KSU Students Say

“Yes!”
to Football

Brain Power
KSU research may help detect brain injuries  p.12

“Lost Boy” Found
An African refugee’s exodus to KSU  p.14

Immeasurable Contributions
Center redefines corporate governance  p.20
On Sept. 15, 2010 the Football Exploratory Committee delivered its recommendation that KSU should move forward to field a football team. Cheers rang out from the mostly student-filled arena at the Convocation Center as the idea of football on the KSU campus became a step closer to reality.

President Daniel S. Papp and former University of Georgia football coach Vince Dooley applauded the findings of KSU’s Football Exploratory Committee.

The university’s 27th annual “Year of” program focuses on Romania, one of Europe’s fastest-growing economies.

Nathaniel Nyok endured a 14-year exodus from war-torn Sudan to the KSU campus, where his story is the common reader for the First-Year Experience Program.

Biology professor Troy Mitchel’s sea grass research in the Gulf of Mexico may aid in recovery efforts of that fragile ecosystem following the BP oil spill.

KSU’s Corporate Governance Center has shaped the national dialogue on corporate governance for 15 years.

If everything goes according to plan, KSU’s football team will take the field in fall 2014.

The annual undergraduate research symposium is a hot ticket as more KSU students undertake research projects to enhance their undergraduate experience.

Since KSU launched its first doctoral program in 2007, it has continued to add new and exciting doctorates in various disciplines.

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Dear Friends of Kennesaw State University:

This edition of Kennesaw State University Magazine heralds the coming of age of a great university. Who could have imagined in 1966, when Kennesaw Junior College opened its doors to 1,014 students that in 2010, it would be Georgia’s third-largest university with 23,400 students. Our move to the "big leagues" is evident on several fronts — in academics, in athletics, in campus life and in our commitment to global learning and engagement.

Our paramount mission at Kennesaw State continues to be the education of students who entrust us with their futures. In this issue, we spotlight the robust academic environment at KSU, where faculty, graduate students and, increasingly, undergraduate students are involved in cutting-edge research. Biology professor Troy Mitchler’s pre-BP oil spill sea grass research in the Gulf of Mexico may provide important data for recovery efforts of that fragile ecosystem. A new addition to the KSU faculty, neurochemistry professor Svetlana Dambinova brought a $2.7 million grant from the U.S. Department of Defense to continue her study of a molecule that may aid in the early detection of brain injuries. And this year, a record 138 undergraduate students presented research at the annual symposium, thanks in part to funding by KSU’s Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL).

On the athletic front, a 32-member exploratory committee led by legendary football coach Vince Dooley, recommended that KSU field a football team. The cover story documents the committee’s scrutiny of the feasibility of starting a football program and lays out all the work we have ahead of us.

After decades of offering only bachelor’s and master’s degrees, KSU has evolved into a doctoral-degree-granting institution. Since it launched its first doctorate, in 2007, the university has developed doctoral programs in business, education and nursing and, this year introduced a Ph.D program in international conflict management. There are currently 115 doctoral students enrolled at KSU, and the numbers are expected to keep growing over the next few years.

Providing the campus community a rich academic experience that emphasizes global learning and engaged citizenship is a sustained source of pride for me. KSU’s innovative "Year of" program, now in its 27th year, exemplifies our commitment in this area. This year’s annual country study focuses on Romania, one of Europe’s fastest-growing economies. Another story chronicles the sustained source of pride for me. KSU’s innovative "Year of" program, now in its 27th year, exemplifies our commitment in this area.

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KSU’s First-Year Experience Program was recognized by U.S. News & World Report in its 2011 Best Colleges issue as one of the best in the country, the eighth consecutive year it has been lauded in the annual college rankings. KSU was one of 23 colleges recognized by U.S. News for its First-Year Experience Program, the only university in Georgia that received this recognition. U.S. News also ranked KSU 32nd among regional, public universities in the South and 89th among regional universities in the South.

"It is an honor for Kennesaw State to be recognized once again for the excellence of our First-Year Experience Program," said KSU President Daniel S. Papp. "Kennesaw State is on its way to achieving national prominence, and the latest U.S. News rankings are a testament to that.

KSU’s First-Year Experience Program combines special curricular and extracurricular offerings designed to make first-year students stay and succeed in college.

In a separate ranking, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni listed KSU among only 16 universities in the country that scored an "A" in the group’s "What Will They Learn?" guide. The grades are based on whether a university requires courses in seven core subjects: composition, literature, foreign language, U.S. government or history, economics, mathematics, and natural or physical science.

Other universities receiving the council’s highest ranking include Baylor University, Texas A&M University, the United States Air Force Academy and the United States Military Academy. Only 2 percent of more than 700 institutions evaluated were awarded an "A."
Kennesaw State University received a $2.85 million grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to support the recruitment of STEM professionals and to provide funding for institutions of higher education to offer scholarships and develop a pipeline of STEM professionals into teaching careers.

The NSF’s Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program is designed to prepare better science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) teachers. The proposal for the new and expanded KSU Community Health Clinic at MUST Ministries is one of the only community-based, nurse-managed clinics in the state. The new clinic gives KSU nursing and social work students with hands-on experience. The KSU Community Health Clinic at MUST Ministries is one of the only community-based, nurse-managed clinics in the state.

Almost two years ago, Blaine McIntosh walked out of jail homeless, jobless and penniless. Today, McIntosh is the marketing manager for A Plus Contracting Roofing and Restoration and he shared his story at the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new and expanded KSU Community Health Clinic at MUST Ministries.

KSU Community Clinic at MUST Ministries opens

Clinic provides hands-on experience for KSU nursing and social work students

By Jennifer Hafer

Almost two years ago, Blaine McIntosh walked out of jail homeless, jobless and penniless. Today, McIntosh is the marketing manager for A Plus Contracting Roofing and Restoration and he shared his story at the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new and expanded KSU Community Health Clinic at MUST Ministries.

“This project will help address Georgia’s critical shortage of secondary physics and chemistry teachers by developing a pipeline of STEM professionals into teaching careers,” said Greg Rushton, an associate professor of chemistry who directs the project.

Charles Amlaner, vice president for research and dean of the Graduate College, said there is a critical need for teachers proficient in STEM disciplines at the state and national levels.

“After I got out of jail, I came to MUST, entered the shelter and went to the clinic,” he said. “I received medication prescriptions, nutritional health counseling and follow-up testing.

“Today, by the grace of God, the discipline of Alcoholics Anonymous, the love and charity of MUST Ministries, and the hard work and dedication of the clinic staff, I am a changed human being — employed, 30 pounds lighter, all vital signs are normal, diabetes in remission and almost two years of sobriety.”

After 15 years of serving patients in a tiny, single-wide trailer that was held together “with chewing gum and chicken wire,” the KSU Community Health Clinic at MUST Ministries has a new home, which boasts a waiting room, six treatment rooms, a doctor’s office and two counseling rooms.

The expanded facility will allow the WellStar College of Health and Human Services to substantially increase its capacity for patient treatment. The clinic offers office visits, phone consultations and prescription refills to the under-insured, as well as the uninsured.

“ occasionally, I didn’t have heat; sometimes we didn’t have air; and sometimes little friends came to visit us (at the trailer),” said KSU assistant nursing professor and clinic nurse manager Donna Chambers. “This is truly a special occasion marking a great partnership.”

The new clinic gives MUST Ministries’ clients improved access to health care services and provides KSU nursing and social work students with hands-on experience. The KSU Community Health Clinic at MUST Ministries is one of the only community-based, nurse-managed clinics in the state.

“This clinic offers an opportunity for our students to get an even better education,” said WellStar College of Health and Human Services Dean Richard Sowell.
Linda Lyons was named interim chief diversity officer. Lyons came to KSU in 2005 as the director of the Center for University Learning. In 2006, she was appointed customer service champion, representing KSU on a state-wide committee that reviews and implements customer service training programs to all state employees. She was awarded the “Outstanding Customer Service Leadership” award in 2007 and 2008 by the University System of Georgia and the Governor’s Excellence in Customer Service Award in 2008. Lyons holds a bachelor’s in management from the University of Oklahoma and a master’s in human resource development from Georgia State.

