

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

# UPSTATE

ALUMNI & FRIENDS MAGAZINE

FALL 2023

## Good *Neighbors*



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**Making Good**  
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**GOOD NEIGHBORS - 12**

*USC Upstate partnerships in the city of Spartanburg are helping to improve the lives of residents.*

**ALUMS MAKING GOOD - 24**

*Upstate graduates are finding meaning and purpose in serving others.*

# Good Neighbors



*“Every day I see our students stepping up as servant leaders.”*



## Message from the Chancellor

**Servant leadership** is a concept I talk about often, and a concept I try to embody every day in my work as chancellor of the University of South Carolina Upstate. Focusing on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong, this leadership model puts the needs of others first and makes us all stronger, better, and more connected for doing so.

Every day I see our students stepping up as servant leaders by participating in campus organizations and activities that connect us to the broader community. These students are making a major difference in the issues of homelessness, education, health care, and other areas of concern for the Upstate.

Here are just some examples of the USC Upstate community's commitment to servant leadership:

We are part of the **Racial Equity and Economic Mobility (REEM)** Commission in Greenville, which convenes around matters of social justice and disparities that impact the Black community in Greenville County.

Our **South Carolina Centro Latino** (El Centro) programs in interdisciplinary studies, the public humanities, and translation and community interpreting help build bridges to belonging, civility, and equity.

**IMPACT** is a student-led service organization that connects students with the Upstate community through bi-monthly service projects that address local issues. Members participate in direct service, explore diverse societal needs, and develop leadership skills.

Our **partnerships** with the United Way have helped address poverty, economic gaps, and inequality issues, and our partnerships with NAACP branches across the state have improved voter participation among minority and youth voters.

Our **students and faculty** are cultivating relationships with community organizations and building awareness of our campus. They are working side-by-side with the public to improve our cities, our state, our country, and our world. The same is true of so many of our alums.

In this issue of the magazine, you will have the opportunity to learn more about our campus partnerships with community organizations, and the good work being done by our alumni. I hope you enjoy these stories about servant leadership, connection, and impact. I could not be more proud of our Spartans.



Go Spartans!

Bennie L. Harris, Ph.D.  
Chancellor

## Upstate Magazine

FALL/WINTER 2023

Volume 5, Issue 1

*A magazine for alumni and friends of the  
University of South Carolina Upstate*

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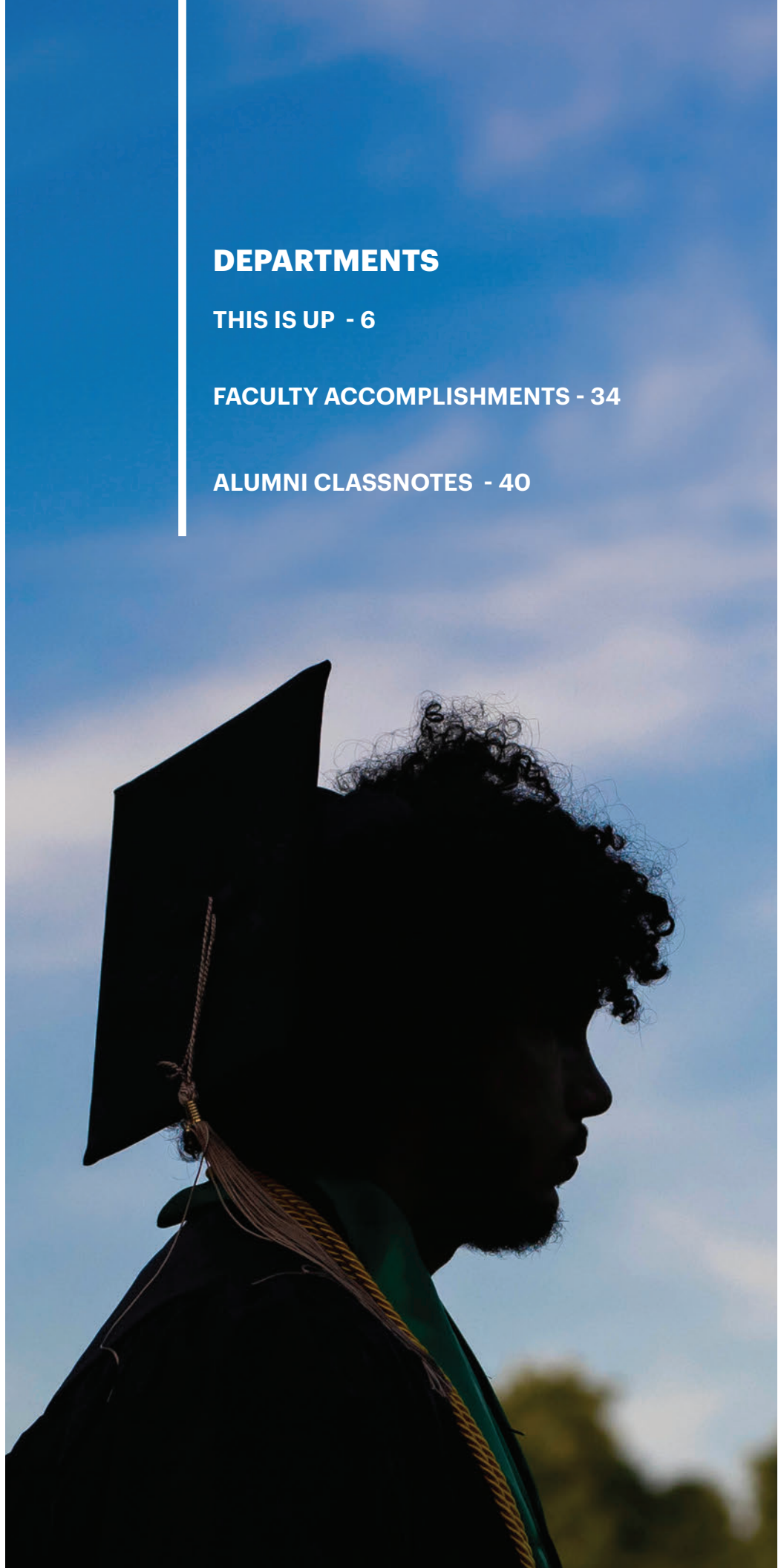
Upstate Magazine is published by the  
USC Upstate Office of Marketing and  
Communications. Diverse views appear in these  
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## DEPARTMENTS

