Anna Ordonio, a UT Martin freshman equestrian athlete from Frederick, Maryland, is nibbled by Luigi the horse during an equestrian competition against South Dakota State at the Ned McWherter Agricultural Pavilion. During a break in competition, Ordonio hugged Luigi’s muzzle and was surprised when he returned the affection by latching on to her shirt with his teeth.
IN THIS ISSUE

To explore the wonderful wild world is to find adventure—whether close to home or far away. It can be found in the exotics brought close and the unseen brought home.

In this issue, we tell the stories of an alumnus who found himself caring for elephants in Tennessee and researchers who travel far to bring microbes back to Tennessee to uncover their mysteries in our rapidly changing world. There is the story of an alumna hooked on the allure of what moves in the deeps and one about an organization that has helped animals a little less wild.

In fact, our quotidian worlds and humdrum lives intersect with the wild in sometimes surprising ways. One of our researchers seeks drugs to help when we are undone by mosquito-borne illnesses or by COVID-19. We also take a look back at a time when an orangutan came to college.

We hope you enjoy this issue that gives a quick look at when the wild moves among us.

As always, we look forward to hearing from you regarding each issue. You may send a letter to the editor at alumnus@tennessee.edu or reach out to us on social media. We can be found on Twitter @TNAlumnus, Facebook at Tennessee Alumnus and Instagram @tennesseealumnus.

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ON THE COVER
Flora, an African elephant, enjoys a bamboo snack at The Elephant Sanctuary in Hohenwald.
PHOTO BY RAFFE LAZARIAN
A message from the president

Someone asked, “Well, with the coronavirus disrupting our campuses, making this the ‘greatest decade in the history of the University of Tennessee’ is going to be hard, isn’t it?”

While this is definitely an epic challenge for us, it is precisely why this will be the greatest decade. We will all rise up in the face of adversity, rally together and, ultimately, succeed. These are the times that will define our decade and define each of us forever. Greatness isn’t achieved when times are easy but when times are hard. It is always achieved by the greatness of a team, and we have a great team.

Our top priority is always to keep our students, faculty and staff safe and healthy, and we are determined to give our students the support they need to complete their classes and their degrees. From Memphis and Martin to Chattanooga and Knoxville and everywhere in between, our OneUT team has rallied together. As a result of this adversity, we will be stronger and more resilient in the future, as individuals and as a university system.

Also, I’d like to say how thankful I am to the UT Board of Trustees and to all those who have shared their confidence and support for me to continue as the 26th president of the University of Tennessee for up to five more years. It is an honor and a privilege to serve our great state, my alma mater and to serve with this great team. Together, we will make this the greatest decade in the history of the University of Tennessee.

Randy Boyd, Knoxville ’79
Dear Editor,
I am delighted to see the article about Patten Chapel in the fall 2019 issue of the Tennessee Alumnus. My grandfather, Wilson A. Gosnell, was the architect. He worked for the W.T. Downing architectural firm.

Janet Keese Davies
Chattanooga ’56

(The following refers to a letter in the winter 2020 Tennessee Alumnus suggesting changing the magazine’s name to Tennessee Alumni.)

Dear Editor,
With three years of conscious Latin and two daughters, I must admit I never saw this, and it makes all the sense to change it without any comment. It never hurts to have sharp professors looking over our shoulders.

Jerald Duncan
Health Science Center ’65

Dear Editor,
The new look of the magazine is very nice. The photo “The Scene” was spectacular. Everything in the issue was well done.

Cliff Lynch
Knoxville ’58

Dear Editor,
After rereading the Tennessee Alumnus winter 2020 and Alison Manning’s touching article, I was reminded of a spring day in 1969 at UT-Martin. Several of us were having a late Saturday breakfast and second/third cup of coffee, and I was bemoaning the fact that I was spending my out-of-class time tutoring classmates in math and engineering science. I suggested that someone had to go into the high schools and do a better job of teaching math and science. I was told that someone might as well be me.

Monday morning, I changed my major to secondary education with endorsements in math and physical science. I graduated in 1971 and have been in the classroom ever since. Some days were one-on-one tutoring in the hospital/homebound department of the local public system, and others were in lecture halls with 230 at Georgia Tech.

I’m currently in my fourth year at a small private Christian school that had trouble finding a chemistry/physics teacher. It’s the kids each day who remind me why that third cup of coffee led me to them.

Sincerely,
George M. McKelvy
Martin ’71

CORRECTIONS:
In the winter 2020 issue, the cutline on page 6 should have read: Karen Holst, Pond Gap Elementary coordinator; Christopher Almanza, former Pond Gap Elementary student; and Bob Kronick, UT Knoxville professor of educational psychology and counseling, believe in the power of community schools.

On page 44, the photo caption should have read: 4] From left, Ben Scott, Riddell Scott (HSC ’02), Nishel Patel (HSC ’11) and T.J. Patel, HSC department of dermatology chair, attend the UTHSC department of dermatology weekend.

On page 47, the photo caption should have read: 17] Attending the UTHSC College of Medicine Alumni and Friends Reception are, from left, Errol Thomas (HSC ’00); LaTonya Washington (HSC ’04); Scott Strome, UTHSC College of Medicine executive dean; Corbi Milligan (HSC ’00, Knoxville ’13); Jessica Minor-Ruffin (HSC ’00); and Bianca Sweeten (HSC ’97).

We regret the errors.

INSTAGRAM
@26connie: “She is such a role model. Our school is so fortunate to have her!”

TWITTER
Corrie Livesay: “I have 3 daughters that have been blessed to have had Ms. Manning as their teacher! So very thankful for all she does.”

Hayli Victoria: “@manning4u you will always be an inspiration to us”

Bre Hubb: “This woman is probably one of my very favorite people in the world”

Loren Grace: “My two worlds collide!!! I love the mission and work of @TNAAlumnus, and I love Ms. Manning and the impact she made on mine and so many others’ lives. Don’t mind me, I will just be dabbing the tears in my eyes outside HSS!!”

SELECTED COMMENTS from social media regarding “Remembering Why,” a story by Alison Manning in the winter 2020 issue about why she has remained in the teaching profession for 14 years.

FACEBOOK
Brett Chumley: “There’s no way to put into words how amazing she is. No doubt her students will be on the silver screen.”
The Great Pause

UT Addresses COVID-19

BY JENNIFER SICKING

W

We’re in the waiting now as I write this. This pause in our lives since COVID-19 arrived in the United States and the World Health Organization declared it a pandemic. By the time you hold this magazine in your hands, hopefully, our lives will have begun playing anew.

In mid-March, the University of Tennessee moved classes online for the final six weeks of the spring semester and postponed graduations. The last time university life came to such a halt was when classes were suspended from spring 1862 to fall 1865 due to the Civil War, according to Alesha Shumar, UT Knoxville archivist and associate professor.

Time will tell what the COVID-19 outcome will be. The last major pandemic was the 1918-1919 influenza when one-third of the entire global population became infected over 18 months. An estimated 50 million people died, giving it a mortality rate of almost 10 percent.

“Pandemics are devastating,” says Susan Lawrence, a UT Knoxville professor who is an expert in medical history. “Lots of people die, economies are disrupted, lives upended. In the developed world, we are not used to suffering from any infectious diseases, other than colds and seasonal flus or slow-moving ones, like HIV/AIDS.”

While society has changed greatly from 100 years ago, epidemiologists and public health officials learn from every epidemic and use that cumulative knowledge in the next epidemic.

“What we see the Centers for Disease Control and World Health Organization doing now is the cumulative effect of the historical past,” Lawrence says.

We must learn to trust the experts, she says.

UT also responded to the crisis by searching for cures, 3-D printing masks for health-care workers and making hand sanitizer.

“This adversity has brought out the best in us. Resolve. Determination. Passion. Caring for one another. I have never been more proud of our students, our faculty, our staff, our campus leaders and our alumni than I am right now,” UT President Randy Boyd wrote in an email. “These are the days that will define us, that will define greatness.”

Imagining a Different Future

A Student Reflects on Changes Brought by COVID-19

BY EMMIE DICKMAN

While we all adjusted to a new way of living, learning and working due to COVID-19, I struggled.

As a senior, I knew I would be saying goodbye, just not this soon. I will not sit in a physical classroom as an undergraduate again. I did not get to say goodbye to some of my friends, and I did not walk across a graduation stage in May.

Yet, through this emotional time, I can do nothing but admire the staff and faculty who had to make these tough decisions to protect our campus. The university staff has remained transparent and supportive, which is all we can ask for as students.

Just as adjusting to online classes was difficult, we also had to adjust to a very different economy that mere weeks before looked strong. Now, graduation also brought job uncertainty.

Even though the university was not preparing us for an unforeseen pandemic the last three and half years, our professors were preparing us to take on the unknown world post-graduation with an outstanding education. Like all of the graduates who have come before us, the university has prepared us for whatever is to come after receiving our diplomas, even if there is no symbolic ceremony.

While I don’t know what life looks like when you receive this magazine, I know that we, as students, as faculty, as alumni, are resilient and are equipped for whatever comes.
A Matter of When

UTHSC Researcher Takes on Viruses, Including COVID-19

BY PEGGY REISSER

It’s 105 degrees in June in the jungle of Paraguay, and Colleen Jonsson and her students are hunting a killer. They’re sweating under heavy biosafety gear and working in a makeshift lab set up on the porch of a house owned by the World Wildlife Federation.