Ronald H. Matson was named interim dean of the College of Science and Mathematics in July. A native of Los Angeles, Matson received his bachelor’s in zoology and his master’s in biology from California State University, Long Beach. He earned a doctorate in biology from UCLA. After leaving UCLA, Matson worked as a post-doctoral scientist for two years at the University of Alabama. He came to Kennesaw State in 1989 as an assistant professor in the biology department teaching courses in evolution, the biology of dinosaurs, comparative anatomy and vertebrate zoology. He previously served as chair of the Department of Biology and Physics.

Michael Sanseviro was named dean of Student Success. He served as KSU’s first director of Residence Life from 2004 to 2009 and served as interim dean for the past year. Sanseviro will oversee various areas of Student Success for more than 23,000 KSU students. He will continue in his duties as director of Residence Life until a successor is named. Sanseviro earned a bachelor’s in educational research, philosophy and religion from Emory University and a master’s in higher education from Florida State University. He received a Ph.D. in education policy from Georgia State University.

Scott Whitlock, senior associate athletics director and head softball coach, was named interim athletics director in August. Whitlock has worked at KSU for more than two decades, as a coach and as an athletics department administrator. He joined Kennesaw State in 1985 as assistant softball coach and assistant women’s basketball coach. From 1995 to 2004, Whitlock served as assistant athletics director. In 2004, he was promoted to senior associate athletics director helping oversee the day-to-day operations of the university’s athletics department. A member of the Women’s Softball Hall of Fame, Whitlock has one of the highest win totals in the sport, garnering 13 regional crowns and back-to-back NCAA Division II national championships in 1995 and 1996.

By Sabbaye McGriff

Popular media has not been kind to Romania. For centuries, the Eastern European nation has been associated less with its fierce political independence, extraordinary culture and ethnic diversity than with negative images of Dracula, orphanages and dictatorships.

To help set the record straight, KSU is celebrating this academic year as the “Year of Romania,” the university’s 27th annual “Year of” program. The year-long series of more than 30 lectures by scholars from across the U.S. and Romania, cultural events and business forums is designed to reveal Romania’s greatness, complexity and promise.

“Romania is a very important Eastern European nation because of its history, especially in the late 19th and 20th centuries, as modern nationalism evolved,” said Dan Paracka, coordinator of the “Year of” annual country-study series.

For example, Paracka noted, in the past 75 years, Romania...
Going Global

Barry Morris, vice provost for global engagement and strategic initiatives and interim executive director of the Institute for Global Initiatives.

When KSU global education planners examined Romania, they found it to be a good fit for the university’s annual country study. Among the long list recommending Romania as a country worthy of study, Morris noted, is a recent history of revolution and change; integration into the European Union; economics and business dynamics relevant to American business; and the current activities of American companies in Romania.

“In addition to deep and rich cultural tradition, there are institutional ties; diversity; regional politics and security; and the innovative humanitarian work of non-governmental organizations,” Morris said.

The university’s reputation and its existing relationship with ASEBUSS, Romania’s leading Executive M.B.A. program played a role.

“As we met with leaders from various segments of Romania’s society, we struck me as being their pleasant surprise to KSU’s global reach, its ability and willingness to partner with diverse sectors, as well as its proven ability to import to Georgia and the region a representative sample of the country,” said Morris. “I observe this reaction each year, and it is nice to see.”

Darina Lepadatu, assistant professor of sociology, associate director of KSU’s Ph.D. program in international conflict management and a native of Romania

“Romania is truly an exceptional country. It is the only country that preserved the name of its Roman conquerors who occupied the country during the first and second centuries. Its language is very close to the popular Latin of ancient times. A closer look at Romania’s history shows the exceptional resilience of its people, who have had to battle the hordes of Slavic, Visigoth, Hun or Tatar tribes, and later on, the fierce domination of the Ottoman and Soviet empires. At the crossroads between West and East, Romania is the only Latin culture with a predominant Christian Orthodox religion. While stubbornly preserving its Latin roots, Romania has embraced the ethnic minorities of the entire region: Hungarians, Germans, Jews, Turks, Russians, Ukrainians and Serbs among them. Of its 22 million people, Romania is home to the largest Roma/Gypsy population in the world, nearly 2 million people.”

Tom Doleys, assistant professor of political science and international affairs and “Year of Romania” lecturer

“It is noteworthy that Romania was the first central or Eastern European country to establish formal relations with the European Union in 1974. However, it would not apply for membership until 1995. Romania joined the now 27-nation bloc in 2007. It is difficult to overstate the depressed state of Romania’s economy at the end of the communist era. The country had few externally competitive industries. Labor markets were rigid and capital markets virtually non-existent. The drive for EU membership encouraged government authorities to make the hard and often politically unpopular choices required to transition from a state-led economy to one that is market-led. It also encouraged the country’s leadership to embrace democratic institutions and enhance the protection of human rights. As the reform process continues, Romanians can look back with a sense of accomplishment and look forward with renewed confidence and sense of optimism.”

Mike Salvador, director of executive education programs, Coles College of Business and coordinator for the past five years of a joint student project involving up to 160 Executive M.B.A. students from KSU and Romanian business school ASEBUSS

“Two events of the last 22 years — the revolution in 1989 that ushered in democratic reforms and the country’s membership in the European Union — have transformed Romania, creating a dynamic and robust economy. In fact, it is one of Eastern Europe’s fastest-growing economies. A lot of the things we take for granted as older, established democratic economies — foreign investment, growth of credit markets, the presence of large, multinational corporations and a strong entrepreneurial sector — are currently in motion in Romania. And it’s very exciting to watch. Romania has turned out to be an exceptional international learning experience for our students who are interacting over an intensive eight-month period with executives from top multinational companies with operations in Romania. Having the chance to closely observe and interact with the development of multinationals in a newly post-communist society, to witness the emerging entrepreneurial culture taking hold, and to hear the personal testimonies of people in their 30s who remember the transitional events is a truly enriching learning experience.”

Marcel Duhaneanu, Rector of the Institute for Business Administration (ASEBUSS) in Bucharest

During an eight-year relationship between KSU and Romania’s Institute for Business Administrations (ASEBUSS), more than 530 potential global managers from both institutions have earned an Executive M.B.A. Along the way, a level of trust has developed, making possible a collaboration to produce the “Year of Romania.”

“Each year Romanian and American professors and students are meeting face-to-face in Romania and the U.S.A.,” Duhaneanu said. “Our students are working in Romanian-American teams virtually for eight months and are presenting the final projects in Atlanta.”

Duhaneanu praised Kennesaw State’s Institute for Global Initiatives and President Daniel S. Papp for creating and supporting programs and partnerships with Romania.

“These programs will contribute to a broader and deeper knowledge of Romania and to continuing development of Romanian-American bilateral relations, especially this year when we celebrate 130 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries,” he said.

KSU is fortunate to have five faculty members of Romanian background who have helped plan and shape this country through scholarship, academic programs, student and faculty exchanges, and participation in a “Year of Romania” learning community. They have helped plan and shape this year’s program. Below, three of them share their observations and insights with KSU Magazine:

Duhaneanu
Salvador
Doleys

Lepadatu

Morris
Like many famous Russian scientists before her, Distinguished Professor of Neurochemistry Svetlana Dambinova is fascinated by how the brain works. But rather than focusing on behavior modification as one of her most famous predecessors, Nobel laureate Ivan Pavlov, did, Dambinova has discovered a molecule that may aid in the early detection of brain injuries.

“This is a tradition — focusing on the brain — in Russia,” she said. “The brain is the most important organ. The brain is what we are actually.”

Armed with a three-year, $2.7 million research grant from the U.S. Department of Defense, Dambinova moved from Emory University to Kennesaw State’s WellStar School of Nursing this fall to begin investigating the molecule.

“This molecule, which may be helpful for early diagnosis of stroke and the consequences of neurotrauma, may come from the brain into the bloodstream,” she explained. “We will be looking to see whether this molecule is compromising the blood-brain barrier and looking for this molecule in the bloodstream.”

If the molecule is found to be in the bloodstream, it could give health care providers the opportunity to identify not only the occurrence of a stroke, but potentially the ability to predict a stroke before it even happens, Dambinova said. If successful, the research could also be applied to identifying head injuries like concussions in athletes or traumatic brain injuries in soldiers, among many other brain abnormalities.