**THIS IS UP - 6**

**FACULTY ACCOMPLISHMENTS - 34**

**ALUMNI CLASSNOTES - 40**



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## Homing in on Data

**A**laina Dingwell, '23, and Tenille Black weren't exactly sure what they wanted to do in the next chapter of their careers when they entered the Master of Business Analytics program at USC Upstate.



Tenille Black

An assistantship program with real estate company Zillow earlier this year was key to helping them discover what they loved about data.



Alaine Dingwell '23

The program was an opportunity for business analytics students to work on teams at Zillow, where they could apply what they were learning in class to real-world projects. Dingwell and Black say doing a deep-dive into data and analyzing customer behaviors and experiences helped build their technical skills.

"As great as our classes have been, and as much as we've learned from them, there's still that limitation of getting a lot of data to work with at a time," Dingwell says. "So having that experience of working with really big data was something that the classroom wasn't able to offer me."

Black agrees, adding that the assistantship lent an immediacy to what they were studying. "I know in a lot of classrooms, they'll say, 'When you get to the corporate world, this will happen,'" Black says. "This kind of closed that gap really quickly. You get to Zillow and you're like, oh yeah, that's exactly what they meant."

Black, who had worked as a teacher assistant since getting her

degree in economics from North Carolina A&T in 2011, always knew she wanted a job focused on research. When she learned about the field of business analytics, it gave her interest a name and a direction to go for her career reset. The Zillow assistantship confirmed she had chosen the right path.

"I really want to keep the momentum going and look for more assistantships," Black says. "This has definitely been a confidence booster."

For Dingwell, who had discovered an interest in analytics while working at a library after graduating from USC in Columbia with a French degree, the assistantship helped her figure out what area she liked. Initially she thought she'd love doing data visualization, but she realized she much preferred SQL, a standard language used in programming and database management.

"It really helped to clarify what type of job I want and what skills I would want to use at that job," Dingwell says.

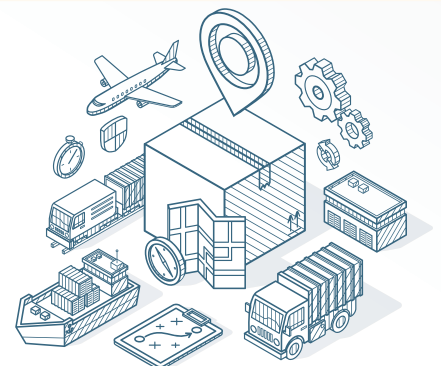
## Analyze This

**C**ountless storms and a pandemic have shown how supply-chain disruptions can quickly wreak havoc on the availability of everything from groceries to auto parts.