Their elusive prey is the hantavirus, a rodent-borne disease that has killed thousands across the globe. The scientists are trying to understand hantavirus at its molecular level, how it acts and reacts, how it replicates and spreads, and what molecules or combination of molecules can be used to stop it. It is an ongoing quest.

But, this year, Jonsson and her team faced head-on a more immediate and, possibly even more deadly, threat at home. A Ph.D. virologist and professor in the department of microbiology, immunology and biochemistry at the UT Health Science Center, Jonsson set her sights set on the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), which circled the globe in a matter of months.

As the director of the UTHSC Regional Biocontainment Laboratory, one of 11 federally funded labs authorized to study deadly pathogens, she is leading a team to find antivirals or drugs that might treat COVID-19.

BUILDING A RESEARCH CAREER

Jonsson originally studied to be a biologist at the University of Missouri in St. Louis, her hometown.

“When I started my research career, I was very interested in plant-pathogen interactions,” she says. “My perspective was that plants had a lot of different pathogens, and they needed to be understood better so we could create better environments to produce plants.”

As an undergraduate, she worked as a technician at Monsanto in St. Louis during the summers.

She studied fungal interaction in graduate school at Purdue University. Then, seeking a different path for asking research questions in her postdoctoral work, she began to look at retroviruses. It was 1990 and during the HIV outbreak in the United States. She sought to understand one of the proteins in that virus and how it worked.

Jonsson was recruited to New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, New Mexico, just as the initial outbreak of the hantavirus occurred in the early 2000s.

“It was a new virus in the United States, and not many people were working on it, and I thought it would be a good direction for my research to take,” she says.

During a five-year period, she often travelled to the highest-level biosafety research labs at the U.S. Army Research Medical Institute of Infectious Diseases at Fort Detrick, Maryland, to do hantavirus research.

She also began periodic fieldwork to track the virus in one of its natural hot spots in the Chaco region of western Paraguay.

“There was an outbreak in Paraguay, and as luck would have it, which is my whole life, I had a student in my lab who was from Paraguay,” she said.

Strictly a lab researcher up to that point, Jonsson and her team members went to that country, conducted workshops and trainings, and met scientists with whom she collaborates on hantavirus research and fieldwork to this day.

“The questions we’ve been working on are simple: Where is the virus, how does the virus maintain itself in nature, and what is it that promotes or accelerates the emergence of the virus to a level that it becomes a public health risk?” Jonsson says.
Essentially, when in Paraguay, they research the virus in its animal hosts in order to understand it better.

“The only way to truly answer those questions is to work in essentially what is a jungle because, in the jungle, we can understand what life is like for the virus in nature.”

**MANY VIRUSES, MANY QUESTIONS**

“They say, with these viruses, it’s not a matter of if they (outbreaks) are going to happen, it’s a matter of when,” Jonsson says. Her life’s work has given her a practical point of view on the viruses that terrify humans. “I’m not Captain Marvel. It’s more of a scientific conundrum that you want to answer.”

Jonsson was recruited to Southern Research, an institute affiliated with the University of Alabama at Birmingham, to grow an antiviral research program in its Level 3 biocontainment facility. There, her research expanded to antiviral drug discovery for Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), influenza, H5N1 (avian influenza), West Nile Virus and alphaviruses. Her lab developed the first high-throughput screening in high containment (a high-volume testing procedure) outside of industry and tested compounds (small molecules) from companies all over the United States for their potential to treat Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

Simply put, these small molecules would be ones that bind with spikes or areas on the individual viruses and block their spread. They are the crux of her lifetime quest.

In 2008, she moved to the University of Louisville to continue her antiviral research and begin the research programs and operations for the newly constructed Regional Biocontainment Laboratory.

“Hopefully, all of our work will eventually translate into a better understanding of how these viruses emerge, but at the same time, we can begin to have a pipeline of small molecules for these particular pathogens,” she said.

**A NEW FOE EMERGES**

Jonsson was recruited to UTHSC in 2017 to direct and raise the research profile of the Regional Biocontainment Laboratory (RBL), a Level 3 biosafety lab among the few commissioned after 9/11 in response to the threat of bioterrorism.

In less than two years, she secured a $21 million National Institutes of Health grant to set up a Center of Excellence in Encephalitic Alphavirus Therapeutics to discover antiviral therapeutics for deadly viruses spread to horses and people by infected mosquitoes. She collaborates with investigators at several universities, and this alphavirus work, as well as her previous work on other viruses, including SARS CoV (the SARS outbreak of 2003), has positioned her to lead her team at UTHSC to face COVID-19.

The laboratory received live samples of COVID-19 in late February. Jonsson and her team began growing the samples so they would have enough to test against compounds (small molecules) that could prove to be treatments.

Jeremy Smith, professor at UT-Knoxville and director of the UT/Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL) Center for Molecular Biophysics, called Jonsson to collaborate on testing molecules identified by the supercomputer at ORNL as possible candidates to work against the virus. The UTHSC team is also testing candidates for industry. Basically, the virus is placed in tiny wells of a plastic tray, the small molecule candidates are added and the results analyzed. With high-throughput screening, many candidates can be tested rapidly.

“She is a world-class virologist with lots of experience working with viruses similar to SARS-CoV-2,” Smith says as to why he wanted to work with Jonsson. He says he felt his computations would help her decide which compounds to test as possible therapeutics for the virus and to analyze her results.

Asked what she wants people to know about this work, Jonsson again is matter of fact. “When coronavirus breaks out, there are people in Memphis working on understanding it and working hard to develop a therapeutic to treat it,” she says.

The immediate outbreak must be addressed, but Jonsson knows there will be others. That’s what these viruses do: Emerge, go dormant and then return. She continues to keep her eye on the hantavirus, which popped up again recently in Argentina. She considers it, for now, the one that got away, she says.

“We should be doing outbreak response all the time,” Jonsson says. “We forget and people move on to the next thing, so there will be always be another something. But what that will be, no one can predict. Nobody has control over emerging infectious diseases.”
All Creatures Great

UT Alumnus Cares for Them All

BY JENNIFER SICKING | PHOTOS BY RAFFE LAZARIAN

Ronnie, left, and Debbie, right, explore the Q habitat with their dusting of wood shavings.
and Small
As Steven Scott, Knoxville ’81, walked across the gravel, his feet crunched at every step.

“Who’s making more noise? Me or her?” he says, smiling while gesturing with his thumb over his shoulder at the African elephant, Flora, who strode across the gravel in her enclosure to grab the pear tree branch just thrown over the fence. She made as much noise as the cat that was simultaneously sneaking around the elephant barn.

Since Scott, known as “Doc,” began tending to his clients at The Elephant Sanctuary, he’s learned more than just how silently they can move.

“Dr. Scott has dedicated himself to improving the lives of our elephants—making himself available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. His skill, knowledge, experience and gentle nature has guided elephant care at the sanctuary for 25 years,” says Janice Zeitlin, sanctuary CEO.

Growing up in Maury County, Tennessee, Scott had a hero—local vet D.C. George, who tended the dairy cattle and later the shorthorn beef cattle on the Scott family farm.

“He was in his 50s or 60s, and he was still happy,” Scott remembers.

With George as an example and a love of animals in his soul, Scott and a friend dreamed of becoming veterinarians when they grew up. But Scott had one hesitation.

“I thought you had to be an absolute genius to be a vet,” he says.

After attending Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, Tennessee, where he met his wife, Connie, Scott enrolled at UT Knoxville and met some of the people who enrolled in the vet school.

“I didn’t know if I was smarter, but I knew I could work harder,” he says.

That philosophy worked, and he graduated from UT Knoxville in 1981. He and Connie moved to Maury County, and Scott began treating animals in Columbia. In 1984, Scott opened a clinic in nearby Hohenwald. For 25 years, he, along with a vet in Hickman County and another in Wayne County, cared for animals large and small in an area the size of Rhode Island. Since then, he’s hired additional
veterinarians at his practices in Hohenwald and Linden. Until 1995, the bulk of his clients were cows, horses, cats and dogs. The most exotic animals he tended would either be a herd of bison or a herd of elk. “The elk,” he says with a laugh, “would kill you and not even feel bad about it.”

Then, in 1995, a client arrived in his clinic. She asked him to be the vet for an elephant sanctuary she was establishing there in the tail of the Central Basin Ridge, which caused the area’s early Swiss settlers to name the fledgling town Hohenwald or “High Forest” in German.

“I didn’t know if I was smarter, but I knew I could work harder,” he says.

While mastodons once roamed east of the Mississippi River and mammoths wandered the grasslands of the American West, they disappeared during the great die-off that removed other megafauna animals such as the cave bear and saber-toothed cat. The first elephant—a 2-year-old female—was brought to the United States in 1796. Her owners quickly realized that people would turn over their coins to see the animal of books and legends. More people brought more elephants, which then led to elephants traveling with circuses and standing in zoos.