According to Dambinova’s research, approximately 1.7 million cases of traumatic brain injury (TBI) and 795,000 strokes occur in the United States annually; 52,000 people will die as a result of TBI and 143,579 from stroke. An estimated 5.3 million people live with a TBI-related disability. Brain injury is the ultimate cause of death in 40 percent of all cases of fatal trauma and remains the leading cause of severe disability in young adults.

“We want (this research) to be very useful in practice,” Dambinova said. “That’s why I came to Kennesaw because of the great nursing school. Nurses are more focused on immediate patient care; they have more opportunity to work with the patient and can assist the medical doctor with patient care.”

Viewing nurses as the first line of defense in patient care, Dambinova envisions the development of a Ph.D. in nursing that will enhance students' knowledge on neurological disorders and blood chemistry.

Dambinova’s research could eventually predict a stroke before it happens.
Perhaps it was serendipity that Nathaniel Nyok ended up in a political science class last spring with one of KSU’s conscientious, globally aware student leaders, who alerted her organization’s adviser, who happens to direct the university’s first-year programs, which, it turns out, last year selected as its common reader a book in which Nyok is featured.

But nothing about the journey of Nyok, one of the original “Lost Boys of the Sudan,” would suggest that luck or mere chance had anything to do with the fortuitous string of events that revealed his presence as a KSU student.

Rather, in Nyok’s view, the good fortune that led him to KSU and remains with him, despite a childhood of misfortune and hardship, is more likely a matter of Providence.

In 1987, when he was 8, Nyok was torn from his family after his village of Bor in Southern Sudan was attacked during the civil war between Sudanese government forces — allied with mostly Arab Muslims in the north — and black African rebel groups from the south. He escaped into the woods with a horde of other children, walking thousands of miles over two months to refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya.

The journey was so brutal, Nyok said, that more than half the children never made it to the camps. He lived as a refugee for nearly 14 years until 2001 when he was one of 4,000 Sudanese children chosen to come to the United States from among the more than 30,000 orphaned by the war.

Nyok, now 31, ended up in a resettlement community with 150 other “lost boys” in Clarkston, Ga., beginning his march toward normalcy as a naturalized U.S. citizen. He learned the language, got a job, helped newly arriving refugees settle in, played soccer and even organized a team. But destiny seemed to propel him toward a brighter, more compelling future.

Over the past decade, Nyok has appeared in interviews on CNN, and other television stations, in People magazine and local newspapers. He landed a role in the 2003 Hollywood movie “Tears of the Sun,” spending four months on location in Hawaii and befriending its star, Bruce Willis. His story was featured in the first-year program’s common reader, “Outcasts United,” by author and journalist Warren St. John about a group of refugee children from the world’s war-torn countries, the tenacious coach who organized them into a competitive soccer team and the transformation of Clarkston into a global village.

Nearly 6 feet, unassuming and exuding an understated confidence, Nyok is growing more aware that the upward trajectory of his life is being guided. Last year, after completing 62 course hours at a local junior college, he selected Kennesaw State from among three Atlanta-area universities to pursue his dream of a career in international humanitarian service.

Since then, the merit of that decision has become apparent. In search of a summer job this year, Nyok’s academic adviser steered him to KSU’s Career Services Center. Taking a long shot, he responded to an item posted on the bulletin board, applying for, and landing, a coveted legislative internship in the Washington, D.C. office of Sen. Johnny Isakson. The position required him to attend hearings and briefings and report back to Isakson’s staff. He also worked with the senator’s international department, attending meetings on nuclear arms reduction and other critical global issues.

“I can’t believe I shared rooms with people like [Secretary of State] Hillary Clinton, [Defense Secretary Robert] Gates, [Sen.] John Kerry, a lot of great people,” said Nyok, who also sat in on briefings attended by the secretary-general of Southern Sudan, the U.S. special envoy to the Sudan and the former president of South Africa.

As a result of last spring’s seeming “chance” encounter with Audrey Ruark, president of KSU’s ONE Campus Challenge, and her connection to Keisha Hoerrner, director of first-year programs, Nyok is presenting a series of talks around campus.
Common reader vital to First-Year Experience Program’s success

This fall, more than 2,700 first-year students are learning about Nathaniel Nyok’s plight and that of hundreds of other refugees, as they read “Outcasts United,” the book selected as the common reader for the First-Year Experience Program. In its 2011 Best Colleges issue, U.S. News & World Report recognized KSU’s first-year program as one of the best in the country for the eighth consecutive year.

The program combines special classroom and extracurricular learning experiences designed to help first-year students succeed and stay in college. As part of first-year academic requirements, students have the option of taking a seminar or enrolling in a learning community whose members take several classes together and participate in activities outside the classroom. Since the common reader program was launched in 2004, all first-year students must read and discuss the selected book in their seminar or learning community.

Each year, a faculty committee reviews a number of books and recommends three, from which first-year faculty and administrators select a suitable book to provide first-year students a shared learning experience. The book is intended to help students develop political, cultural, global and self-awareness.

“Outcasts United” is the story of a refugee soccer team, the coach who put everything on the line to organize them and the small Georgia town that reluctantly evolved into a resettlement community for refugees from war zones in Liberia, Congo, Sudan, Iraq and Afghanistan. Like its predecessors, this year’s reader was chosen because of its political, social and global themes; the opportunity it presents for students to examine life transitions; the chance for students to become engaged in the issues of refugees; and traits that make any book enjoyable: an interesting story, heroic characters, conflict and human interaction.

Ralph Rascati, associate vice president for Academic Affairs and dean of the University College, which houses the Department of First-Year Programs, observed: “The foundations for the university’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) of ‘global education for engaged citizenship’ are laid in the first-year experience program. Each year the common reader has been chosen with the QEP in mind. This year’s selection of ‘Outcasts United’ is no exception.”

Saving the Sea Grass

Research provides insight into the Gulf oil spill

When KSU marine biologist Troy Mutchler set out to spend the summer doing research on sea grass in the Gulf of Mexico, he never expected that a huge oil spill would offer an unexpected twist to his findings.

Mutchler, along with biology students Rachel MacTavish and Viet Nguyen, was already planning to study the sea grass and started the project just weeks after the explosion of the BP oil rig in April, which unleashed the worst offshore oil spill in U.S. history. They snorkeled in the shallow waters around Perdido Key in the Gulf Islands National Seashore near Pensacola, Fla., and collected samples for weeks until the spill was contained several months later.

“The conditions we worked under will never be replicated,” MacTavish said. “No one is going to spill oil in the Gulf just to do scientific research, so this was a rare experience.”

Mutchler is certain his findings will provide insight for the now delicate ecosystem into the recovery efforts of the Gulf oil spill. At one point, the leading edges of the oil spill were just 300 yards away from the pristine barrier island, forcing Mutchler and his students to acquire as many samples as possible. If there are any significant changes in the sea grass beds due to oil infusion, he explained, the study will be able to detect it.

“The organisms most likely to be harmed by the oil are those at the foundation of the food chain, and that’s where you find sea grass,” said Mutchler, a biology professor in the College of Science and Mathematics.

About his incredible journey and commitment to help build schools for his native Bor, an agrarian community that still has no clean water supply, school buildings, clinics and hospitals. He visited his village in 2009, seeing his mother and two younger brothers for the first time in 22 years, since the night of the attack. “What I saw there was very shocking; the village is still the way it was, lacking any signs of modernity, except now they wear clothes and hold primary school under the trees,” said Nyok, who has created a nonprofit organization to raise funds.

“Nathaniel is an amazing man who epitomizes the ‘engaged global citizen’ ideal we promote at KSU and in all our first-year programs,” said Hoerrner, who has engaged global citizen ideal we promote at KSU and created a nonprofit organization to raise funds.

For more information on Nyok’s nonprofit, please visit his website at www.thesaves.org
Working with the U.S. National Parks Service, his research examines how water pollution is changing the nutritional content and will help determine why sea grass numbers are dwindling. "Sea grass is so vital to the food chain for plants, fish and even humans," Mutchler said. "It provides food for red drum, blue crab, flounder, crabs, shrimp and scallops. So if you like seafood you should care about sea grass."

Mutchler’s research also examines the interaction between organisms, and the environment and how human activity can influence those interactions.

"Pollution is the result of the coastal landscape converted into farms, coastal cities and towns," says Nguyen, a senior biology major. "The fertilizer from agricultural fields eventually washes into rivers and streams and makes its way to the bays were sea grass lives."