So when BMW representatives met with the interim dean and faculty at the Johnson College of Business and Economics last year to explore potential partnerships, they saw an opportunity to gain insights on that logistics issue with help from the graduate program in business analytics.

Throughout the spring 2023 semester, students worked in teams to examine the impact of weather on BMW's global supply chain. Each team created dashboards that they shared with the company in a final presentation. BMW was pleased with the results, and decided to use them to create a prototype through the Center for Business Analytics and Community Research (CBACR) at the business school.

That outcome highlights how partnerships between businesses and the university can be mutually beneficial, says Uma Gupta, director of business analytics at JCBE. Students get real-world experience, while organizations get access not only to student talent, but also, through the center, faculty experts in data analysis and research. "Our philosophy at CBACR is based on reciprocity, where individuals and organizations are participants, not just clients, in our work," says Sam Cooper, director of the center.





# Know your Enemy

Research to examine how coronaviruses spread in the body.

**A**nita Nag, associate professor of chemistry, received a \$406,500 award from the National Institutes of Health to support research on the SARS coronavirus. Nag and her research colleagues at the University of South Carolina and USC's Greenville School of Medicine are seeking to understand how a viral protein in the SARS virus selectively takes control of a cell's machinery to help itself spread.

Upstate students will also benefit from the grant. "This funding will not only support our research but also provide a unique learning experience for three undergraduate students each semester, fostering their scientific growth and preparing them for future careers in the field," Nag says.



## First Glance

Library expansion coming soon.

**A** new chapter in Library history is about to be written. In early spring 2024, the university will break ground on an annex to the 46-year-old building that will provide modernized multipurpose spaces for classes or meetings and potentially student support services. The 22,000-square-foot facility will be built adjacent to the Library, and is being funded by monies approved by the state legislature in fiscal years 2022 and 2023.

The second floor of the Library will also be renovated as part of the process. Existing rooms will be repurposed for the university archives, study rooms, and a digital commons lab. The work is scheduled to be completed by the start of the fall 2025 semester.

**22,000**  
SQ. FEET OF ADDITIONAL  
ACADEMIC SPACES

**\$21 Mil.**  
INVESTMENT IN  
LIBRARY EXPANSION



^ Photo: Refika Turgut, third from left, assistant professor of education, works on a coding exercise with Spartanburg elementary school teachers.

## Code Ed

Teachers learn how to add STEM lessons to their classes.

**A** group of Spartanburg-area elementary teachers went back to school in July to learn how to code. Thanks to a grant from the National Science Foundation secured by Refika Turgut, assistant professor of education, the teachers developed the skills to teach coding using small robots. The weeklong program also included instruction on how to integrate coding activities and a linguistically inclusive curriculum into the classroom.

Turgut will continue to work with the teachers throughout the year to implement the lessons. She notes starting with young children ensures they get a strong foundation in an essential skill. "At the elementary school level, coding skills are crucial for fostering problem-solving abilities and enabling students to understand the practical applications of technology in addressing real-world problems."