In 1995, the Elephant Sanctuary opened as a home for old, sick or abused pachyderms and had a goal to let the elephants live out their lives as free as possible. It is one of two sanctuaries accredited by the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries for elephants in the United States. It is the only sanctuary accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. Now grown into 2,700 acres that are crossed by streams and dotted with ponds and a 25-acre lake, the sanctuary is currently home to 11 elephants. Divided into areas designated as Asia (for Asian elephants), Africa (for African elephants) and Q (for those in quarantine), the elephants knock down trees, dig wallows and connect with other elephants in their enclosures. Video cameras mounted throughout the sanctuary—which is closed to visitors—allow the public to watch the elephants munch their way through the high forest.

Scott’s first elephant patient was the sanctuary’s first resident, Tarra, when she developed hemorrhoids.

“There are some species-specific things, but when you do a lot of animals, there’s a lot of knowledge that transfers,” he says. “Elephants process their food a lot like horses and rabbits.”

Through research and reaching out to experts, the wiry Scott has developed expertise in caring for the animals.

“There’s a saying that you want to be on the cutting edge in medicine,” he says. “Well, we’ve been on the bleeding edge.”

Around the time the sanctuary started, tuberculosis (TB) was being diagnosed in elephants.

“Elephants have been domesticated longer than cattle,”
Scott says, “Mahouts live with them, real close to them, and share germs. Elephants get it from humans and give it back.”

All of the elephants who have come to the sanctuary have tested positive for the bacterial disease. Upon arrival at the sanctuary, elephants live in the Q quarters. With a positive TB test, they receive a 90-day regimen of three drugs. All of the elephants have a trunk wash once a year to test for the disease. Since the wash isn’t the most reliable method, blood tests also are conducted on the elephants. X-ray machines are not large enough to X-ray the elephants’ lungs to look for the disease.

From years of standing on concrete, many of the elephants have arthritis in their legs, for which they receive laser treatments. They also are prone to developing abscesses in their feet.

“Think about an abscessed tooth and how it hurts all the time,” Scott says.

Abscesses also can move into the elephant joints. Caretakers keep a close watch on the elephants’ feet, which are formed mostly of soft tissue. Scott uses a thermal camera to track blood flow on the elephants to see if an area is inflamed.

“It’s a non-invasive way to show if there’s a hot spot on their bodies,” he says.

Caretakers use protected contact to conduct checkups on their charges. Instead of exerting dominance as in free contact, with protected contact a barrier remains between humans and elephants, and the elephants can walk away if they choose. When the elephants lift a foot or something else that the caretaker requests, they are rewarded with treats such as fresh fruit and vegetables.

The elephants also let their caretakers know that the treatments work. They come into the barn and wait for their laser treatments. One Asian elephant, Shirley, would return to the barn when the epoxy mesh, which protected her abscessed foot from mud and rocks, came off. She would lift her foot to show caretakers that the epoxy was missing.

“I’ve gained more respect for them,” Scott says of his charges. “Over the years, I’ve learned how intelligent they are and how they’ve been treated.”

In 1992, Scott and his wife adopted a daughter, Alina, from Romania to join their two sons, Nathaniel and Andrew.

“I thought, ‘I can’t change the world, but I can change the world for this girl,’” he says. “She ended up changing our world and works with me a lot.”

That same philosophy factors into his care for the elephants. For the elephants that arrive at the sanctuary, he provides the best care he can to help change their world.

“I’m a boots-on-the-ground kind of guy,” he says.

At the sanctuary, the elephants have freedom to roam across the acres, enjoying the high forest. But it takes them time to learn they have that freedom. They wait for caretakers to tell them what to do and where to go. The caretakers refuse. Slowly they learn, often with the guidance from other elephants, to take quiet steps down the trails, through the woods and to splash into ponds.

“At the clinic, we have a plaque that says, ‘Dogs have masters. Cats have staff.’ It’s nice to see the elephants becoming cats,” Scott says.

Looking back on his career that started as a boyhood dream and included some patients he never thought possible, Scott calls it fulfilling.

“I can’t imagine doing anything else,” he says. “My idea of heaven is doing this forever.”
The Elephant Sanctuary While the sanctuary is closed to visitors, it has opened a visitors’ center in downtown Hohenwald. There visitors can learn about its residents, elephant conservation efforts in Asia and Africa and more through interactive multi-media exhibits. The center opened in 2019 and had 2,500 visitors. It hopes to grow that number to 5,000 in 2020.

There’s also an educational aspect to the sanctuary. In 2019, the sanctuary’s distance-learning initiative presented 476 online programs to 14,000 students in 44 states, five Canadian provinces and five countries outside of North America.

To learn more about the sanctuary or to view the elephants on the elecam, visit: www.elephants.com.
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Hooked

UT Martin Alumna Studies Shortfin Makos

By Erin Chesnut | Photos Courtesy of Center for Sportfish Science and Conservation
Adrift for seven days. One hundred miles from shore. Followed by a shark.

Not an ideal scenario for most people, but for Kesley Gibson (Martin ’12), it was a dream come true.

Gibson, originally from Martin, is now a postdoctoral research associate in the Center for Sportfish Science and Conservation at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi’s Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies.

“I am an artificial reef ecologist with a specialty in sharks,” she says. “I study about marine fisheries and how those species use their habitat(s) and what their migration patterns are.”

After earning her bachelor’s degree in biology from UT Martin in 2012, Gibson went on to complete a master’s degree in environmental science from Troy University in Alabama and her doctoral degree at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

“I don’t think I could have picked a better institution than (UT) Martin. It’s a small enough campus that faculty know your name when you walk in and you have a problem, or you want to get experience with undergrad research. That’s doable. You’re not having to compete against thousands to do that. You have that ability to do specialized projects and get that experience,” she says.

Gibson spent many childhood vacations at the beach, and her father, a geology professor, nurtured her love of the ocean and the creatures that live in it. Later, as an undergraduate, she was able to test being a marine biologist through UT Martin’s association with the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory in Ocean Springs, Mississippi.

“I think (UT) Martin has positioned itself and made the right connections to help its students figure out what they want to do and give them the support to get there,” she says.

And “there”—for Gibson—is adrift in the ocean followed by a shark. Her week at sea was part of a research study featured on Discovery Channel’s Shark Week in 2017 during an episode called “The Lost Cage.” While the rest of the team of marine biologists hoped to discover if any

Kesley Gibson tags a 12.5-foot female mako, nicknamed “Martie,” off the Scat Cat boat in 2018.
sharks would follow a drifting artificial habitat connected to their raft, Gibson used the experience to learn more about the habits of the shortfin mako shark.

“This is the shark that you see on Shark Week all the time that is flipping in the air and breaching. It’s one of the fastest sharks in the ocean,” she says. “We were filming for Shark Week when the largest shark I have ever seen was hooked, and she was a shortfin mako. At 11.5 feet, she was estimated to weigh close to 1,000 pounds, and we couldn’t let her go without finding out where she was going. Luck got me hooked on makos, but since then, the excitement and wonder has kept me going.”

The shortfin mako in the North Atlantic has been listed as “overfished and undergoing overfishing,” which means too many have been harvested to sustain the population.

“We’re still pulling out too many. Scientists did the math, and if we stopped and no shortfin mako sharks were caught, we have a 50 percent chance of the population recovering by 2070,” Gibson says.

A doctoral candidate at the time of the Shark Week filming, Gibson’s dissertation focused on movement patterns and habitat use for various species, including the shortfin mako. Now she spends her time tagging mako sharks in the Gulf of Mexico and learning where they go, why they migrate and what they need in an ideal habitat.

“We’re looking at where these sharks are going because, even if we can protect them in U.S. waters, they are traveling through other international jurisdictions. Just because we may have a stricter regulation here, what are they being subjected to there? Why are they leaving here? What are we not providing here? Why do they need to go somewhere else?” she says.

So far Gibson and other researchers have found a potential mating group in the Gulf of Mexico, off the coast of Texas. Some females and smaller male sharks remain in the area, while larger male sharks leave and return year after year.

“We’ve started noticing bite marks down the body of the females that we were catching, which would suggest that the sharks are mating here, which would indicate that this could be an essential fish habitat—something that they need for their species to survive,” she explains. Once Gibson and her fellow researchers can determine what makes a habitat ideal for the shortfin mako, they can work to locate and protect those areas and the fish that frequent them.

Gibson says there are two components to preventing the extinction of the shortfin mako population: first, to conserve the type of environment they need to grow, thrive and multiply, and second, to promote sustainable harvesting of the species.

“We can’t really encourage them to return other than just making sure that we’re maintaining and conserving the habitat that they need. What we can do is try to help protect the individuals that are coming here,” she says. “Right now, shark science is still in its infancy. You think about all the things scientists discover every year, and we still don’t know where sharks go half the time.”

As far as preventing overfishing, Gibson says the United States does not have a commercial fishery for shortfin mako sharks; however, many other countries do. The shortfin mako, among other sharks, are considered a delicacy and are harvested for their fins to make shark-fin soup.

“Here in the United States, shortfin makos are predominately caught as a by-catch in the tuna fishery or the swordfish fishery, but because they are so highly prized, they are retained once they are on the longlines. Recreationally they are targeted because they are very acrobatic when they jump. You hook them, and they do the flips, and everybody enjoys that fight. Unfortunately, a lot of people do still retain them because they are good to eat.”

However, Gibson hopes that, if she and her fellow marine biologists can advocate for the conservation of additional and similar habitats that support the shortfin makos, the species will be able to thrive once again.