Mutchler said that sea grasses were already declining because of those environmental pollutants in the water. "I'm hoping this project will help define an early detection system that will signal pollution is occurring at a point where we can still prevent the disappearance of sea grass."

The study will also measure the long-term effects of the oil spill and the threat it poses to the ecosystem. "It’s the same as when you go to the doctor," Mutchler said. "They take your pulse to get an assessment of the type of condition you’re in. We’re trying to examine the carbon and nitrogen in tissues of the plant to determine if they’re under stress from nutrient pollution."

The team’s experiments will determine if pollution is adding more nitrogen to the beds of sea grasses living in the small barrier island. To test the nitrogen levels, the students clipped off small sections of the plants and then added garden fertilizer to some areas.

"We thought that if we add nitrogen, which is in the fertilizer, theoretically it should show up in the plants in those areas,” Mutchler explained. A few weeks later, they clipped the same plants and compared the nitrogen and carbon levels from the samples. "We know if there is a strong presence of nitrogen in sea grass beds where we did not add fertilizer. It suggests there is nitrogen coming from somewhere else. Trying to figure out where is the tricky part.”

High nitrogen levels feed algae, which grow in the same sea grass meadows. Algae use the nitrogen as plant food, making it grow much more quickly and overtake the grass. "When algae populate it shades out the light the sea grass needs to grow, therefore killing the sea grass. Some fish can’t live in algae so there’s a direct impact on the ecosystem," Mutchler said.

A laboratory is analyzing the water samples to determine the nitrogen and carbon content in the sea grass before. Mutchler will have the results in early 2011 and will submit a report to federal officials, who will incorporate the findings into their management plans for protecting sea grass.

The results will also set the parameters for the detection of nutrient pollution in coastal waters.

"If our tests indicate that nitrogen in sea grass tissues is a reliable signal of nutrient pollution, then officials can use this simple test to detect pollution and decide how to eliminate it,” Mutchler said. "We will also be able to tell them if there were any short-term impacts of the oil spill to the sea grass growth.”

In the future, Mutchler plans to take more students on field research projects. "You can’t always learn from a textbook," he said. "Sometimes students have to get their feet wet, they fail and try again and learn from their mistakes. It is what learning is all about."
Immeasurable Contributions

By Aixa M. Pascual

In the summer of 1995, three accountants – two college professors and a former audit partner with Price Waterhouse – met in Atlanta. Over casual conversation, they came up with an idea: Why not launch a center focused on helping improve the performance of corporate boards? Just like that, the Corporate Governance Center at the Coles College of Business was born, the first academic center of its kind in the U.S.

“We literally hit it at a perfect time,” said one of the founders, Paul Lapides, then a director at a real estate investment trust. “We’ve been participating in the dialogue on corporate governance for 15 years now, and we have actually shaped some of the things that are now required in the boardroom.”

Over the past decade and a half, KSU’s Corporate Governance Center has been at the forefront of the national dialogue on corporate governance, which examines how directors oversee the conduct of a company’s business to promote the best interests of the company and its shareholders. As investors and regulators have demanded greater accountability from boards of directors, the center’s faculty has emerged as an important voice on key governance issues.

The center’s work ranges from issuing principles on effective governance and conducting research to serving on an influential task force of the National Association of Corporate Directors, giving hundreds of media interviews on hot-button financial reporting scandals, the accounting fraud and massive bankruptcy at WorldCom, and the collapse of Arthur Andersen LLP, Enron’s longtime auditor, brought about positive changes in corporate governance, said Lapides, who is also an advocate for increasing the number of women in corporate boards.

Today, it is uncommon for CEOs to select directors. There is much more awareness on best practices. And new regulation brought about by the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002, as well as tougher listing requirements on the stock exchanges, have mandated changes, including more independence and expertise on the part of directors.

“There is a much clearer understanding of the role of the board on the part of directors, the media and regulators,” said Hermanson. “Directors get raked over the coals in the media when there are disasters.”

Nowadays directors have to work much harder than they used to, Tompkins said. “It’s a job that is taken a lot more seriously.”

And the job carries the risk of personal liability for failure to do what is required. “Being a director of a public company is no longer just a free lunch and social club,” Lapides said.

Hermanson, who recently co-authored a major study on financial reporting scandals, believes that work remains to be done. “Many directors are far too trusting of management,” he said. “There is a need for more skepticism, like an external auditor should have.”

“The KSU folks have made an immeasurable contribution to the corporate governance dialogue,” said Joe Carcello, University of Tennessee Corporate Governance Center issues, and working closely with directors to educate them on best practices.

Finance professor James Tompkins, the center’s director of board advisory services, served as an expert witness on an Enron case. Tompkins, center director Lapides and co-founder and director of research Dana Hermanson were recognized in 2010 in the NACD’s Directorship magazine as “movers and shakers who merit serious attention” in the field of corporate governance.

“The KSU folks have made an immeasurable contribution to the corporate governance dialogue,” said Lapides, one of the founders, Paul Lapides, then a director at the Coles College of Business.

Paul Lapides is one of the founders of the Corporate Governance Center at the Coles College of Business.

“The KSU folks have made an immeasurable contribution to the corporate governance dialogue,” said Joe Carcello, University of Tennessee Corporate Governance Center director of research at the University of Tennessee’s Corporate Governance Center, which the KSU center helped launch.

“The team at KSU put together one of the best corporate governance centers in the nation.”

Disastrous events in the past decade, such as the Enron collapse, brought about positive changes in corporate governance, said Lapides, who is also an advocate for increasing the number of women in corporate boards.

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“Many directors are far too trusting of management,” he said. “There is a need for more skepticism, like an external auditor should have.”
Cheers rang out from the mostly student-filled arena at the Convocation Center as the news was announced and the reality of a football game played on the KSU campus — as early as 2014, if all goes well — became apparent.

“We are one step closer to being able to have football at KSU,” said Papp, who tossed a football in the air as he started his remarks. “This will not be easy but, then again, nothing worthwhile ever is. We have four quarters to play and we have the lead now, but it’s the score at the end that counts.”

According to the 137-page report, launching football is the logical “next step for Kennesaw State to go from a commuter school to a residential one with a more vibrant student life on campus. It will help attract more accomplished students and new donors, boost alumni giving and attract new donors.”

From Report to Reality

At that time, Papp said there was still some work to do — including gauging student support and figuring out how to pay for football — before Owls football becomes a reality.
KSU President Daniel S. Papp takes a handoff from legendary UGA football coach Vince Dooley during the press conference.

For the Football Exploratory Committee report visit  
www.kennesaw.edu/explorefootball

Projected Costs; Rick Siegel, Football Funding Possibilities; Dr. Nancy King, Broader Consequences of Adding Football; and Dr. Tom Keene, Positive Alternatives to Adding Football. Dooley, who retired as UGA’s athletics director in 2004 after 25 years, was Georgia’s head football coach from 1964 to 1988. He led one of the most successful football and all-sports programs in intercollegiate athletics. At the announcement, he handed Papp a copy of the final report. “It has been an honor to oversee the hard work and enthusiasm of the four subcommittees,” Dooley said. “They did a very thorough job. We tackled some tough issues over the past several months to come up with the committee’s recommendation, which I’m particularly glad to say represents the overwhelmingly positive opinion that the university should move forward toward building a football program.”

The committee’s report highlighted the need for community support, noting that people in the South are passionate about football. “It is believed a KSU football team could attract attention from beyond Cobb County, drawing fans from among the several million north metro-Atlanta residents,” the report said. “It is encouraging that the chamber (of commerce) leaders of Cobb, Bartow, Cherokee, Douglas and Paulding counties all indicate support for KSU football.”

One question KSU will not have to worry about is where the team will play. The state of the-art KSU Soccer Stadium, which opened its doors in May, is a boon to football. The $16.5 million arena, home to the women’s soccer team and the Atlanta Beat women’s professional soccer team, could, with certain adjustments, serve double duty as a football stadium. Preliminary plans call for more than doubling the stadium’s 8,300-seat capacity.

Subcommittee chair King, who serves as senior women’s administrator for KSU Athletics, said that a football program at KSU would reap huge benefits for women’s athletics as well. Title IX Considerations

“Title IX was passed with the intention of providing equal opportunities for men and women in athletics,” King said. “Our decision to explore football means that we would be able to offer more athletic opportunities to women than we have in the past.”