## The Doctor Is In

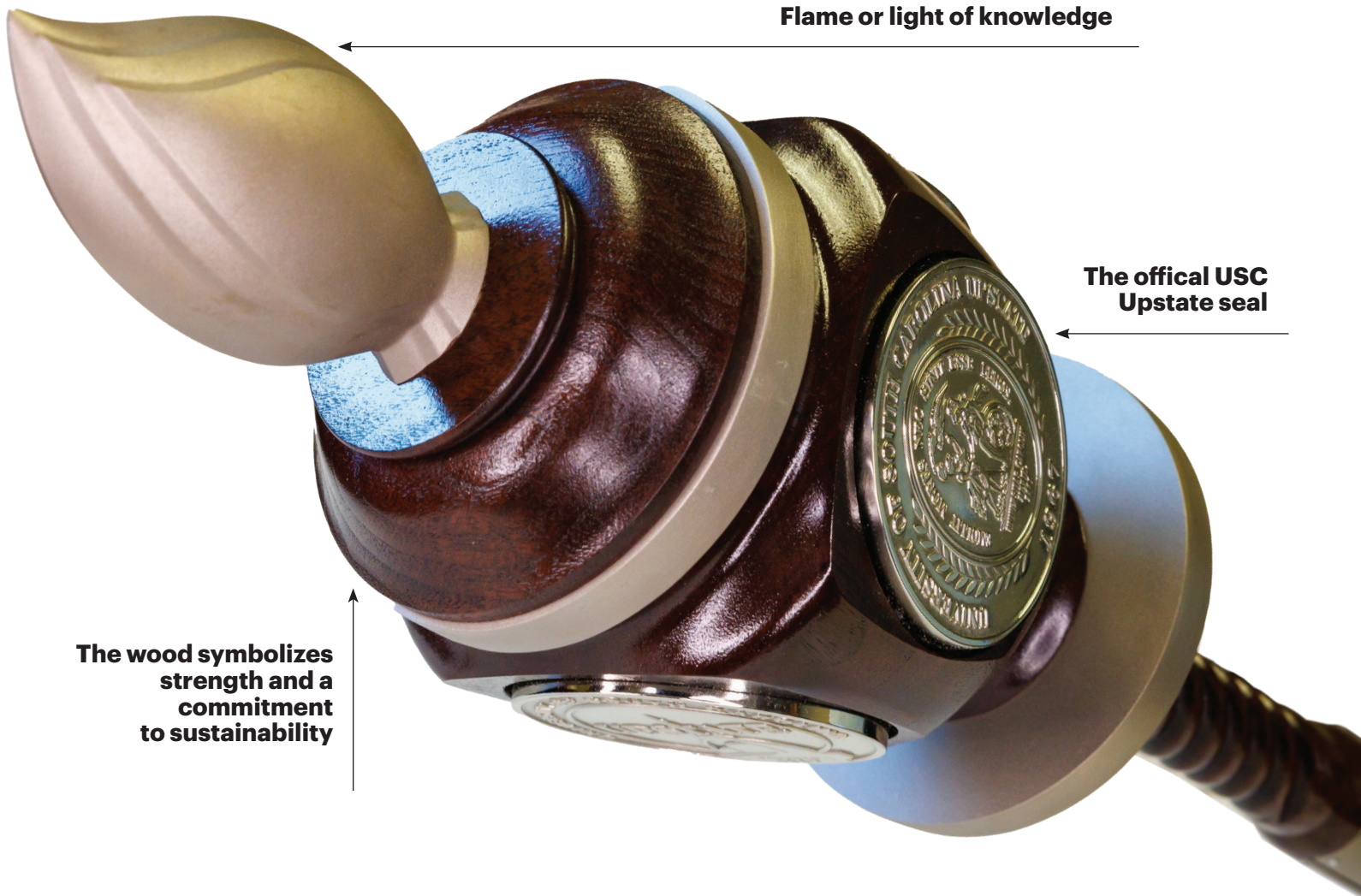
USC Upstate adds advanced nursing degree.

**R**egistered nurses looking to have a leadership or policy role in health care can now enroll in the Doctor of Nursing Practice program at USC Upstate. The advanced degree gives working nurses the expertise and leadership training to improve health care in their communities.

Graduates of the program will be prepared to serve in roles that plan and implement evidence-based programs that lead to better care outcomes for the population. Training also includes the development of organizational and information management skills and an understanding of health care policy. DNs often focus on underserved communities and on fostering partnerships that can reduce health disparities through preventative care.

**Interested in earning your doctorate?**





Flame or light of knowledge

The official USC Upstate seal

The wood symbolizes strength and a commitment to sustainability

# Something Old, Something New

Mace Makes it Debut.

**F**or the first time in its 56-year history, USC Upstate opened a ceremony with its own mace. The mace, which debuted at new student convocation on Aug. 20, is a traditional symbol of a university's peaceful governing authority. It is used for all official proceedings, such as graduations and convocations. When placed on its stand, it signals an event has begun, and when removed, that the event has ended.

At the top of USC Upstate's mace is a silver flame representing the light of knowledge. On the head is the official university seal, along with an image of the main Administration Building, the original building on campus. These marks represent USC Upstate's history and the possibilities that lie ahead. The shaft is crafted from wood, signifying the strength of the university and its commitment to sustainability.



^ Student Government Association President V'dell Carter prepares to carry the USC Upstate mace out of the G.B. Hodge Center at the end of the 2023 Convocation ceremony in August.



# Formula for Learning

More students were able to take part in paid summer research this year after USC Upstate's ER(Up)T program received a \$50,000 award from Power:Ed. Students who take part in the program are paid \$3,800 for their full-time eight-week internship with Upstate faculty. They also participate in career development workshops and have opportunities to present their research at local and regional conferences.

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# Good *Neighbors*

How USC Upstate is making  
generational change possible  
in its hometown.

By Elizabeth Anderson



## Community engagement and generational investments are critical, and align exceptionally well with our mission.”

- Chancellor Bennie Harris

The Franklin School on the city of Spartanburg’s Northside doesn’t look like a research laboratory.