“Ideally, if I had my way, harvest would only be for sharks that were dead on haul-back—so, sharks that didn’t survive the fishing process. It would be a catch-and-release fishery like the white shark fishery is, at least until we can get the population stable and flourishing,” she says. “I’m all for harvesting, but you should harvest sustainably, and we’re currently not able to do that.”

Until then, Gibson will continue to tag and track sharks in the Gulf with the help of local fishermen and fishing captains who encourage their customers to return caught sharks to the sea.
Photos  Clockwise, top to bottom: Underwater photo of Martie, a mako shark, during tagging; Kesley Gibson shown tagging a mako from the man-overboard ladder with Captain Chad Banks; A 11.5-foot female mako Gibson tagged off the Scat Cat during Shark Week filming in 2017; Gibson tagging a shortfin mako in February 2019 which was named Chancellor Shark after Chancellor John Sharp of the Texas A&M University System; a scalloped hammerhead shark being measured during the tagging process in 2017 off the Scat Cat.

Inset, left: Gibson diving during the filming of the 2017 Shark Week episode “The Lost Cage.” PHOTO CREDIT: DEVON MASSYN
TO THE EXTREME

UT Knoxville Scientists Seek Answers Across the Globe

BY WHITNEY HEINS | PHOTOS COURTESY OF RESEARCHERS

HELIÇOPTERS. GIANT DRILLS. GUNS. RADIOACTIVE ISOTOPES.

These might sound like the props needed for Hollywood’s next big blockbuster. But, no. They’re what’s needed for UT Knoxville research projects being conducted in extreme environments around the world.

UT scientists are spending months of their lives in bleak conditions, completely off the grid, all in the name of science. Their groundbreaking research is adding pieces to the intricate puzzle that predicts the effects of climate change on the planet. And the pieces are hidden under ground and ice in the form of tiny microscopic organisms.

Take the work of Jill Mikucki, associate professor of microbiology. Mikucki has been deployed to Antarctica 13 times, a place where temperatures average well below zero year-round. Her work requires cargo planes, helicopters and ATVs to reach the remote field sites. In blowing, icy winds, she must construct canvas tents, in which she’ll live for months at a time.

Mikucki’s research sheds light on how life can exist in dark, barren places as well as how this life contributes to climate change. In 2013, her work made history by punching through the West Antarctic Ice Sheet with
Karen Lloyd, associate professor of microbiology, at Nordenskiold Glacier in Norway.

a giant custom hot-water drill and retrieving the first evidence of microbial life from Subglacial Lake Whillans. Mikucki and her team uncovered how microorganisms isolated from the atmosphere for thousands of years live and grow in completely dark and cold places—holding implications for the possibility of life on other planets. A year later, Mikucki’s team found life in another bleak place, under Blood Falls, an outflow of saltwater from Antarctica’s Taylor Glacier named for its red color caused by iron-oxide.

Understanding how these microbes manage to live in stark conditions is important for predicting the effects of climate change because the tiny organisms manage to survive by liberating material from the bedrock trapped by ice. When the ice melts, these materials leak into the water, changing the water’s chemistry and affecting the ecosystem.

“It’s important to know what’s under the ice so you can better predict what will happen when you lose the ice,” says Mikucki, adding that the ice caps are 10 percent of the Earth’s terrestrial surface, yet little is known about the life there.
Mikucki does her work alongside students, passing on knowledge and samples for them to do their own work. Alicia Purcell worked in Mikucki’s lab as an undergraduate student, traveled to Antarctica as a master’s student and now runs her own Antarctic field campaign as a doctoral candidate at Northern Arizona University.

“Antarctica is a beautiful and fragile environment where we aim to understand the limits of life and the impacts of global climate change,” says Purcell (Knoxville ’12). “I was lucky to have the opportunity with Dr. Mikucki, and it propelled me to seek future opportunities to continue working there and study how microbes respond to global temperature increases.”

Mikucki’s colleague, Karen Lloyd, associate professor of microbiology, is also trying to uncover the mysteries contained in remote frozen locations. Lloyd’s latest project, funded by a $2.5 million U.S. Department of Energy grant, seeks to understand the carbon-eating activities of microbes in permafrost. Permafrost is ground that remains frozen for at least two years. Her work is located at the Arctic’s Ny Alesund, Svalbard, Norway, which, after 20,000 years of being frozen, is one of the fastest-thawing places on the planet.

“Climate change is not a future scenario. We are watching the polar ice cap melt,” says Lloyd, explaining that they had to move their field season earlier in the year in order to conduct their research because of the region’s steady warming trend.

Lloyd’s work is extremely important as the planet warms: The permafrost acts as a carbon reservoir, safely locking it away—but, as it thaws, this carbon is released, feeding carbon-eating microbes. As these microbes process the carbon, they may emit harmful greenhouse gasses such as carbon dioxide, methane or nitrous oxide—further heating up Earth.

“We are asking the basic questions of what kind of microbes are in the permafrost and what they’re capable of,” says Lloyd.

To find the answer, Lloyd’s team, which includes UT professors Tatiana Vishnivetskaya and Andrew Steen and graduate student Katie Stipes, drill into the permafrost to extract cores, which are cut, preserved and sent back to Tennessee for analysis at UT and partner Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

“I’m excited for the fieldwork with Dr. Lloyd in the Arctic because of the brotherhood that occurs when you’re working day and night to get samples prepared,” says Stipes, who has previously studied in the Arctic twice. “Being there makes you realize that we know such little about the variety in our world that we don’t even need to go to another planet to study something extreme.”

The fieldwork requires that one researcher is constantly standing watch for polar bears.

“We carry a loaded gun, sleep in houses instead of tents and always have someone on watch,” says Lloyd, who adds they’re trained in how to read polar bear behavior to know when their lives are in danger and how to avoid hurting the bears unnecessarily.

After the samples arrive back in Tennessee, the
scientists analyze what kind of microbes are there—with a high possibility that the microbes will be ones researchers never knew existed—and what the carbon molecules turn into after they’re eaten by the tiny organisms.

“It’s important to understand how carbon is flowing through these systems. If the microbes convert all the carbon into carbon dioxide, that would be catastrophic,” explains Lloyd. “This knowledge can tell us the severity of the situation.”

Steven Wilhelm, the Kenneth and Blaire Mossman Professor in the department of microbiology, also studies areas under ice of which not much is known—and these areas are much closer to home. Wilhelm’s work, funded by the U.S. Department of Energy, focuses on identifying and understanding the microbial communities living in the Great Lakes, specifically Lake Erie, in the winter, as well as the role they play in the carbon cycle. In his past Great Lakes research, Wilhelm has travelled on giant ice breakers, ships with big bows that crush ice, to get to his research site to collect samples.

“Think about working in the middle of a frozen lake in minus 30-degree temperatures in 30 mph wind with ice pellets hitting your face. And the ice is thick in some spots and thin in others,” Wilhelm says. “It’s dangerous.”

For spring 2020, Wilhelm doesn’t have to work in these conditions. One reason is it’s been too warm for ice to form on the lake. So that is one aspect he and his team—which includes students and colleagues in Ohio and Canada—will study: which microbes have historically lived under the ice and what takes over as the planet warms. The work holds implications for predicting the effects of climate change as well as what humans eat.

“There are giant fields of phytoplankton called diatoms there which serve as the baseline for the food web, and Lake Erie is home to one of the most valuable freshwater fisheries in the world,” Wilhelm says. “When you start tweaking with the primary producers of the food web, you change the ecosystem quickly.”

In the past, diatoms have dominated under the ice; now they’re distributed throughout the water column. Wilhelm and his collaborators will examine how that changes the makeup of the microorganisms by collecting samples and performing RNA sequencing. Understanding what these tiny organisms are eating and emitting gives scientists the ability to better predict what will happen in the carbon cycle.

“We want to know what winter communities will look like when there is less ice, how they are using carbon dioxide and where that carbon dioxide is going,” says Wilhelm. “The Great Lakes play a large role in regulating the global carbon cycle, so understanding how to protect and preserve this resource is important.”

Elizabeth Herndon, a UT-ORNL joint faculty member in earth and planetary sciences, is putting another piece of the climate change puzzle together by peering not under the ice but into the Arctic soil.

Funded by the National Science Foundation’s Arctic Natural Sciences program, Herndon and her collaborators will head to the Arctic Circle in Alaska during the next three summers to
The work of Steven Wilhelm, the Kenneth and Blaire Mossman Professor in microbiology, takes him on ice breakers in the Great Lakes.

study changes in the levels of nutrients, specifically phosphorus, and how plants and microorganisms respond to those changing levels.

“As the planet warms, environments shift. Some become warmer. Some become drier. These changes impact the microbial communities in the soil,” explains Herndon. “Our project focuses on what’s happening to the availability of nutrients for the microorganisms and plants, and how they respond.”

Underfoot, there is a war of sorts for phosphorus. Plants want it. Microorganisms want it. Minerals hang on to it. As the planet gets hotter, more plants are growing, and microorganisms are becoming more active, increasing the competition for phosphorus. At the same time, iron oxide, commonly known as rust, retains phosphorus. But, as places become wetter or drier, the supply of iron oxide, and thereby phosphorus, is changing, but it’s not known how effectively plants and microbes can compete with iron oxides for phosphorus under these different conditions.