Currently, KSU offers six Division 1 men’s sports programs: baseball, basketball, cross-country, golf, track and field, and tennis. Women’s sports programs comprise basketball, cross-country, golf, soccer, softball, tennis, track and field, and volleyball.

Competitive cheer, lacrosse, swimming and diving, field hockey and gymnastics are among the women’s varsity sports identified in the report that could be launched in conjunction with football. Papp concluded his remarks by donning an Owls football helmet that King gave him. “It is believed a KSU football team could attract attention from beyond Cobb County, drawing fans from among the several million north metro-Atlanta residents,” the report said.

Papp said that KSU needs football to become a nationally recognized university. “In the American South, most people believe football is needed for national recognition,” he said. Papp concluded his remarks by donning an Owls football helmet that King gave him. She handed another helmet to Dooley. “Go Owls!” Papp shouted to the audience. “Our next step is in front of us.”

KSU President Daniel S. Papp takes a handoff from legendary UGA football coach Vince Dooley during the press conference. President Papp, Nancy King, senior women's administrator for athletics, and Vince Dooley showed off some future KSU football equipment.

KSU trustee Bob Prillaman talks football with State Rep. Earl Ehrhart, left, and former University of Georgia football coach Vince Dooley.

KSU Trustee Bob Prillaman talks football with State Rep. Earl Ehrhart, left, and former University of Georgia football coach Vince Dooley.

"It’s very important for us to once again re-evaluate the level of student support," he said. "This has been a continuing conversation, and to that end, our next step is to talk with our student leaders and to the student body to ascertain their continued interest in having a football program at KSU.

The leadership of the KSU Student Government Association took the ball and ran with it, organizing several town hall forums in early November to engage fellow students in a healthy dialogue about the pros and cons of football prior to the binding referendum on the $100 per-semester fee.

The cost of starting a football program at KSU is estimated at about $10 million, with the bulk of that coming from student fees, according to the report. Since the state of Georgia does not allow any state funds to support athletics programs, Papp explained, these must be funded “through student fees, gifts, guarantee games, radio and TV rights and so on.”

Papp has appointed Wes Wicker, vice president for university advancement, to spearhead a fundraising campaign to raise money for football.

The Big “Yes” Decision

The “overwhelming positive recommendation,” according to the Football Exploratory Committee, came after nine months of intensive study by four subcommittees consisting of faculty, staff, students, alumni, benefactors and community supporters.

In December 2009, Papp charged the 32-member committee with weighing the projected costs of football, funding, the broader implications and alternatives. The four subcommittees were chaired by Teddy Parrish, Nancy King, Positive Alternatives to Adding Football; and Vince Dooley showed off some future KSU football equipment.

KSU Trustee Bob Prillaman talks football with State Rep. Earl Ehrhart, left, and former University of Georgia football coach Vince Dooley.

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KSU Trustee Bob Prillaman talks football with State Rep. Earl Ehrhart, left, and former University of Georgia football coach Vince Dooley.
Many biochemistry student researchers pursue research-related studies or careers.

Joy of Research

Undergraduate research has become a hot ticket at KSU

By Aixa M. Pascual

In late April, dozens of students and professors crammed into the University Rooms at the Carmichael Student Center for what has become a rite of spring: the annual symposium featuring undergraduate research.

“It was a really exciting place to be. All of the students got to talk to a lot of people,” says assistant professor of anthropology Susan Kirkpatrick Smith, who had seven students participating at the 15th Annual Symposium of Student Scholars. “I wonder where they’re going to do it next year. It seems like they’ve outgrown that space.”

The annual symposium has become a hot ticket as more and more KSU students take up research projects to enhance their undergraduate experience. The number of students presenting has more than doubled in the past three years. This year, a record 138 undergraduate students participated in the symposium, up from 82 students last year; the number of faculty mentors rose from 40 in 2009 to 54 in 2010. More KSU undergrads also are getting recognition for their research, including two students who were invited to present at an international conference this summer.

“I’m seeing a lot of students going to national conferences,” says Amy Buddie, the faculty fellow for advancing undergraduate research for KSU’s Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, which funds undergraduate research and creative activities across the university. “Students are increasingly publishing their work, which we didn’t see very much of five years ago.”

Several factors are driving the surge in research among undergrads. Faculty are encouraging students to engage in these projects, even making original research mandatory in some courses. Also, more funds have become available to fund undergraduate research. In 2007, CETL, with funds from the Office of the Provost, started offering awards for undergraduate research — to both professors and students — and now awards $30,000 a year through various funding programs. Colleges and departments — the College of Science and Mathematics awards mentor-protégé grants of up to $2,000 for supplies and equipment and up to $1,200 in travel expenses for research projects involving collaboration between professors and students — are also providing financial support to undergraduates in their research endeavors. And, as KSU faculty become more successful at garnering external grants from prestigious sources such as the National Science Foundation, undergrads are poised to benefit too.

“Eight to 10 years ago many professors were doing research by themselves or they weren’t doing research at all,” says Buddie, an associate professor of psychology who cherishes mentoring student-researchers. “Now there is a growing interest in involving undergraduates in their research.”

Biochemistry professors Carol Chrestensen (front left) and Jonathan McMurry (front right) in a lab with three undergrad researchers, Emily Rye (left), Josh Francis and Allan Johansen.
There is no research requirement for most KSU undergrads. But some choose to work one-on-one with a faculty mentor, for credit, in a research project of their liking. Others help out professors who are working on externally funded research in the lab or on the field. And yet some, like anthropology majors taking Smith's forensic anthropology class, are required to conduct original scholarly work. When she started teaching the class in 2005, she gave students the option of doing a research project. But one semester after she saw the high level of interest, Smith decided to make the research project mandatory for all students.

Seven of her eight students in spring 2010 presented at the International Journal of Arts & Sciences hosted by the College of the Arts’ director of jazz studies. The research teaches students how new knowledge is discovered. "It opened my eyes," Karonji says. "There are more opportunities to advance yourself academically than you think.”

"I got my very first playing gig at the age of 15," Skelton said. "From that day on he played every day until the day he died," Skelton recalled.

Sam Skelton is the kind of guy who uses words like "cool" and "groovy" and laughs heartily when a student shares that he was born the same year — 1991 — Skelton began teaching.

As a woodwind doubler — a musician who plays multiple woodwind instruments — Skelton plays the saxophone, clarinet and flute. His versatility has made him a sought-after musician, both for live performances and in the studio. He has performed with the London Symphony Orchestra, the Atlanta Symphony, the Atlanta Pops, the Peachtree Pops, the Atlanta Ballet Orchestra and the Cobb Symphony Orchestra. In the studio, he has performed on more than 160 recordings, as well as in television and radio jingles for the Georgia Lottery, The Weather Channel, the Travel Channel, Ford, Subway, the Cartoon Network and CNN, among others.

But for Skelton, playing jazz is more than a way to pay the bills. It is a culture that must be preserved. "Jazz is the only American art form, so we have to keep it alive," he said. "We've just got to keep it rolling."
A Life with Meaning

By Cheryl Anderson Brown

Despite physical limitations, Jessica Blinkhorn ‘05 shares her unique vision of the world

Meaning

“Come Hither,” a graphite drawing by Jessica Blinkhorn

“Meaning”

Despite physical challenges created by spinal muscular atrophy, Jessica Blinkhorn, earned a bachelor’s in art from KSU in 2005.

Most artists work their entire careers without being profiled on National Public Radio or ABC News. At 31, Jessica Blinkhorn is an exception. In fact, she is an exception in nearly every way.

She first showed artistic talent as a three-year-old drawing on her parents’ walls. Angry at first, they were quickly impressed to see an extraordinary skill level for such a young child.

Growing up, Blinkhorn committed herself to artistic excellence and was eventually accepted into the drawing and painting program at Kennesaw State University. She received her bachelor’s in 2005 before going on to Georgia State University for a Master of Fine Arts. Over the years, however, she has had to adapt her technique because of challenges faced by few other artists.

Diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), Blinkhorn barely learned to walk before she lost that ability. Her body is in a constant state of degeneration and the condition may eventually take her life.

But, Blinkhorn has a no-nonsense approach to her art, her life and her own mortality. “Everyone dies,” she says. That attitude is reflected in the stark realism of her art. She has documented her life, often realistically depicting her tattooed, pierced and degenerating body. The work is honest and unapologetic, whether addressing the harnesses required to move her from her bed to the shower or the frustration of finding romance.