Its glass-paneled front, natural landscaping, and bright classrooms with age-appropriate furniture and play areas are what you might expect to find at a new school for very young children.

But the school, a collaborative effort launched in 2019 that includes the Northside Development Group, Spartanburg Academic Movement, USC Upstate, Spartanburg County First Steps, and Spartanburg District 7, was founded as a learning laboratory. Its students, many from underserved communities, benefit from the latest methods of early education while also providing teachers with data about how young minds develop.

“The concept is very new to South Carolina – a school for 0 to 4,” says Nur Tanyel, distinguished professor emerita who remains active with USC Upstate and the Franklin School. “Northside was selected because of area children being at risk. The other benefit for Northside is that now parents see and understand what a quality education looks like.”

USC Upstate’s involvement in the Franklin School is just one way the university is helping to invest in Spartanburg communities that have been overlooked in the past. Through partnerships in the Northside and Highland, another high-poverty neighborhood in Spartanburg, USC Upstate faculty and students are supporting and developing programs



^ Children dig into gardening at the Franklin School during a visit by Hub City Farmers Market

in education, business, public safety, and community health that can improve quality of life. These contributions transform the lives of not only residents, but of future generations as well, according to USC Upstate Chancellor Bennie L. Harris.

“Community engagement and generational investments are critical, and align exceptionally well with our

mission,” Harris says. “From the very beginning, when we started as a nursing program, we were investing in the health and wellness of the community. Higher education has been a critical part of the region moving from textiles to other industries like manufacturing, life sciences and health care, and USC Upstate has participated in that.”

## EARLY START

One area affected by that economic shift was Spartanburg's Northside neighborhood. During the city's textile heyday, the Northside was a thriving mill community. The collapse of the industry gradually led to the neighborhood's decline and rising crime rates. More than 50% of children in the area live in poverty, according to census data.

But in 2013, residents, city officials, and nonprofits came together to create a redevelopment plan for the neighborhood and restore its vibrancy. The coalition became the Northside Development Group, and it continues to collaborate with Spartanburg colleges and universities, including USC Upstate, Wofford College, and the Via College of Osteopathic Medicine.

The Franklin School was born of such a partnership. The early childhood education programs housed at the school share the goal of increasing kindergarten readiness for children, but particularly for those zoned for the Cleveland Academy of Leadership on the Northside, one of the city's highest poverty elementary schools. By giving children a solid educational grounding from birth, education leaders hope students will continue to perform well as they progress through school.

But it isn't just children who benefit from the Franklin School. Shawna Bynum, '18, director of the school, says teachers get plenty of feedback and support throughout the year so they can see what works well and what can be improved. Every class at the school is recorded for future research purposes, and each week Tanyel meets with a different teacher to review footage of a particular day and reflect together on what they're seeing.

"It really helps with the training we do," Bynum says. "I want the teachers to look at it not as something punitive, but as an opportunity for growth."

The school was also built with observation rooms, where USC Upstate students majoring in early childhood education can watch what's going on without distracting the children. Tanyel says it's an invaluable resource for her students, who get to see the developmental trajectory of children at their most critical period. "This opportunity is cutting-edge research learning for our students," Tanyel says.

The commitment of teachers and administrators to the school has carried over to parents, too. "Our family engagement here is phenomenal," Bynum says. Staff and parents work as a team, sharing observations from home and school that encourage a child's growth. "If we want to be able to make changes, we have to be intentional about developing relationships with the parent," Bynum says.



Top, Dana Holland, '99, M.Ed. '21, a teacher at the Franklin School, helps a student learn to write her name. Below, Markeisha Morgan, '18, plays with one of the children during outdoor time.



**“As a university, we have the privilege of being able to impact communities. We have all this expertise, and as much as we love giving it to our students, we can use it in other ways beyond just publishing papers and standing in a classroom.”** - Elise Harvey

## GROWING BUSINESS

**A**nother goal of the Northside Initiative is increasing economic opportunity for residents. More than 80% of Northside residents are African American, and nearly 42% of households are below the poverty level. The Start:ME program, a partnership between USC Upstate and the Northside Development Group modeled on a program at Emory University, provides 14 weeks of free training to budding entrepreneurs with ties to the Northside.

Elise Harvey, director of Start:ME and assistant professor of marketing at the George Dean Johnson Jr. College of Business and Economics, says the program aims to empower people to create their own businesses. Rather than recruit a large outside employer to come into the neighborhood, “We’re going at it from the ground up, instead of the top down,” Harvey says.

Fifteen applicants are selected every year, and receive intensive instruction on all aspects of running a business, from creating a business plan and applying for loans to marketing their services and building networks.