To predict how the supply and demand of the nutrients change as the climate changes, Herndon and her collaborators will implant sensors in the soil to continually measure gas and water levels. They’ll also collect water, soil and plant samples and use chemical and spectroscopy techniques to identify what minerals and nutrients are present.

“Arctic soils store a lot of carbon in organic matter (mostly decomposing dead plants), but as they warm and thaw, they create a positive feedback to climate change because decomposition speeds up and releases more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. It’s a double whammy,” says Herndon.

Much like a blockbuster movie, Herndon’s work, as well as the others, seeks to head off the potential destruction facing the warming planet—one small puzzle piece at a time.

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“IT’S IMPORTANT TO KNOW WHAT’S UNDER THE ICE SO YOU CAN BETTER PREDICT WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN YOU LOSE THE ICE.”

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TENNESSEE ALUMNUS • Spring 2020 25
when the UT Municipal Technical Advisory Service (MTAS) works with its customers, Tennessee’s 345 cities, it’s often the residents who see the impact. In the case of a long-running project with the city of Kingsport, it’s the region’s cats and dogs that benefit.

The project started almost 10 years ago when MTAS and the County Technical Assistance Service (CTAS), both agencies of the UT Institute for Public Service, conducted an analysis of the Kingsport, Sullivan County and Bluff City animal shelters. The recommendation from the analysis was to combine the shelters and operate them as a 501c3 organization. The three entities combined efforts and began a campaign to build a new shelter to replace two antiquated shelters.

With the money raised to build a new Petworks shelter and just weeks away from pouring the foundation, Petworks Board President Tom Parham once again called on MTAS to conduct a staffing and operational needs assessment for the shelter.

MTAS Management and Finance Consulting Program Manager Pat Hardy says,
“We examined data from previous comparative studies and from comparisons with newer, similar facilities. In addition, we interviewed key staff and Petworks board members. Finally, we utilized national standards for shelter and animal control services to estimate the new facility’s needs.”

One key fact about Petworks that affects staffing and financial needs is the shelter’s no-kill policy.

“We have not euthanized an adoptable cat or dog in the last 18 months,” Parham says. He also says they will rely on the UT College of Veterinary Medicine program and its Spay-Neuter Mobile Service to help control the pet population.

In his research, Hardy found that a number of animals at Petworks have been in the shelter for more than a year and some as long as a year and a half.

“Needless to say, there are additional costs associated with this higher level of service,” Hardy says. “The extended stay time required in these shelters influences staffing and other factors.”

Currently, the shelter has eight full-time employees and two part-time employees. After the analysis, Hardy presented three staffing alternatives to the shelter; however, none have been adopted so far.

The $2.5 million in funds to build the shelter came from the city of Kingsport, area businesses and private donors. In examining operational expenses, Hardy found that the level of community support is “quite remarkable.” However, with the increase in size of the facility, such expenses as utility costs will increase. In his report, he suggested several options, including increased fees and additional fundraising events to increase revenue.

The new Petworks shelter is to open this summer.
The University of Tennessee Research Park at Cherokee Farm is located just across the Tennessee River from UT’s flagship campus in Knoxville. We offer an ideal location for companies and entrepreneurs to collaborate with the talent at UT, and we provide the right connections to foster success.

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ESCAPE ARTIST

Chantek Charmed UTC in 1980s

BY SHAWN RYAN
PHOTOS COURTESY OF LYN MILES
Lyn Miles, UT Chattanooga anthropology professor, became a surrogate mother to Chantek the orangutan.

BACK IN THE 1980s, when police officers at UT Chattanooga prepared for their shifts, they made sure they were equipped with more than the usual handcuffs, pepper spray, batons and weapons.

“Most police departments at the start of their shifts line up and check their guns. Ours did that, too, but they also made sure they had cans of Coca-Cola and some M&Ms in the car,” says Richard Brown, former UTC chief of police, laughing heartily.

The treats weren’t there for the officers. They were to satisfy the sweet tooth of Chantek the orangutan.

“Our security staff had to learn how to handle him, but he trained them, really,” says Brown, now UTC executive vice chancellor of finance and administration.

Chantek, who died in 2017 at 39, spent about nine years at UTC, where anthropology professor Lyn Miles worked with him, eventually teaching him more than 150 words—the vocabulary of a 2- or 3-year-old child—in American Sign Language for the Deaf. It was the first time someone had tried—and succeeded—to teach an orangutan to sign. In 2014, the project was highlighted in a PBS documentary titled “The Ape that Went to College.”

Having Chantek at UTC was a “remarkable opportunity and privilege,” Miles says. “I mean, we had some challenges, but this is the kind of research that would have been done at a university like a Vanderbilt or a Yale, and we got to do it here at UTC.”

Brown says the research brought national recognition to the university, which at the time was a small Southern school.

More than sign language, though, Chantek—the name means “beautiful” in Malaysian and is usually used for female primates—learned the ins and outs of life on a college campus and a city.

“He knew to cross a street, to look both ways,” Miles says. “When we would get in the car, he would sit in my lap and—this would probably get me arrested—I worked the foot pedals, and he would steer. Like a little kid. And he understood traffic lights. He knew you stop at red and you go at green, and he looked both ways.”

He put metal slugs in soft-drink machines, trying to get a Coke or orange soda. He loved cheeseburgers and called ketchup “tomato toothpaste.”

“He knew a path to his favorite places in Chattanooga,” Miles says. “There was a Dairy Queen on the corner, and he knew how to get there. He knew the
way to McDonald’s and the other fast-food places. Local restaurateurs would often allow him—in off hours—to have a meal.”

His photo was in the UTC yearbook next to students, and he described other orangutans as “orange dogs.” He’d go to the school’s children’s center to play with the kids, make art and participate in other activities.

“As much as possible, we tried to give him a human childhood because that’s the only way you could test if he could learn language the way we would use it in conversation,” Miles says.

But he also was a rascal. He played tricks on students who were walking with ice cream cones or candy bars, jumping out at them so they’d drop it and he could grab it. When he had to go to the bathroom, they’d take him to the closest in Brock Hall, home to the Department of Anthropology. It was a girls’ bathroom.

“He’d go into his stall and close the door, so he’s locked in there. We couldn’t get to him. He would wait until a young girl would come into the stall next to him and then this hairy, orange arm would come up under the wall and she’d scream and carry on.”

Wherever he lived, however, Chantek was an escape artist. At UTC, his home was in a large grassy area with a trailer where he slept and ate. It was surrounded by a chain link fence. Didn’t matter.

“We did a lot to keep him in, and he kept getting out,” Brown recalls with another laugh. “The cognitive abilities of this animal were so strong. It’s almost hard to call him an animal.”

Maintenance men told Linda Sue Stephens, who has been in UTC Facilities Planning and Management for more than 30 years, that Chantek would get out of his enclosure, wander campus for a while, then go back home to his trailer when he got tired.

When Chantek was transferred to Zoo Atlanta in 1997, keepers there quickly contacted Miles with a problem. She wasn’t surprised at their question.

“They called me in a panic, and they said, ‘He’s disassembling his cage. What’s going on?’ And I said, ‘Well, he knows how to use all these tools,’” she recalls. “What he wanted for his birthday and holidays was a complete workman’s tool belt with a hammer and screwdriver and everything hanging off it.”

Born in Atlanta’s Yerkes Primate Center, Chantek came to UTC when he was 9 months old. For the next eight years, Miles worked with him, becoming a surrogate mother and best friend. She’d hold his hand when they
walked around the UTC campus. She’d take him on excursions to Point Park on Lookout Mountain, to Lake Chickamauga where he liked to chase the fish and to local hang-gliding parks where he like to watch the gliders. (No, he never flew with them.)

For Miles, none of it was particularly shocking.

“We know now how incredibly intelligent chimps, gorillas, orangutans and bonobos are. Not only can they learn language like Chantek, but on their own in a natural setting, they have culture. They learn from each other. They have families. They form political alliances. They make and use tools. They've developed medicine. They lie and deceive. They have so many of the elements that we would consider to be human culture on a rudimentary level.”

Despite his fun-loving side, Chantek displayed the usual traits of an orangutan, which are different from other primates.

“Mostly you know chimps in a circus or a zoo, and the chimps are noisy, and they're hopping around, and they're making noise. They want something, and they'll find it, and they'll put it on their heads or they'll smell it.

“Orangutans are nothing like that. They’re very self-focused, very interior. Chantek would be very quiet. He would look and watch,” Miles explains. “I wouldn’t say ‘introverted’ because he was so curious about the world. But he was kind of introspective. He also was pragmatic and kind of whimsical.”

But, in 1986, he escaped from his enclosure at UTC and reportedly jumped on a female student. He was sent back to the Yerkes Primate Center, and his life was drastically different—he lived in a 5-foot-by-5-foot cage. He grew to 500 pounds, about 200 pounds overweight. Eleven years later, he was transferred to Zoo Atlanta, where he was around other orangutans and eventually found a mate.

Although he was depressed at Yerkes, his personality returned at the zoo, but he always wanted to go back to UTC and live with Miles.

“One of the times he got out of his enclosure at the zoo, I told them, ‘Just give him hamburgers, so he’ll sit.’ And that’s what happened, although they still (tranquilizer) darted him,” she says.