“I want my work to reference my life,” she says. “I want it to say something, to mean something.” She emphasizes these points in a short documentary about her called “Grounded by Reality” that is making its way around film festivals, having won accolades earlier this year in Toronto.

“As the years progress, so too does the severity of her disabilities,” says her friend and former mentor, KSU art professor Joe Remillard. “Her stunning drawings are becoming smaller. That is not a setback for Jessica, just another challenge.”

As spinal muscular atrophy increasingly limits her ability to move her arms or hold a pencil, Blinkhorn has expanded her repertoire by adding poetry and performance. She emphasizes she will always find a way to be creative, even if she has to attach a pencil to her head to draw.

Her drawings may have become smaller, but her reach has become broader. She has been invited to install solo exhibitions at The Mattress Factory and at Castlereberry Hill as well as several group shows including the recent 7th Biennial Alumni Exhibition at KSU. She also stays busy with art commissions, but she hopes to evolve her career to include more teaching opportunities, a creative outlet she discovered as a graduate student.

“I want to be a teaching artist,” she says, adding that her students quickly overcome their initial surprise when she rolls into the classroom. “Once they realize that I know about drawing and painting, it changes their perspective.”

By sharing her unique vision of the world with her students and through her art, Blinkhorn is ensuring that her life will indeed “mean something.”
At commencement last July, Kennesaw State awarded its first-ever doctoral degree. In front of thousands of guests at the Convocation Center, high school calculus teacher James Clinton “Clint” Stockton was hooded, and extolled, after completing a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in Teacher Leadership for Learning. Several weeks later, as the 2010-2011 academic year kicked off, 18 students from 14 countries arrived on campus to start advanced studies in international conflict management. The students, reflecting a wide range of professional backgrounds and international experiences, are KSU’s first Ph.D. students.

KSU is now among an elite group of U.S. universities that offer doctoral degrees. Since it launched its first doctorate, the Ed.D., in January 2007, KSU has started offering a Doctor of Business Administration (D.B.A.), a Doctor of Nursing Science (D.N.S.) and a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) — the highest academic degree offered in U.S. higher education — in international conflict management. There are currently 115 doctoral students enrolled at KSU, and the numbers are expected to keep growing over the next few years as word gets out and more programs are added.

“This is a tremendous step into becoming a nationally recognized institution of higher learning,” said President Daniel S. Papp.

More professional doctoral programs in various disciplines — such as computer science — are in the works, as the University System of Georgia is interested in having Kennesaw State become a more robust doctoral-granting institution, said interim Provost W. Ken Harmon. In fact, developing new doctoral programs is one of the university’s top strategic priorities.

“There is increasing demand for doctoral education in many sectors, and KSU now has reached a point where we have the faculty and facilities to respond to that demand,” Harmon said. “KSU has a strategic initiative to develop areas of national, and even international, recognition. Doctoral education is one way to achieve this strategic goal.”

Through these initiatives, KSU offers many opportunities for students to pursue advanced degrees.

1. **Ed.D. in Teacher Leadership for Learning**
   - Designed for teacher leaders in grades K-12.
   - Focuses on developing shared leadership expertise.

2. **Ed.D. in Educational Leadership for Learning**
   - Preparing educational professionals for administrative leadership roles.

3. **D.N.S. in Nursing Science**
   - Preparing nurses to become faculty in schools of nursing.

4. **D.B.A. in Business Administration**
   - Tailored to the academic needs of highly experienced business professionals.

5. **Ph.D. in International Conflict Management**
   - Equipping students to teach at the university level and conduct research contributing to global challenges.

These programs are designed to equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary to make significant contributions in their respective fields. The University System of Georgia is interested in having Kennesaw State become a more robust doctoral-granting institution, said interim Provost W. Ken Harmon. In fact, developing new doctoral programs is one of the university’s top strategic priorities.

Graduates of these programs are well-prepared to make significant contributions to their respective fields.
By Jennifer Hafer

You may not know who Jeffrey Stepakoff is, but if you've watched television in the last 20 years, have a Disney movie fan in your household or like to read novels, chances are you know his work.

The assistant professor of film and television writing at Kennesaw State University has written or produced hundreds of hours of TV, writing for 14 series, including "Dawson's Creek." He's taught the craft to students like the famed Zambellis.

"I was 23, 24, when I packed my car and headed out West," Stepakoff recalls. "I started working almost immediately." Stepakoff was one of 29 writers recognized. KSU’s golf program had the highest ratio of athletes honored, with eight out of nine golfers receiving honors. Other varsity sports programs earning academic honors were: men’s and women’s track and field, with 57 honorees; men’s and women’s tennis, with 15; soccer and softball, with 14; baseball, men’s and women’s baseball, and men’s and women’s cross-country, with 12; and volleyball with eight.

KSU to host 2011 NCAA women’s soccer finals

The NCAA has selected KSU’s new, $16.5 million soccer stadium as the site of the 2011 Women’s College Cup, the Division I women’s soccer national semifinals and finals. The matches, which will be played in December 2011, will mark the first time the event is held in Georgia. Women’s soccer head coach Rob King led the bid effort to land the cup.

"This is great news for us. ESPN will be here televising the games live. We’re all thrilled," said King. "The new KSU Soccer Stadium is the country’s premier women’s soccer-specific stadium and we look forward to showcasing college soccer’s most prestigious event."

Owl athletes honored for academics

The Atlantic Sun Conference announced that 142 Kennesaw State student-athletes — 10 more than in the 2008-09 academic year — earned All-Academic honors last year, coming in at third best in the conference.

Every member of the men’s tennis squad — one of only five teams in the conference — earned All-Academic honors. The team was also awarded All-Academic team honors for the second consecutive year by the Intercollegiate Tennis Association, the governing body of collegiate tennis. The Owls were one of 29 teams recognized for achieving a collective 3.5 or higher grade-point average.

I am very proud of the way our team performed this semester in the classroom," said T.J. Greggs, head men’s tennis coach. "I have stressed from the beginning that our student-athletes are here first and foremost to receive a quality education. For these young men to achieve that kind of a GPA, in addition to the rigors of both fall and spring schedules for tennis, is truly amazing to me."

The women’s track and field team led the conference with 22 athletes recognized. KSU’s golf program had the highest ratio of athletes honored, with eight out of nine men golfers and four out of five women golfers receiving honors. Other varsity sports programs earning academic honors were: men’s and women’s track and field, with 57 honorees; men’s and women’s tennis, with 15; soccer and softball, with 14; baseball, men’s and women’s baseball, and men’s and women’s cross-country, with 12; and volleyball with eight.

To qualify for All-Academic honors, student-athletes must maintain a 3.0 or higher GPA during the season they compete and must be listed on the team’s final roster.

Alum Larry Nelson shares tips with KSU golfers

Members of KSU men’s and women’s golf teams sat down with golfing great Larry Nelson at the start of the fall term to talk about the importance of mental preparation. Abby Fitzgerald, a senior from Albany, echoed her sentiments. "The key thing he taught us is to be able to get the ball where you want it, when it’s the hardest thing to do. The key is being comfortable and you think maybe no one else can do it."

Nelson, a 1970 alumnus who is perhaps best known for his three PGA championships and his exciting Ryder Cup play, spent two hours talking with the team members at the Convocation Center. Still the consummate professional player, he said he enjoys sharing with young people what he has learned about the game he loves so much.

Owls men’s basketball team tours Canada

When the KSU men’s basketball team hit the road in August for a six-day, five-game Canadian tour, head coach Tony Ingle had more on his mind than wins and losses. He wanted to use the experience to prepare his players for long road trips coming up in the regular season, such as the seven straight road games the Owls face in November and December.

"The guys have to understand what the standards are," Ingle said. "We believe in being comfortable while traveling, but there are rules, curfews and things like that. These guys are coming together as a team and I saw some things during the trip that will help us in the future."

The Owls won four of the five games played against teams made up of current and former college players from Canada and the United States. The team was also able to get some sightseeing, touring the CN Tower in Toronto and taking in a Toronto Blue Jays baseball game.