Mentors from the community volunteer their time to provide advice and guidance, and at the end of the program participants pitch their businesses for a chance to receive grant money.

Since the program’s first session in 2017, 108 Spartanburg residents have taken part, 80% of them women and 94% of them minority business owners. That’s not only good for the community, Harvey says, but for the university as well.

“As a university, we have the privilege of being able to impact communities,” she says. “We have all this expertise, and as much as we love giving it to our students, we can use it in other ways beyond just publishing papers and standing in a classroom.”

**15**

ENTREPRENEURS  
SELECTED EACH  
YEAR

**108**

SPARTANBURG  
RESIDENTS  
PARTICIPATED

**80%**

WOMEN

**94%**

MINORITIES

# Start:ME



^ Shana Soberanis, pictured with her son Trevor Pinckney, got help with her nail salon for men, The Man Cave, through her participation in the Start:ME program.

**// We're not looking at people who are making millions of dollars, but people who are setting themselves up to be able to pass the business down or pass on some of that generational wealth to their children."**

- Elise Harvey

Shana Soberanis, owner of The Man Cave in Spartanburg, is one of the beneficiaries of that knowledge. Soberanis had opened her nail salon for men in 2021, but was looking for ways to market it. She says Start:ME helped her with that and much more.

"There were a lot of networking opportunities that I got from the program," Soberanis says. "And the financial piece was critical. Just understanding the importance of cash flow statements and other financial statements for operating and expanding the business was crucial to continued success."

Like many small business owners, Soberanis says she did everything on her own when she started out. "I was the CPA, I was the attorney, I was everything," she says. The program "made me realize that it's OK to spend money to earn money."

Harvey notes that one of the most important outcomes of Start:ME is giving people a chance to build something for their families. "We're not looking at people who are making millions of dollars, but people who are setting themselves up to be able to pass the business down or pass on some of that generational wealth to their children."

## WORK IN PROGRESS

**T**he investment in Spartanburg's Northside is already showing results, with new housing, retail, a farmers market and parks transforming formerly blighted properties. But on the city's southern side, change has been slower to come.

Like Northside, the Highland neighborhood was once a thriving African American community. Most homes were single family, and church was a central part of resident life. During the 1950s, however, public housing was concentrated in the area under the guise of urban renewal, and crime and blight rose.

Concerned residents came together with city agencies in 2016 to develop a renewal plan for the neighborhood. The Highland Neighborhood Plan, approved in 2020, laid out recommendations that included removing some of the most decrepit public housing and replacing it with a mix of rentals and single-family homes.

Since that time, one public housing complex has been demolished and a second is scheduled to be razed by the end of the year. New townhomes also have been constructed. While the change has helped, and crime is down overall, the Spartanburg Police Department's crime report for 2022 shows most violent crime in the city remains concentrated in Highland, particularly around the public housing that remains.

It's a problem Michele Covington, associate professor of criminal justice and executive director of Greenville programs, is helping Highland residents address. In 2021, Spartanburg received a \$1 million grant from the Department of Justice to fund community-based crime reduction efforts in Highland. Covington, who is acting as a research partner on the grant, is analyzing the types of crimes in the neighborhood and how they can be prevented. But resident feedback is driving the process.

<sup>^</sup> Above Michele Covington, director of the Upstate Crime Analysis Center, reviews plans for security cameras in Highland with Jarvis Harris of the Bethlehem Center.  
<sup>∇</sup> Below, Covington and Harris meet with Jamie Smith, Highland neighborhood project manager for the city of Spartanburg, and contractors about the camera installations.



"More importantly for this program is what the community wants to see and how the community feels about it," Covington says. Crime reports tell part of the story, but they don't take residents' daily experiences into account. "We talk to the residents to find out what they see and what they're worried about," Covington explains. "We want to make sure we're covering all our bases."

Violent crime is a concern for many of the people she's talked to, Covington says, particularly related to drugs or weapons but also domestic



**“More importantly for this program is what the community wants to see and how the community feels about it.”**

- Michele Covington



# This is their neighborhood.

**It really is mostly about what makes them comfortable and safe.”**

- Michele Covington

abuse. Her work includes identifying areas where changes to the physical environment can help – cutting back brush, adding lighting, or installing security cameras, for example.

Jarvis Harris, community engagement services coordinator at the Bethlehem Center, Highland’s community center, didn’t grow up in Highland, but spent time there with friends when he was younger. Harris says he’s noticed a lot less drug and gang violence than there used to be, and he’s glad the grant is opening up opportunities for the community.