Back in his enclosure, Miles, who was visiting him, signed: “We need a discussion. What did you do?”

“And he just sat there; he knew he was bad. Then he said, ‘But you could get the key and let me out.””
The relationship between the University of Tennessee System and the Tennessee Legislature goes beyond the annual legislative session in Nashville, budget hearings and advocacy. Behind the scenes are students from the UT System campuses who are getting first-hand lessons on the legislative process and the dynamics of politics.

Interns serve a legislative committee office, a leadership office in the House or Senate or the UT Office of Government Relations and Advocacy. Through funding from the UT Alumni Association’s Fund for the Future, seven students with a passion for politics gain career-changing experience as they navigate the legislative session.

Dalis Lampkin (Martin ’19) interned in the UT Office of Government. She spent the 2019 legislative session handling typical office duties, as well as attending committee meetings, writing the weekly newsletter for UT legislative advocates, analyzing bills and assisting with events.

“I hoped to gain a better understanding of how policy implementation actually occurs by being able to witness it firsthand, instead of just learning about it in the classroom setting,” says Lampkin of why she applied for the program.

Her favorite experience was when the office received the Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Budget Books. They gathered in the conference room and shared the appropriations for the UT System with President Randy Boyd.

“The excitement in the room was incredible,” she says.

The lessons from her internship pushed her focus to higher education policy. Lampkin is pursuing a Ph.D. in public policy and administration and hopes to use her experience and knowledge of advocacy when she is teaching at the collegiate level.

With an interest in government since elementary school, Reid Witcher (Knoxville ’11) saw the internship program as a natural fit. He wanted a peek behind state government to see how things really work, which is exactly what he got through his assignment with then-House Majority Leader Jason Mumpower.

He remembers monitoring committees for the legislative team, sitting through meetings listening to bill discussions and recording votes on key legislation.

“As a political science major, that was my first time in the field, and I was hooked,” Witcher says.

Witcher, who interned during the 2010 legislative session, now works as a consultant and chief operating officer with a Nashville-based fundraising, compliance and communications firm. The hands-on experience he had during his internship is one that he believes can’t be replicated in the classroom.

“I had a theoretical knowledge of the legislative process from coursework, but I was blown away by the scope of state government from my experience,” he says.

Currently an associate in the Office of UT Government Relations, Kaitlin Flippo (Knoxville ’19) interned in the same office during the 2018 Legislative Session. Flippo was studying journalism and electronic media with a minor in political science and wanted the experience to gain a better perspective on government to become a better journalist.

“As someone who majored in journalism, this experience helped me better understand state government, how decisions are made and how the media reports information to the public, which will ultimately help me be a better communications professional in the future,” says Flippo.

It was not an easy start, as Flippo felt a learning curve coming from a communications background and not political science. However, that disadvantage ended up providing a clean slate for her experience and became a blessing in disguise.

“It was important for me to push myself to go beyond my comfort level,” she said.

Stretching that comfort level, Flippo remembers finding out that her work in the weekly advocacy newsletter would be read by then-UT System President Joe DiPietro. While she felt the pressure from that, she found working for UT on an administrative level as a student incredibly surreal.

All of the interns described the internship as one of the most important steps they took for their future and one of the best experiences during their time as an undergraduate.

Students in the internship program receive a stipend, which is partially funded through the UT Alumni Association’s Fund for the Future. That fund underwrites scholarships, faculty awards, alumni programming and legislative internships. To learn more about the Fund for the Future and help future legislative interns realize their passion for politics, visit alumni.tennessee.edu.
The mission of the Alliance of Women Philanthropists is to educate, empower and inspire women to be philanthropic leaders at the University of Tennessee. Since the creation of the Giving Circle in 2007, the alliance has provided more than $654,300 for 72 UT programs and research endeavors across the state. The 2020 grant recipients represent innovations in learning and community partnerships that support the health of Tennesseans young, old and furry.

Alliance of Women Philanthropists Funds Grants Across the UT System

BY BLAKE HICKS | PHOTOS COURTESY OF UTAA

Jennifer Weisent, assistant professor in shelter medicine, shares how the UT College of Veterinary Medicine Shelter Medicine program will be able to expand its program by 20 percent.

Sharing about their project installing communication boards on preschool and elementary school playgrounds are, from left, Lauren Broyles with Knox County Schools; Erinn Finke, director of the UT Autism Social Development Lab; Jillian McCarby, director of the UT Augmentative and Alternative Communication, Language, and Literacy Laboratory and the co-director of the Language and Literacy Laboratory; and Rebecca Hofman, Little Tennessee Valley Education Cooperative.

Perry Storey, director of the UTC Challenger STEM Learning Center, discusses how the virtual and augmented reality lab will allow participants to travel the world, visit museums and more.

UT Martin—Incorporating Pediatric Simulation into BSN Curriculum
Funding Awarded: $7,035.37
This project will incorporate pediatric simulation into the curriculum of a rural baccalaureate nursing education program at both the UT Martin campus and Parsons Center. The use of simulation gives students the opportunity to critically think and make clinical judgement without the risk of causing harm to a patient and provides the students the opportunity to improve communication and collaboration.

UTIA-College of Veterinary Medicine—Shelter Medicine Spay-Neuter Outreach Expansion Project
Funding Awarded: $16,808
Through this outreach project, UTCVM Shelter Medicine program will expand its life-saving operations by approximately 20 percent annually through service-learning and community engagement. The project will provide essential surgical equipment to safely and efficiently train fourth-year students in vital clinical skills. In addition, it directly benefits regional animal shelters by increasing the number of animals spayed/neutered and treated medically.

UT Chattanooga—Bring the World and More to Teachers and Students of the Tennessee Valley
Funding Awarded: $10,000
Establishing a virtual and augmented reality lab that will allow 1,000 participants each year to travel the world, visit museums, explore the moon, travel the stars and more is the objective of this project. Through a combination of STEM content aligned with today’s education standards, virtual and augmented reality technology engages students in a high-tech simulation environment. The current space missions of the UTC Challenger STEM Learning Center complements this initiative through its real-world applications of STEM principles.

UT Chattanooga—Collaborative Clinical Medical Laboratory Equipment
Funding Awarded: $8,660
This funding will purchase equipment that will be shared among the physician assistant, doctor of physical therapy and occupational therapy doctorate programs at UT Chattanooga, as well as in collaborative learning experiences with nursing, athletic training, social work and counseling programs. The learning opportunities provided in the laboratory will help students in the varying professional programs to excel in their field and to work together to deliver the highest quality of coordinated care.

UT Health Science Center—Want to Play? Establishing Communication-Rich Playgrounds for Children Who are Nonverbal and Their Peers
Funding Awarded: $5,500
This project will develop and install 25 playground communication boards on preschool and elementary school playgrounds around East Tennessee for children who are nonverbal or have limited verbal skills. Initial and ongoing training to teaching staff, parents and students on how to use the boards effectively is a major component to this project. In addition, it also creates opportunity for research that examines the evidence-based practices of selecting appropriate social context-rich vocabulary, as well as methods for modeling vocabulary.
The Clayton Family Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Campus is the largest project in Zoo Knoxville’s history, and will provide the home that the zoo’s amphibian and reptile friends deserve. Our conservation work makes a HUGE difference!

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- Participates in over 20 Species Survival Plans for turtles and tortoises, one of the most endangered groups of animals on the planet
- Is the leader in the conservation of tortoise species native to Madagascar
- Has led the effort since 1991 to release critically endangered bog turtles into Appalachian Tennessee
- ...and so much more!

Visit BuildTheARC.com for more information, and to learn how you can be part of this ENORMOUS project.
Boyd Announces UT Promise Mentor Recruitment

In his second State of the University address, President Randy Boyd (Knoxville ’79) announced UT Promise scholarship students will be paired with mentors who help guide students through the transition to university life and beyond. Boyd was the first to sign up as a UT Promise mentor.

“I am excited to serve as a UT Promise mentor because I believe this is one of the greatest aspects of the UT Promise scholarship. Having the experience to interact with professors, chancellors, community leaders, alumni and more is invaluable to our students in preparing them for their lives during their college years and beyond,” Boyd says.

Mentors will be paired with two to five students, will spend one hour a month with their mentees and are asked to serve the same students for a two-year period. UT faculty and staff will be paired with freshmen and sophomores while UT alumni and friends will be paired with juniors and seniors. If you’re interested in learning more about the UT Promise mentorship, please visit tennessee.edu/ut-promise/mentoring/.

Volkswagen, UT, ORNL Announce Collaboration, Innovation Hub

Volkswagen Group of America, Oak Ridge National Laboratory and the University of Tennessee announced a collaboration to create Volkswagen’s first innovation hub in North America at the UT Research Park at Cherokee Farm.

The collaboration involves research opportunities for doctoral students and space in the Innovation North building at the UT Research Park. Initial work will focus on developing lighter vehicle components made from composite materials and the electrification of vehicles.

“By identifying difficult challenges and pursuing creative solutions with immediate industrial application, we can accelerate fields such as materials science, energy storage and advance manufacturing while making vehicles better, safer and more fuel efficient,” ORNL Director Thomas Zacharia says.

Boards Appoints Boyd as 26th President

By a unanimous vote Friday afternoon, the University of Tennessee Board of Trustees selected Randy Boyd to serve as UT’s 26th president for the next five years.

