SOCIAL WORK

Graduate student overcomes drugs and homelessness

MELISSA CACERES
News Director

There were many times in his life that Aaron Alvin wishes he could turn back the clock. Instead, he was brought to Miami and lay in a place close to home.

There he found his family again.

But he also found more drugs.

It wasn’t long before Alvin was arrested for drug possession, grand theft auto and domestic violence.

He became a regular sight for the Miami judges, as Alvin’s criminal record grew longer and crimes became more severe.

Until a judge gave him one more chance to enter a drug rehabilitation center, Alvin finally decided, after 12 years living in the streets, that he didn’t want to die. Instead, he was brought back to life.

“I’ve learned now that I’m a certified addiction counselor, that the only way to stay clean, is to do it for yourself,” said Alvin. “All the other times I was in treatment it was for my job, my mom or my wife. Not until my life had gotten to the lowest bottom was I able to decide that Aaron needs to help Aaron.”

This fall, Alvin will be graduating with a Master’s degree in social work from FIU’s Robert Stempel College of Public Health and Social Work.

He currently holds a 3.73 GPA and a bachelor’s degree in the same field from the University.

For the man who was once struggling with drug and alcohol addiction, Alvin, in his forties at the time, chose to take on a different kind of challenge—college.

“Being as old as I was, I didn’t think that anyone [in class] was going to accept me,” said Alvin, who is now graduating at the age of 50. “But they did. I had some classmates who really stood by me. We helped each other get through it all.”

His area of study was chosen because of the Alvin’s desire to become the person who can help others who struggle with addictions.

He hopes that, what was once the vice that could have destroyed him, will now provide certain knowledge and empathy that few social workers have.

“One of my proudest moments was walking across the stage as a drill sergeant and hearing my son say ‘that’s my dad,’” he said.

Today, Alvin, who has since remarried and is working as a therapist at Camillus House, will be on another stage, this time to receive his college diploma.

“I know can’t make up for many things but I can start catching up,” he said. “I want to show my kids that if life’s struggles ever meet them, they can come out of it too.”

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Ashley McClain, senior outfielder and pitcher for the Panthers, said that Florida International University is not known as a softball school.

“But over the years it’s been noticed more,” she added quickly.

Though McClain may not want to admit it, it is no secret that she has been the key factor that has contributed to the success of the program over the past few years.

In 2007 and 2008, the two years prior to McClain joining the squad, FIU had a 38-45 record. Though the 2008 season was shortened, those two years still constituted a losing record.

In the three years since her arrival, the team has compiled a 99-77 record, punctuated by the 37-21 record in 2010.

That same year, Ashley McClain became a dominant force in the Sun Belt Conference, tearing the cover off any ball pitched to her. Posting team-high marks of 71 hits, 56 RBIs, 17 doubles, 12 home runs, three triples and 130 total bases.

McClain earned FIU’s first ever Sun Belt Conference Player of the Year award for softball in 2010. She also put together a season-high 14-game hitting streak, third best in FIU history. In 2011, the senior had the lowest ERA with a 2.65 mark, exemplifying why she is a double threat.

“I wasn’t expecting to achieve what I have been achieving these past few years. I thought I was just going to come in, play four years, and be done,” said McClain. “I shocked myself, and to this day I still can’t believe I’ve done half the things I did.”

Coming to FIU was a huge transition for the star player. Hailing from Brandon, Fla., a census-designated place with just over 100,000 residents, McClain relied heavily on her family for support.

McClain, page 2

SPOTLIGHT ON

Student preps for new role as graduate

ESRA ERDOGAN
Lifel Editor

“My dream role is to play the bad guy,” said Gustavo Dapiaggi, who is graduating with a BA in Theatre. Covered in tattoos and dressed to the nines, Dapiaggi looks like he fits the part.

“I know can’t make up for many things but I can start catching up,” he said. “I want to show my kids that if life’s struggles ever meet them, they can come out of it too.”

Ashley McClain will graduate with a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice. She won FIU’s first Sun Belt Conference Player of the Year award for softball.

“Since I was a little kid my passion was to be different characters. My mom [used to] tell me that I would go to school dressed as Zorro or Superman,” said Dapiaggi.

Acting was not always the dream that Dapiaggi’s family envisioned for him. His parents had always urged him to become a doctor or a lawyer.