“It’s very family oriented here, and there’s a lot of culture,” Harris says. Investing in Highland is “giving this community a better quality of life, giving them resources that other parts of the city of Spartanburg have access to.”

Covington is sensitive to residents’ desire to improve safety without being under constant surveillance. Distrust of law enforcement is high, and adding security cameras raises privacy concerns for many residents. To mitigate some of those fears, the university’s Upstate Crime Analysis Center, which Covington directs, will house any data collected and limit law enforcement access to emergency situations.

“We’ve done a lot of assessing of what people are comfortable with, to try to strike that balance,” Covington says. “This is their neighborhood. It really is mostly about what makes them comfortable and safe.”





## HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

**A**nother focus of the Highland Neighborhood Plan is improving residents' health. Nearly 70% of adult residents are living in poverty, and the median income in the neighborhood is around \$12,000. Poverty rates for children under 18 are even higher, at 92%.

Access to fresh produce and healthy foods remains a challenge. Highland and surrounding neighborhoods went for three years without a nearby grocery store before a new Piggly Wiggly opened last year. Now it, too, is closing. Many residents rely on public transportation, and getting around town by bus can often take several hours. Access to bike and walking trails is also limited.

These kinds of neighborhood inequities that affect resident wellness are among the things that USC Upstate's community health program set out to address, says Kara Davis, assistant professor of community health at USC Upstate's College of Education, Human Performance, and Health. "The foundation of the program is the understanding that only about 20% of our health is determined by medical care," she says. "The other 80% is

**“Everybody needs help nowadays. You can't help everybody, but the ones we can help, seeing how grateful they are to get service, I enjoy that.”**

- Carmen Blake

determined by what we call social determinants of health.”

Those include availability and affordability of housing, access to transportation, and educational opportunities, Davis explains. “So we’re wanting to educate and provide career opportunities for students to really work in these areas to have some meaningful impacts on those social determinants that affect health overall.”

One of those students is Carmen Blake, a senior community health major. Blake, who did her required internship as an AmeriCorps volunteer, spent most of her time at the Bethlehem Center in Highland. Among her duties was assessing the needs of low-income families, and helping those who qualified for food assistance to pick out healthy choices from a list of available groceries.

Blake would also track every client served, and then follow up to see if they were interested in additional services, such as career or resume workshops. The client interaction was her favorite part of the experience.

“Everybody needs help nowadays,” she says. “You can’t help everybody, but the ones we can help, seeing how grateful they are to get service, I enjoy that.”

## SHARED MISSION

In Highland, as in the Northside, Upstate has invested in improving educational outcomes for children. But while Upstate’s involvement in the Franklin School on the Northside focuses on early learners, the university’s unique collaboration with Wofford College in Highland assists children in first through sixth grades.

Last year Inaya Thompson, ’22, a community health student, was doing an internship with the Spartanburg Housing Authority, and assisting with an after-school homework club started by Wofford at the Prince Hall public housing complex. She decided to create a supplemental program one day a week that focused on enrichment activities for the children after they’d completed their schoolwork.

Her professor, Marilyn Izzard, community outreach coordinator with the College of Education, loved the idea and wanted to ensure it continued after Thompson graduated. She approached Alysa Handelsman, assistant professor of sociology and anthropology at Wofford, about expanding the homework club to include the activities program. Now every day that the students come for homework, they also get to work on a fun project that includes an educational component.

“Getting to brainstorm with people who have that experience training students to be teachers has been a really great benefit to the program,” Handelsman says. “All of the students become our students. We’re all this team where we want everyone to grow and to thrive.”

Handelsman’s students come from a variety of majors, while the Upstate students are education majors. Sinéad Brien, assistant professor of middle level/secondary science education at USC Upstate, says the different backgrounds are one reason the collaboration is so fruitful.

“They get to learn from each other, because they have different strengths,” Brien says. Izzard notes the Wofford students used their grant-writing skills to get



additional funds for the program, while the Upstate students shared teaching techniques they learned in class.

Izzard says for many of the Upstate students, it’s the first time they’ve interacted with children from completely different backgrounds than their own. She sees the experience as important for understanding cultural differences. Behaviors that some teachers might interpret as disrespectful, for example, may be considered normal by the children. A teacher who’s aware of that can address the situation without immediately resorting to discipline, Izzard says.

“There are very few persons of color in schools teaching,” she notes. “So the best you can do is get all of the students or professors to be familiar



^ Marilyn Izzard and Sinéad Brien, at left, oversee USC Upstate students who lead enrichment activities at the Prince Hall apartments after-school program.

with the cultures we're training our students to work with. And sometimes we have to get out in the community to do that."