“As I’ve said, naming the president of the University of Tennessee System is one of our most important decisions that we undertake as trustees,” Board Chair John Compton says. “We wanted to make sure we were comprehensive and considerate to all key stakeholders in reaching our decision. Randy Boyd is absolutely the right person to lead the university at this time.”

Trustees approved Boyd serving in the position up to June 30, 2025. Boyd, a UT Knoxville alumnus and Knoxville businessman, has served as interim president of the UT System since Joe DiPietro retired in November 2018.

“I am thankful to all who have shown confidence and support for me to continue as the 26th president of the University of Tennessee,” Boyd says. “It is an honor and a privilege to serve my alma mater and our great state with this great team. Together, we will make this the greatest decade in the history of the University of Tennessee.”
A New Generation of Leadership

Before a campus audience in the new Student Union auditorium, Donde Plowman was officially recognized as UT Knoxville’s ninth chancellor in an investiture ceremony in November 2019. “Today we celebrate this university and the great leaders and thinkers who came before us,” she said during the event. “The hard work of everyone on this campus has put us on the path of greatness, and I could not be more excited about the future.”

Ellen McIntyre, former dean of the Cato College of Education at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, joined the university in January as dean of the College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences. Amber Williams, former assistant vice chancellor for academic services and enrollment management at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, also came to UT in January as the first vice provost for student success.

Academic Excellence and Scholar Announcements

In February, UT was named a top-producing Fulbright Student campus following a blockbuster year for Fulbright Student awards, with 17 current students and recent graduates offered fellowships and another eight named alternates. UT ranks seventh among public research universities and is the top-ranked Southeastern Conference school.

Hera Jay Brown, who graduated in August 2018, was named a 2020 Rhodes Scholar—the ninth current or former student to earn this prestigious honor. Natalie Campbell, a senior who serves as student body president and advocates for people with disabilities, was selected for a Mitchell Scholarship, one of the top undergraduate awards in the country.

Celebrating the Volunteer Spirit

It was a story talked about all over the world: A young fan created a homemade shirt to show his love for the Volunteers, and the VolShop offered to print the boy’s design for him as a gesture of appreciation. Sales of that T-shirt raised $952,101 for STOMP Out Bullying.

On Feb. 25, the UT Knoxville family marked its 225th anniversary in true Vol style—with a day of celebration and service projects. At the end of the day, all leftover food—which coincidentally totaled 225 pounds—was donated to local nonprofits by the Food Recovery Network.
Winning Ways

For the second year in a row, a UT Chattanooga alumna has been chosen as TVA’s best engineer.

Noelle Currey (Chattanooga ’91) won the 2020 Ike Zeringue Engineer of the Year Award for creating a computer program to virtually eliminate errors in the design process of electric panels. In the past, errors might slip through and be caught in the testing phase of the panels. But, once an error is found, the whole design process goes back to square one to fix it, which can take months.

“It stops the flow of everything, and it can be days or weeks to rectify it. Even one error causes everyone to stop,” Currey says.

In 2019, Marjorie Parsons (Chattanooga ’98), was the Ike Zeringue winner, the first woman to receive the award. She helped develop standards for the reliability of the agency’s power grid.

World Record Set

The UTC Rocket Mocs’ win set a world record of 17,267 feet, or about 3.3 miles, for its rocket launched in the Mojave Desert in December. The previous world record was 15,101 feet. The award was given by the Tripoli Rocketry Association, a nonprofit that focuses on amateur rocketry and has members from the United States and 22 other countries.

Allergy App Wins Competition

Senior Kaylin Underwood is developing an app—AllerX—that automatically scans grocery items and tells shoppers whether the item contains an ingredient that could trigger a food allergy. Her idea was so good, a three-judge panel selected it as the winner of the HatchIt competition in the Gary W. Rollins College of Business.
Unity Circle Honors Divine Nine

The National Pan-Hellenic Council Greek Garden at Unity Circle was dedicated in honor of the Divine Nine historically African American fraternities and sororities during homecoming festivities. The NPHC Greek Garden features nine plaques commemorating each of the UT Martin Divine Nine chapters and their contributions to the university. “This not only signifies a place, a recognition spot, a gathering spot, a programming spot for our Divine Nine, it’s also moving us along in our university mission and vision,” says UT Martin Chancellor Keith Carver.

Nunnellys Honored with Welcome Center Dedication

After bequeathing $22 million to fund scholarships for students from underserved rural counties, Bill and Rosann Nunnelly were honored by UT Martin with the official naming of the Nunnelly Family Welcome Center. The center is located on the first floor of the Boling University Center and is where all university campus tours begin. More than 90 Nunnelly Scholars will be able to attend UT Martin each year when the bequest is realized.

Giles Inducted Into Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame

Bettye Giles, the first and only director of women’s athletics at UT Martin, was announced as a 2020 inductee into the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame. Giles founded the Tennessee College Women’s Sports Federation, which began with 18 member colleges and universities and grew to 34 institutions by 1974. She spent her career advocating for women’s equality in sports across the state.

WestStar Leadership Program Celebrates 30 Years

WestStar, the state’s oldest and largest regional leadership program, celebrated its 30-year anniversary of equipping regional leaders with new skills and knowledge designed to impact the educational, economic and social development of West Tennessee at Discovery Park of America in Union City. WestStar has graduated 857 class members, including UT Martin Chancellor Keith Carver, since its inception in 1989 at UT Martin.
Pediatric Dental Clinic Opens

The UT Health Science Center’s College of Dentistry opened a Pediatric Dental Clinic in December. It is located inside Le Bonheur Children’s Hospital and was funded by a grant from Delta Dental of Tennessee, the College of Dentistry Dean’s Reserve Fund, UTHSC alumni gifts and Le Bonheur. UTHSC pediatric dental faculty and senior residents staff the clinic. It serves patients in the hospital, as well as the patients cared for by Le Bonheur-based pediatric practices and children from Memphis’ Midtown, Downtown and surrounding areas. The clinic provides a full range of pediatric dental services, including routine well visits and check-ups, cleanings and restorative care for patients ranging in age from newborn to young adult.

UTHSC Site of Third UT System Mural

UTHSC is the site of the third mural in the UT System’s “Everywhere You Look, UT” awareness campaign. The campaign emphasizes the statewide reach and impact of the institutions in the UT System through a series of murals proclaiming those words and located in prominent spots across Tennessee that have been donated by friends and alumni of UT. The UTHSC Memphis mural is on the south-facing wall of the Van Vleet Cancer Center Building, 3 North Dunlap St., at the corner of Madison Avenue and Dunlap Street, and is expected to be seen by an estimated 2.2 million people a year.

UTHSC Marks ‘Year of the Nurse’

As the first nursing college established in Tennessee, the UTHSC College of Nursing is leading the way in recognizing the impact of the nursing profession during 2020, which has been designated as the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife by the World Health Organization. The college is highlighting how nurses change lives through exceptional community service, leading research, innovative clinical care and excellence in education. Messaging will be shared in a variety of ways, including a billboard and advertisements on public radio and in business publications, as well as in nursing magazines and on social media.

137 Graduate at Winter Commencement

The UT Health Science Center presented degrees to 137 new healthcare professionals during its 2019 Winter Commencement. Four graduates from the College of Dentistry, 14 from the College of Graduate Health Sciences, 25 from the College of Health Professions, 30 from the College of Medicine—including 29 from the physician assistant program—and 64 from the College of Nursing received their degrees. Tim Tucker, who is the owner and lead pharmacist of City Drug Company in Huntingdon, Tennessee, and president of the UT Alumni Association, offered remarks and welcomed the students.
Farm Bureau Pledges $125,000 to Lone Oaks Farm STEM Facility

The Tennessee Farm Bureau—including the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation, Farm Bureau Insurance of Tennessee and Tennessee Farm Bureau Health Plans—has pledged $125,000 to UT Extension. The donation will be used for a science, technology, engineering and math barn at the new Youth Education Center at Lone Oaks Farm in Middleton. The center will consist of an instructional facility, demonstration farm and overnight lodging for 64 students.

UTIA to Lead UT System One Health Initiative

The UT One Health Initiative will focus on research collaborations to address regional animal and environmental health issues that also may have implications for human populations. Approximately 70 percent of emerging infectious disease cases in humans and livestock are a consequence of spillover events from wildlife. Debra Miller, a veterinarian specializing in wildlife pathology who holds a joint appointment in the College of Veterinary Medicine and the UTIA Department of Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries, and who also serves as director of the UTIA Center for Wildlife Health, has been named interim director of the UTOHI.

UT Extension to Coordinate PROMPT-TN in Response to Opioid Crisis

UT Extension has received a grant for $324,841 to lead a joint effort of multiple institutions to combat the opioid crisis in Tennessee. A pilot program called PROMPT TN (Preventing Rural Opioid Misuse Through Partnerships and Training) will focus on developing opioid-specific resources designed to educate communities about the underlying causes of addiction, assessing the economic impacts of addiction and engaging communities to implement prevention programs. The two-year project is funded by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture and will be led by faculty from UT Extension in cooperation with faculty from Tennessee State University and the East Tennessee State University Addiction Science Center as well as the Tennessee Department of Health.