"We wanted to bond on the trip, and we wanted to make good use of those 10 practice days," Ingle said. "We took nine players, and they got a lot of playing time. It was a really good opportunity. We wanted to come with an attitude and get that winning attitude back, and we did that. We competed hard."
By Sabbaye McGriff

With the publication of “Railroad Noir,” the latest in a series of evocative memoirs about a 20-year career as a brakeman and conductor on railroads throughout the West and Southwest, associate professor of English Linda Grant Niemann hopes she has finally gotten it all down on paper.

The 150-page, coffee table-style book of Niemann’s intimate stories and fine art-quality photographs by Joel Jensen capture the ethos of railroad life in America. It depicts the often dangerous, back-breaking work, the sense of loneliness and desolation workers face in seedy motels and honky-tonk bars, their dedication to craft, and the breathtaking vistas they see streaking by.

Niemann, who worked as a brakeman on the Southern Pacific and as a conductor for Union Pacific and Amtrak, has been telling the stories of railroad life and people every chance she can — in books and in dozens of articles, anthologies, readings and lectures. Her writings include three books: “Boomer: Railroad Memoirs” (University of California Press, 1990); “Railroad Voices” (Stanford University Press, 1998); and the current “Railroad Noir: The American West at the End of the Twentieth Century” (Indiana University Press, 2010).

“I keep hoping there’s not more,” says Niemann, who joined the KSU faculty in 1999 to teach creative nonfiction writing, a position that was tailor-made for her. “Once you turn 50, it’s kind of hard to be hanging off of boxcars, so I transitioned to sitting in a chair. I had always wanted to teach and write.”

With her recent book, Niemann thinks she has come to the end of writing about her experiences on the railroad, which, she says, have come to her in pieces. “But I had to tell the whole story.”

To complete the saga, Niemann tells the story poetically in the vivid vernacular of the railroad, capturing the romance and lore of the craft and exposing its darker side — workers’ struggles with alcoholism and other addictions, exhaustion, homelessness, and what she calls “inept and arbitrary authority.” “You don’t leave out the bad stuff.

“Most railroad literature is deliberately sanitized in that it’s written primarily for rail fans who almost exclusively are interested in the mechanics of it,” Niemann said. She believes enthusiasts have embraced her work because she brings “street cred” and reveals the human side of their common experience. In so doing, critics say she has expanded the genre and given it broader appeal. As Niemann observes, writers like Joseph Conrad and Herman Melville, to whom one reviewer has likened her, penned stories that captured the craft of seafaring but also told deeply psychological human stories.

Although running off to work the railroads in 1979 was a way of escaping a poor job market and five years of “living the Santa Cruz (California) party life,” it was the best thing that could have happened, said Niemann, who earned her Ph.D. from the University of California Berkeley in 1975. “It turned out to be a blessing in disguise; I found my poetic subject.”

With the third book behind her, Niemann hopes to continue her devotion to the railroad and its workers with scholarly research and writing about what she believes is a movement by the industry toward “profits over people.”

The introduction to the last chapter of “Railroad Noir” describes why she has adopted her new role as scholar/advocate:

“When I think about the deskilling of the craft, the normalizing of high turnover of workers, the attack on unions and job protection funds and the blame-the-worker safety programs, I think about the bonds of craft and human satisfaction in life that railroad life used to represent. … Surely this way of life is worth fighting for.”

Before teaching at KSU, Linda Grant Niemann worked as a railroad brakeman and conductor.
1960s

Lindsey Tippins (Business Administration ’69) won the Republican primary for a seat in the state Senate. He lives in Marietta with his wife, Ann.

1980s

Letitia Cline (M.Ed. Early Childhood Education ’89) is the principal at Avery Elementary School in Cherokee County. She previously served as principal at Boston Elementary and Canton Elementary. Cline lives in Canton.

Susan Gore Gardner (Art ’80) was awarded first place in drawing at the Northwest Georgia Artist Guild’s juried exhibit at the Marietta/Cobb Museum of Art. She was the featured artist at Gallery 4463 in Acworth. She lives in Bremen with her husband, Charles.

1990s

Jennifer Akin (Theater ’96) appeared as June Sanders in the Theatre in the Square’s production of “Mount Pleasant Homecoming” in Marietta and was profiled in the review of the show in Creative Loafing.

Keith Bryant (Social Science Education ’92) is the principal at Carmel Elementary School in Woodstock. He lives in Canton with his wife, Julie.

Joseph D. Frazier (M.S.C.M. ’96) was appointed vice chairman of the Brain and Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission. He has served on the commission since 2007 and lives in Marietta with his wife, Julie, and their daughter.

Stephen R. Janis (M.B.A. ’98) was named chief financial officer of American Health Imaging Inc. He lives in Dunwoody with his wife, Andrea.

L. Ronco Johnson (Communication ’97) qualified for the Top of the Table of the Million Dollar Round Table, an exclusive group for financial professionals. He lives in Marietta with his wife, Katherine.

Doug Jones (M.B.A. ’90), a KSU trustee, was named senior production officer of Southern Company. He and his wife, Anna, live in Atlanta.

Chad A. Massaker (Psychology ’99), managing principal of Carceron, was a finalist in the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce’s Small Business Person of the Year awards. He lives in Atlanta.

Shane McDonald (Art ’92) was named 2010 Outstanding Staff Member of the Year by the KSU College of the Arts.

Laura Olzeski (Communication ’93) and her husband, Brett, owners of the Trackside Grill, were featured in The Marietta Daily Journal for the renovation and revitalization of their restaurant in downtown Kennesaw. She and Brett live in Kennesaw.

Becky Peters (Theater ’98) created an arts outreach company in Washington, D.C. called Wandering Souls. She recently launched a fundraising campaign to support a second tour to shelters, nursing homes and community centers in the D.C. area.

2000s

Margot Potter (Theater ’96) had some of her jewelry designs included in the book “Steampunk Style Jewelry: Victorian, Fantasy, and Mechanical Necklaces, Bracelets, and Earrings,” published in April. Her blog, The Impatient Crafter, was named a Top 10 Jewelry Making Blog by Wikio.

Robert Trocina (Music ’97) conducted the Gwinnett Symphony Orchestra at Symphony on the Green in Duluth in June.

Michael Alcorn (Music Performance ’10) is pursuing a master’s in vocal performance at the College-Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati.

Anna Baxter (Psychology ’08) is the workshop coordinator for Destiny’s Daughters of Promise, a nonprofit offering self-improvement programs for young women. She lives in Marietta.

Frank Bishop (Theater ’09) is working on a master’s in theater history at Texas State University.

Jessica Blinkhorn (Art ’05) is the subject of the documentary film “Grounded by Reality,” which was honored at the Hot Docs Film Festival in Toronto this spring. Blinkhorn completed her M.F.A. at Georgia State University in May. She had a solo show, “Open: An Existence Examined,” at The Mattress Factory in Atlanta in June.

Aaron Blowers (Theater and Performance Studies ’06) was nominated for an at-large position on the Alumni Association Board of Directors. He was the sound producer for “Hedwig and the Angry Inch” at Sky City in Augusta in June.

Joie Brown (Art ’08) exhibited in the 151 Midtown Art Show presented by 14th Street Self-Storage in May.

Baxter Crane (Art ’97) has been accepted into the M.F.A. animation program at the Academy of Art in San Francisco. She also created chalk drawings on the walls of Eyedrum Gallery in Atlanta in July.

Sarah Daly (Art ’05) has been accepted into the M.F.A. painting program at the New York Academy of Art.

Jessica Forkel (Communication ’07) is assistant producer for the Vikki Locke Morning Show on B98.5FM (Cox Radio). She lives in Marietta.

Ben Goldman (Art ’06) participated in the 11th Annual Art Papers Art Auction in Atlanta and in a group exhibition, “The Blotter Show,” at Kibbee Gallery in Atlanta. Goldman, who completed his master’s in fine arts at Georgia State in May, also curated the exhibition “America” at Mint Gallery in Atlanta in July.
2000s

Ariel Gratch (Theater and Performance Studies ’03) presented at “trans.form@work: Experimental Methodologies and Interdisciplinary Challenges in Arts Research” at the University of Surrey in London in March.

Kylene Haskins (Biology ’06) graduated from the West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine with a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine degree. She plans to enter the family medicine program at Jefferson Memorial Hospital in Ranson, W.Va. She lives in Marietta.

Carole Hedrick (Theater and Performance Studies ’05) is represented by Cavalieri & Associates talent and literary agency. She has a recurring role on Disney Channel’s “The Suite Life on Deck” and appeared in the 2009 film “I Heart My Job.”