“The funny thing is that my dad was not a doctor or a lawyer, he was a TV host and my mom was a model. They knew how hard this profession is and they didn’t want that for me.”

Although Dapiaggi’s interests are varied – he is passionate about soccer, writing and music — his interest in acting never faded after childhood.

“What inspired me the most was [while] I was in high school I did research for Eviota. At the time they were filming the movie in Argentina and I got really curious about the whole industry,” said Dapiaggi.

After high school Dapiaggi earned a degree in business at an Argentinian university in order to have something to fall back on.

Although his family warned him of the difficulties of a career in the arts and entertainment industries, Dapiaggi moved to Argentina and into the acting world.

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THEATRE, page 2

COMING UP | Spring 2012

The Beacon will return to the stands on January 9. For updates on University news and sports over the break, visit fiusm.com.

ONLINE | www.fiusm.com

Gustavo Dapiaggi sat down with FIU Student Media for a video interview, go to fiusm.com for the footage.

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whether the schedule outlined in the proposed legislation for the next five years there are too many questions about whether mega-casinos could yield as much as $456 million over the next five years. Economists have been struggling to figure out how much state and local tax dollars would go up if the bill passed. As a panel meeting Friday, officials decided that while mega-casinos could yield as much as $456 million over the next five years, there are too many questions about whether the schedule outlined in the proposed legislation could actually be met.

**World**

Flow of money from US to Somalia faces disruption

Ten thousands of Somalis living in Minnesota might be forced to find another way to send money to relatives in their homeland after a bank that handles the majority of the community’s wire transfers said it was halting the service amid fears some funds could go to terrorists.

Sunrise Community Banks plans to close its accounts with several Somali money transfer businesses after determining it could be at risk of violating government rules intended to clamp down on terrorist financing. With the money out in Sunrise, many money transfer businesses known as hawallas signaled they would close Friday or next week because they can’t execute transactions on their own.

**Theatre, page 1**

Dapiaggi: being on stage a ‘privilege’

The University’s Theatre Department

Dapiaggi’s education at the University has helped him grow immensely as an actor.

“The most remarkable lesson I learned was in Acting 3. I learned to listen to another actor and live in the moment. That totally changed acting for me completely because [I realized] that acting is not just memorizing your lines or waiting for the cue to say your line. You must listen to the other person and live in the moment and react as if that moment is real even though you rehearsed it millions of times,” said Dapiaggi.

For the past three years, Dapiaggi has participated in many school productions. In the department, each student is given an assignment to prepare the show for the audience.

Dapiaggi has helped with everything from lighting to costumes.

Dapiaggi and other students in the department help design the stage, paint the stage, work as lighting designers. The good thing about our department is that you get to know everyone. The trick is you can’t be afraid of making mistakes. The more mistakes you make, the more you learn.

The most wonderful thing about theatre is telling a story. And you need these elements to make the audience think and believe that the story is real,” said Dapiaggi.

Now that Dapiaggi has earned his degree, he plans on going to auditions and castings in order to make a living out of his passion.

“My acting teacher Phillip Church said you will always be afraid when you go to an audition, it’s part of being an actor. Your feelings and your emotions are going to affect you at that moment and you need to control them and get the best of them,” said Dapiaggi. Dapiaggi does fear rejection while searching for a job like other graduates, but his aspirations are humble for someone who is aiming to be in the spotlight.

“arary is to be able to live doing this and support my family and be happy. I will be the happiest person in the world to be a part of a theatre company and be able to support my family and that’s it. I will live my life like that and I will be complete. If I get the chance to be Brad Pitt, I wouldn’t say no,” said Dapiaggi.

**Education**

Grad plans to play in 2012

**McClain, page 1**

“Without them I probably would not be here,” she said. “They definitely played a role in keeping me sane.”

Besides the fact that her new school’s training program was about half the size of the one back home, McClain had to deal with the frenetic lifestyle of being both a full-time college student and an athlete. She reminisced on stories of her freshman years where she would wash out a class, have only 30 minutes to prepare for practice, wear herself out and wake up at dawn the next day for conditioning. All the while, she still had papers piling up.

Easy to say, the grueling lesson she learned came in the form of two words: time management. What is her advice to future student-athletes?