Student Organization Recognized Nationally

At the MANRRS regional conference: front row, from left, Destiny Brown, Legna Soto and Windy Soto; middle row, from left, Jasmine Jones and Bryanna Fayne; back row, Damon Conway

The UT student chapter of the national organization Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences (MANRRS) earned the 2019-2020 Chapter of Excellence Award. This is the eighth consecutive year the chapter, which is rooted in the Herbert College of Agriculture, has been recognized with this award.
Government Employees Earn Certified Public Manager Designation

Participants in the Tennessee Certified Public Manager (CPM) program, based in the UT Institute for Public Service’s Naifeh Center for Effective Leadership, graduated in February at the Capitol Building in Nashville.

Twenty-five participants from local, state and federal government positions graduated as members of the program’s 2019 class. In just its second year, the Tennessee CPM program had cohorts in both Knoxville and Nashville. The Knoxville class had nine participants, while Nashville had 16. Currently, the Naifeh Center has CPM cohorts in Knoxville, Nashville and Jackson.

Language Centers Hold Interpreter Fair

The Tennessee Language Center (TLC) and UT Knoxville Language Resource Center partnered to hold an interpreter fair. Both organizations contract with interpreters across the state to fill their interpretation and translation needs.

TLC provides language instruction, translation and interpretation services, professional development for interpreters, translators and language instructors. They serve state government and its employees, the business community, foreign language educators and the public at large.

Gibson Brands Begins TWI Journey

Gibson Brands, headquartered in Nashville, has shaped the sounds of generations of musicians. Recently, the company was looking for assistance with the implementation of Training Within Industry (TWI) at its manufacturing facilities.

Gibson Brands chose UT Center for Industrial Services to provide training in the TWI Job Instruction Program. The company has many skilled craftsmen creating the guitars and was looking for a way to impart proficiency to new employees.

TWI is a proven job-training method designed to provide supervisors with the ability to lead, instruct and improve skills. The TWI approach may assist companies that are experiencing changing workforce demographics. It provides a method to capture institutional knowledge, skills and experience needed to train the next generation of workers.
1 2020 AWP Brenda Lawson Legacy of Leadership Award recipient, Andrea Loughry, center, celebrated with friends at the Alliance of Women Philanthropists’ 12th Annual Women & Philanthropy Symposium. From left, Candace White, Lori Chamberlain Wharton (Knoxville ’83), Loughry (Martin ’66, Knoxville ’69), Dawn Gabriele (Martin ’90) and Sherry Millhorn.

2 New UTC alumnus DeAndre Cole (Chattanooga ’19) celebrated at commencement.

3 Joshua Dobbs (Knoxville ’17) spoke to more than 800 alumni and friends at the Big Orange Tailgate in Jacksonville, Florida, before the TaxSlayer Gator Bowl.

4 Members of the Alliance of Women Philanthropists celebrated the 12th Annual Women and Philanthropy Symposium at the Press Room in Knoxville.

5 From left, UTHSC College of Dentistry Dean James C. Ragain (Knoxville ’76, HSC ’84), UTHSC College of Pharmacy Dean Marie Chisholm-Burns and Rebecca A. Barton (HSC ’84, ’97) enjoyed A November to Remember.
Donna Reed (HSC '75, Knoxville '89), left, Elizabeth Sueing (Knoxville '14, HSC '20) attended the Utensil University and Dinner with Strangers, the annual UTHSC etiquette dinner.

During an alumni event at UT Martin, the Skyhawks retired the jerseys of Hall of Famers, from left, Jasmine Newsome (Martin '14, '17), Jared Newson (Martin '06) and Heather Butler (Martin '14). Butler was the first player in league history to make a Women's National Basketball Association roster.

Darrell Urban (Knoxville '91), left, learns more about the Center for Healthcare Improvement and Patient Simulation (CHIPS) at UT Health Science Center as he and fellow UT Alumni Association Board of Governors members tour the facility during the winter meeting. Jarrod Young, right, is the simulation operations lead at CHIPS and provided the tour.

More than 500 alumni and friends gathered for a tailgate to celebrate Homecoming weekend. From left, Myisha Garnes (Knoxville '18), Gloria Pinnix, Phyllis Moore (Knoxville '93), Jade Newton (Knoxville '06), UT Knoxville Chancellor Donde Plowman, Orlando Walls (Knoxville '99), UT Knoxville Director of Athletics Phillip Fulmer (Knoxville '72) and Cavanaugh Mims (Knoxville '86).
From left: UT System President Randy Boyd is pictured with Bill (Martin ’71) and Rosann Nunnelly, who received the UT President’s Council’s Philanthropist of the Year award Jan. 31 at Discovery Park of America.

UT Martin and the Skyhawk Athletic Department announced the addition of a new, alternate logo aimed to enhance the Skyhawks branding package, which has represented the university since 1995.

Eight Army ROTC alumni were inducted into the UT Army ROTC Hall of Fame during the 103rd anniversary dinner. From left, Barbara Lauth Freeman (Knoxville ’78), retired Brig. Gen. Geoff Freeman (Knoxville ’78), Sunny Carver and Chaplain (retired major general) Doug Carver (Knoxville ’73).

The UTC Chattanooga Alumni Chapter hosted its annual Meet the Coaches event before a women’s basketball game. Almost 100 Mocs fans enjoyed the reception. From left, UTC Outside Linebacker Assistant Coach Jordan Tippit (Chattanooga ’12), Todd Leffew, Billie Wright (Chattanooga ’06), UTC Tight Ends Assistant Coach Jacob Huesman (Chattanooga ’15), Eddrick Brooks (Chattanooga ’09) and Kim Leffew (Chattanooga ’98).

Kerry Witcher (Knoxville ’81), UT Foundation president, spoke at the new member orientation during the UTAA Alumni Legislative Council.
15 Donors were honored and recognized at A November to Remember, a UTHSC donor recognition brunch at the Memphis Botanic Gardens. From left, Cheryl Stegbauer (HSC ’69, ’94), UTHSC College of Nursing Dean Wendy Likes (HSC ’99, ’04, ’09) and E. Dianne Greenhill (HSC ’62, Knoxville ’73).

16 Vanasia Parks (Chattanooga ’83) and Tyler Forrest (Chattanooga ’10, ’12) enjoyed a holiday party hosted by UTC Chancellor Steve Angle.

17 The Alumni Legislative Council (ALC) represents all UT campuses and institutes, and leverages its expertise and leadership to ensure UT’s success for the betterment of the state. Pictured is Jennings Dooley (Knoxville ’17) at the ALC annual meeting in Nashville.

18 More than 150 alumni and friends gathered for UT College of Veterinary Medicine reunions and career impact awards. The Class of 1985, from left: Kyle Sanders, Jannie Craven, Kitty Calcofe, Berry Mitchell, Sharon Brunzlick, Bill Young, Linda Taylor and Bryan Bondurant. UTCVM faculty Jim Brace, Al Dorn and Al Legendre were selected by reunion classes to receive career impact awards.
To Be Different

By Dan Grove

When I started undergraduate studies at UT Knoxville back in 1994, I did not have a clue as to where I would end up 26 years later. I knew I had an interest in science and wanted to use science to help animals, so my logical choice was to become a veterinarian.

I was fortunate enough to land a scholarship through the UT Institute of Agriculture in the animal science program and entered what was known as the 3+1 program for pre-vet majors. It was one of those it-seemed-like-a-good-idea-at-the-time ideas. Fast forward seven years and two degrees later, and I was kicked out of the academic nest to find my own way.

My experiences in vet school made me realize that I did not want to be a traditional veterinarian. I had to be different. I wanted to work with wildlife, and there is no direct path into wildlife health. In the eight years following vet school, I bounced around the country doing internships, field research, wildlife rehabilitation, small-animal vet relief work and even painted houses for a few summers.

After 11 moves across nine states, I landed in North Dakota with my first big-boy job working as the wildlife veterinarian for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department. At the time, there were fewer than 20 of those positions in the United States. There I learned what minus 45 degrees with a minus 65-degree wind-chill felt like, and yes, it is as brutal as it sounds.

I also learned that managing wildlife health and wildlife disease is not just about medicine. Wildlife health also focuses on the impacts that wildlife populations have on domestic animal health, human health and even environmental health.

The field has grown dramatically during the past 20 years. Every time you hear about a “new” zoonotic disease outbreak with a wild animal origin like Ebola, zika or the more recent COVID-19, there was a wildlife health professional involved in the discovery and subsequent management of that outbreak. At the end of the day, there is no shortage of work for wildlife health professionals. There are plenty of known and yet-to-be-discovered issues that impact wildlife looming on the horizon.

Eventually, I made it back down South and a little closer to home. Nowadays, I spend a lot of time working with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency to figure out how to manage chronic wasting disease (CWD) in deer. It is not all field work like one would think. Much of what I do now is deliver extension programs to concerned hunters, landowners and stakeholders to inform them about the issues facing us with CWD. Every time I think how 18-year-old me would have reacted to presenting to a group of 460 concerned stakeholders about a politically charged, highly impactful disease, I chuckle to myself and I realize just how far I have come.

Dan Grove, Knoxville ’98, ’01, is a wildlife veterinarian who specializes in chronic wasting disease and zoonotic disease transmission and prevention. He also is an assistant professor at the UT College of Veterinary Medicine.
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