Mark Helwig (Music Education ’02) was the featured artist for Prinkipria in July. His painting, “Cthulhu” was on the cover the July issue of Prinkipria - Tales of the Fantastic.

Chad Hepler (Psychology ’10) published his first book, “Intervention: Anything But My Own Skin,” chronicling his personal battle with substance abuse. He lives in Marietta.

Ranae Kelley (Art Education ’09) had work featured at WonderRoot Gallery in Atlanta.

Rebecca King (Theater and Performance Studies ’08) appeared as Elsie in “What I Did Last Summer” at Georgia Ensemble Theater in Atlanta.

Brandon McIntyre (Marketing ’03), co-owner of the McIntyre Bakery, a family business for more than 50 years, was featured in the Lifestyle section of the Marietta Daily Journal. He lives in Dallas, Ga.

Kelly McKerman (Art ’09) was featured in the group show, “Something With Women,” honoring Women’s History Month at the New Puppy Gallery in Los Angeles, and in the group show, “Solid Gold,” at MINT Gallery in Atlanta. She had a solo show, “Fight or Flight,” at Beep Beep Gallery in Atlanta in April.

Leah McRath (Music Education ’02) performed as a featured vocalist on the Cobb Symphony Orchestra’s “A Gospel Mass,” in Marietta, in April.

Shirley Murphy (Management ’08) launched Shirley’s Helping Hands, a personal service business that assists people who are recovering from illness, surgery or injury in their own home. She also assists new mothers and patients with memory loss. She lives in Marietta.

Aswani Namale (Art ’10) received special recognition in the Yellow Pages Advertising Challenge.

Elizabeth Neidel (Theater and Performance Studies ’07) choreographed Atlanta Lyric Theatre’s “The All Night Strut” in Marietta in March. She also appeared as Cha Cha in the Georgia Ensemble Theater production of “Grease” in Roswell in April.

Chidiya O. Ohiahu (Biotechnology ’10) received a $5,000 National Society of Collegiate Scholars-GEICO graduate school scholarship. She is enrolled in the pharmacy program at Auburn University.

Melanie Rivera (Theater and Performance Studies ’04) produced and directed “Hedwig and the Angry Inch” at Sky City in Augusta in June.

Samuel Parker (Art ’04) was featured in the group exhibition, “Journey, Memory and Myth,” at Kibbee Gallery in Atlanta in April. He completed his MFA at Georgia State University in May.

Valerie Pool (Music Performance ’04) was the music director for “Hedwig and the Angry Inch” at Sky City in Augusta in June.

Richard Schneider (Criminal Justice ’09), an analyst for the Georgia Governor’s Office of Consumer Affairs – Criminal Investigations Division, gave a presentation about KSU’s undergraduate criminal justice program at the Academy of Behavioral Profiling’s meeting in Toledo, Ohio in August.

Katrina Scoggins (Music Performance ’03) performed a solo recital at the Cherokee County Arts Center in Canton. She appeared as Marian Paroo in the Town Lake Players production of “The Music Man” in Woodstock in May.

Michelle Scott (Art ’07) was selected as one of seven “Featured Artists of 2010” in the summer issue of Visual Overture Magazine.

James Clinton Stockton (Ed.S. Leadership for Learning ’08, Ed.D. Teacher Leadership ’10) received KSU’s first doctoral degree at summer commencement. He is a calculus teacher at Kennesaw Mountain High School and lives in Woodstock.

Ellen Lyle Taber (M.A.P.W. ’00) was awarded the annual Georgia Writer of the Year Award by the Georgia Writers Association for a book she co-authored titled “Tybee Days: One Hundred Years on Georgia’s Playground Island.” She lives in Roswell.

Samantha Wasdin (M.Ed. Early Childhood Education ’08), a teacher at Sky View Elementary, was featured in the The Marietta Daily Journal. She lives in Woodstock.

Karen Wurl (Theatre and Performance Studies ’01) completed an M.F.A. degree from in May.

Janie Hitchcock Young (Theater and Performance Studies ’05) performed in “Seasons of Love VIII” at the 14th Street Playhouse in Atlanta and the Epidemic Theater’s “All in the Timing” in Marietta in March. She also performed in Onion Man Production’s “Harvest 2010, The Backyard Plays” at Lionheart Theater in Norcross in June.
He works with ESPN, Fox, CBS, and his phone rings all day long. Drees has coordinated live shots for five Super Bowls, two World Cups and two Olympics, and his work has earned him four regional Emmy awards. At the 2010 Super Bowl, Drees was responsible for coordinating the live feed of soldiers serving at Camp Eggers in Kabul, Afghanistan. As CBS carried the broadcast live from Sun Life Stadium in Miami, a shot of servicemen listening to Carrie Underwood sing the national anthem played on the stadium’s giant screens. “When I’m done, I’ve completed something important,” Drees says. “It’s rewarding ‘cause you make a lot of people happy.”

Drees joined Crawford Communications two years after graduating from KSU in 2002. He is now getting a second bachelor’s degree in professional sales from KSU. “Part of my job is selling a story,” he says. “You’ve got to sell yourself and the story.”

KSU alum brings together sport teams and U.S. soldiers serving abroad

Owls2 celebrates married alumni

The Kennesaw State University Office of Alumni Affairs and Alumni Association have launched new initiatives to celebrate alumni milestones and keep alumni connected with their alma mater. With more than 700 married couples that have graduated from Kennesaw State University, love was definitely in the air as many students met their better halves during their time spent at KSU. Hence, the KSU Office of Alumni Affairs and the Alumni Association have launched Owls2, a new program celebrating married alumni. This special group was not only created for alumni couples who met as KSU students, but for those who may have met before or after attending KSU. In addition to date night and Valentine’s Day activities, Owls2 group members will receive special communications from the university and Alumni Association throughout the year. Select couples who want to share their KSU love stories may also be featured in the Owl Love You Forever section of the KSU alumni website.

Monday, Jan. 24
Networking Reception
5:30 to 7:30 p.m.
Hyatt Regency Suites, Windy Hill
Hors d’oeuvres and soft drinks provided
Hosted by the Hyatt Regency Suites

Thursday, Feb. 24
Networking Reception and Basketball Game
5:30 to 7:30 p.m.
Hospitality Suite, KSU Convocation Center
Hors d’oeuvres and soft drinks provided
Hosted by KSU Athletics

Friday, March 18
Networking Reception at the Earl Strand Theatre, Marietta
5:30 to 7:30 p.m.
Hors d’oeuvres and soft drinks provided
Hosted by the College of the Arts

Monday, April 25
Networking Reception
5:30 to 7:30 p.m.
California Dreaming, Kennesaw
Hors d’oeuvres and soft drinks provided
Hosted by California Dreaming

For more information or to R.S.V.P. visit us online at www.kennesaw.edu/alumni

Likewise, alumni parents can share birth announcements with the Office of Alumni Affairs so that their newest family addition also can be highlighted on the KSU alumni website. In addition to receiving a KSU Future Alumnus onesie from The Alumni Association, programming for the Baby Alumni group will lend alumni parents additional support and incentives throughout baby’s first year, including first-year parenting classes and a photo session to capture a first-year moment with a discount photo package option.

For more information about these programs, or to submit information for Owls2 or Baby Alumni, contact Caryn Young at 770-423-6333 or cyoung48@kennesaw.edu.

Alumni News

By Aixa M. Pascual

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Christopher Drees (Marketing ’02) always dreamed of working for the Atlanta Braves or another major professional sports team. But his career has taken him beyond his wildest dreams. Today, he works with most of the country’s major professional sports teams. He is busiest during the Super Bowl and football season. And yes, things were hectic during this summer’s World Cup. “I can’t think of any NFL or MLB team that I haven’t worked with,” Drees quips.

As a sports media specialist with telecommunications giant Encompass Digital Media (formerly Crawford Communications), Drees brings together U.S. sports teams and the thousands of U.S. military personnel serving overseas — coordinating live shots from Afghanistan and Iraq that are transmitted at sports events across the country. “It’s them being a part of the sporting event in the U.S.,” says Drees.

He works with ESPN, Fox, CBS, and his phone rings all day long. Drees has coordinated live shots for five Super Bowls, two World Cups and two Olympics, and his work has earned him four regional Emmy awards.

Onesies for little Owlsies

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