

Gift will help improve athletic facilities and enhance student-athlete experience at FIU

By Sissi Aguila '99, MA '08

FIU's Athletic Department is now backed by U.S. Century Bank (USCB), one of the strongest financial institutions in Florida. USCB has pledged more than \$1 million (in a five-year agreement) to help fund improvements to the university's athletic facilities and enhance the student-athlete experience.

In recognition of the donation, the university has renamed the arena – host to some of FIU's most important political, cultural, athletic and academic events – U.S. Century Bank Arena.

"We are honored to partner with Florida International University in naming the arena," said Octavio Hernández '74, vice chairman, president and CEO of USCB. "I trust that our support will help leave a lasting impression on all students, their families, faculty, alumni and guests who visit this great university."

FIU Athletic Director Pete Garcia says "getting corporate support for college athletics is always very important. Getting it in these dire economic times is critical and shows both the FIU and South Florida communities that U.S. Century Bank cares."

Headquartered in Miami, USCB is a locally owned and managed bank with 22 branches in Miami-Dade and Broward counties. Founded in 2002, the bank has quickly become one of the fastest-growing and best-capitalized community banks in the state with assets of \$1.7 billion. In 2008, it received a five-star rating from Bauer Financial, widely considered the nation's bank rating service, and it was recognized as one of the strongest banks in Florida by TheStreet.com.

More than 30 of USCB's employees are graduates of FIU with almost the same amount of employees currently attending.

"We recognize the importance of FIU because many of our employees are part of the Golden Panther community," Hernández said. "As a local institution, it's only fitting that U.S. Century Bank support the university and its students in an effort to further elevate FIU to even higher status among state universities."

Golden Panthers hold prominent positions throughout the institution, including Hernández, who received his bachelor's degree with the first graduating class in FIU's history.

"As an alumnus of FIU, I am so pleased U.S. Century Bank is now a part of this prominent university," he added. "I think back to when I was walking through the campus and never envisioned what it has become today."

The 6,000-seat arena, built in 1986, officially became the U.S. Century Bank Arena in January at a ceremony attended by Hernández, Garcia, FIU President Modesto A. Maidique and U.S. Century Bank Chairman of the Board Ramon Rasco.

"We will use the donation to help us fund the necessary resources to make sure our student-athletes succeed in the classroom and in the field of competition," Garcia said.

This gift is the latest in a long partnership between FIU and USCB. In 2006, the bank donated \$5,000 to the Honors College for alumni initiatives and funded two \$1,000 scholarships for students. Ruth Jimenez, the bank's Brickell branch manager, is the chair of the Honors College Community Advisory Board, and this year, USCB qualified to be inducted as a permanent member of FIU's Torch Society, which recognizes the university's most generous contributors. ■

Very Important Panthers **v.i.p.**

VIP: Elsa Murano '81

Profession: I am the president of Texas A&M University.

FIU degree: Biological Sciences

FIU affiliations: Lifetime Member, FIU Alumni Association

What are your fondest memories of FIU?

Going to lunch with other students and two of our biology professors with whom we did research part-time. We used to go to the cafeteria in Primera Casa, get a bowl of chili and discuss a variety of topics. I learned a lot and felt privileged to be included in these discussions as an equal. Tutoring students in biochemistry and realizing I was a better teacher than the professor who taught that class, since all my students improved their grades, much to the professor's chagrin. Getting a snack with my then-boyfriend, now-husband of 23 years, Dr. Peter Murano, at the Rathskeller. My first quarter (before there were semesters), I was in three of Pete's classes. We became good friends and then he asked me out. The rest, as they say, is history. I not only owe FIU a great education, it was the place where I met my soul mate.

What advice would you offer your fellow Golden Panthers?

I would encourage current students and alumni alike to get out of our comfort zones. By doing this, we are forced to learn, and experience new ideas, different places and interesting people.

In what ways have you been involved with FIU and why is it important to be involved with the Alumni Association?

I must admit I haven't always been involved with the Alumni Association. A combination of a busy career and living outside of the state contributed to that benign neglect. However, now that I am president of a university, I certainly appreciate and know the importance of staying involved with your alma mater and in supporting it as much as one can. Alumni are the ambassadors for the university. They are the network that helps mentor new graduates and the loyal supporters who can help new programs and initiatives that ensure continual growth. I plan to get involved as an FIU alumna, and would encourage all alumni to join me in this resolution.

What is your proudest accomplishment?

The education of young minds and the mentoring of young people so they can fulfill their potential and be the leaders of tomorrow that this world so desperately needs. Every so often I get an e-mail or a letter from someone who was my student, which blows me away. They are like my children. Their successes are my successes. In the end, we are here to help one another. Whatever part I have played in helping others succeed in life has to be my proudest accomplishment. ■



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