“Make sure you manage your time from the very beginning. Don’t come in thinking you can do your homework later,” said McClain sternly. “Do your homework now and practice after. At the end of the day, your education matters, not your sport.”

McClain is studying criminal justice and plans to pursue her master’s program and be a graduate assistant. Though she’s graduating in December, her softball career at FIU is still not done. She plans to play during the 2012 season with one objective in mind: become Sun Belt champions. “I will make that my personal goal. Every year we come so close but we can’t get it,” said McClain. “We know what we need to do and we’ve set that bar.”

Even after the conclusion of next season, McClain will refuse to relinquish softball from her life. She hopes to join National Pro Fastpitch in the summer, the only professional women’s softball league in the country. “I don’t think I can hang up the cleats yet,” said McClain with a smile.
CONGRATULATIONS!

Fall 2011 Commencement Candidates

College of Architecture and The Arts

Bachelor of Arts in Architecture

Jennifer L. Almonaco
Audrey Marie Cintra
Laura Marie Ferreira
Lissette E. Gonzalez
Eduardo Huergo
Rolie Marcut
Ana Carolina Martinez
Enrica Maria Melchor
Christopher Stephen Newcomb
Juan G. Ramos
Paula Romeo
Jonathan Thole
Marcello Usbeck

Bachelor of Arts in Art

Andrea Alvarez
Reina Alivio
Sai Mi Bai
Ashlie Marie Briggs
Alyssa Ann De Sanctis
Michael Joseph Finelli
Maria Victoria Franco
Andrea Gonzalez
Tiffany Yuann Jen
Whitney Joseph
Leigh A. Kidd
Aimee South King
Monica Lorena Mesa
Crystal Angelica Parra
Roger Stephen Roth
Maria Alejandra Sanchez
Claudia Mariana Vera
Christi Carol Williams

Bachelor of Arts in Art History

Johanna Caruso Saad
Madiana Andre Echavarria
Erika Galan
Melanie Gomez
Eleanor Reid Hinshelwood
Jorge Miguel Oroz

Bachelor of Arts in Music

Eva Reyes Cuerno

Bachelor of Arts in Music Architecture

Diego A. Rodriguez
Nancy Elizabeth Tavron
Lauren M. Webb-Harris

Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre

Laine Michelle Bryan
Scott Richard Hinz
Michael Adam Mena
Paul Ari Perez
Giovanni Velazquez

Bachelor of Landscape Architecture

Christopher A. Garcia

Bachelor of Music

Jessica I. Amores
Ivette Fernandez
Iran Alberto Garcia
Eric Gonzalez
Maya Krystal Minnis

Bachelor of Music in Jazz

Jesus Arce
Jonathan Elijah Parker
Fray A. Peralta

Bachelor of Music in Vocal

Janine M. Hudgens
Saeed Ibrahim
Brian A. James

Bachelor of Music in Composition

Juliana Madrinarin
Cristina Marin
Ryan Wellington McKinney

Bachelor of Music in Theory

Glenn Merrill Merfield
Alon Molina
Flavia M. Morrow
Jibril Musa
Monclaud Nestor

Bachelor of Music in Performance

Olusegan O. Ogunbadejo
Alon Orbach
Joel David Ortega
Joseph R. Ortega

Bachelor of Music in Education

Mario N. Patterson
Kenny Perez
Cecilia D. Nies

Bachelor of Music in Composition

Kevin Banogon

Bachelor of Music in Jazz

John C. Cogollo
Arion M. Leos
Linday Reyes Negrin

Bachelor of Music in Vocal

Erik M. Cmristian

Bachelor of Music in Jazz Improvisation

Luis Wilson

Bachelor of Music in Composition and Theory

Carol Wang

Bachelor of Music in Composition and Performance

Jeremy Allen

Bachelor of Music in Theory and Composition

Kris Portugal

Bachelor of Music in Performance and Composition

Luz P. Rueda

Bachelor of Music in Education

Eduardo Huergo

Bachelor of Music in Composition

Luis Grene

Bachelor of Music in Performance and Composition

Carla Dolce

Bachelor of Music in Composition and Performance

Andrew John De La Rosa

Bachelor of Music in Performance and Theory

Natalie Michelle Ander

Bachelor of Music in Composition and Performance

Nathaniel James Dorgan

Bachelor of Music in Performance and Composition

Deborah A. Pacheco
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