Sidney Keene, a senior early childhood education major, says she was a little nervous at first if the children would accept her when she began volunteering. Izzard had told her the children were very close to the students who they saw regularly, and might be wary of a stranger.

But Keene quickly bonded with the children she worked with, and ended up going to Prince Hall every week, both with her class and solo. She grew especially close to one of the older girls, who loved to braid Keene's hair and talk to her about what was going on at school or with her family.

"It was very insightful for me as an educator to experience firsthand what children do and where they go after school," Keene says. "It will help me be able to relate to them better, to know where I can help them personally, and in the classroom, to be able to meet their needs in all ways."

## LEADING BY EXAMPLE

**J**avez Henderson, director of resident services and community engagement at the Spartanburg Housing Authority (SHA), says he's proud of the program, which led to SHA being named to the 2023 Public Housing Communities Honor Roll by

the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. SHA was the only housing authority in South Carolina to receive the honor, which recognized 31 agencies nationwide for their efforts to address learning loss from COVID-19.

"This has been a great positive for our community," Henderson says. "It means the world to the students to be able to see the volunteers as students and model their behavior and see how they interact with others." And, he adds, the college students get real-world experience working with children and learning their group dynamics and behaviors.

Beyond helping young children succeed in school, the program also makes college seem more approachable and familiar to students, Brien and Izzard say. "None of the kids had heard of Upstate before our students started coming here," Brien says. "So now they have the idea there's Wofford, there's Upstate, there might be other universities around here. It becomes more on their radar to think about university."

And one day, Upstate's chancellor hopes, they may be arriving on campus as new students. Getting young people to not just think about college, but get a degree and pursue other dreams is what USC Upstate means when it talks about generational change made possible, Harris says.

"My personal mission is to inspire young people to change the world," Harris says. "Higher education is the place where I see that taking place pretty profoundly. At USC Upstate, our faculty and staff are invested in individuals so they can change not just their families, but they can change and impact other communities and families."

# Welcome to our newest alumni

May Commencement

**Families and friends gathered in the main quad on an unusually mild May evening to celebrate the Class of 2023. As cameras and cellphones clicked, USC Upstate conferred 747 undergraduate and graduate degrees.**









# Making good

Upstate alums find purpose in serving others.

**S**ervice is a part of USC Upstate's DNA. Since its founding as a nursing school, the university has always attracted students committed to giving back to others. For some graduates, that mission is deeply personal,

rooted in their own lived experiences. For others, it's a desire to make a difference for those who are most vulnerable or in need. The following pages highlight some of the ways Spartan alumni are making a difference in the lives of Upstate residents.



## Finding Their Place

Halla Banafa, '13,  
and Kat Carrig, '16

**H**alla Banafa and Kat Carrig earned their psychology degrees at USC Upstate at different times, but their career paths led them to the same location – Pendleton Place.

Banafa, director of residential youth services, and Carrig, program manager of Smith House, work with young people who have come to the facility in Greenville with housing needs. Banafa oversees Smith House, the foster home for youths ages 12-21; an emergency shelter for homeless youths; an alumni cottage; and transitional housing for young people up to age 24. Carrig manages Smith House, which has 10 beds and prepares its mostly older teen residents for independent living.

There are plenty of challenges to deal with every day, but, Banafa says, the job “brings joy to my life.”

“The best thing in the world is being able to work with them,” she says of the young people in the program.

Both Banafa and Carrig found their calling through the child advocacy studies program at USC Upstate. Banafa had always known she wanted a career helping others, and under the guidance of her faculty mentor discovered she enjoyed working with youths. Carrig, a mother of three who came back to college later in life, says a “light went on” for her after she took a child advocacy studies class.

Banafa’s first internship after graduation was with Pendleton Place, and she kept working there while she earned her master’s degree. Even while holding positions with other organizations, she’d come by to teach the teens how to drive or take them to an apartment complex to walk them through the rental process. “This agency has always been where my heart is,” she says.

Carrig, too, interned at Pendleton Place while getting her degree, and quickly connected with the people who worked there. Her duties involved evaluating programs in all areas of the organization, but it was Smith House that spoke to her the most.

“I feel like if you’re going to be in this line of work, then you need to take it pretty seriously,” Carrig says. “If I can see that the team and I are all going towards that purpose, and they are just as serious about making this difference, that is when I feel I am at my best.”

Having worked at Pendleton Place for eight years, Banafa often hears from now-adult former residents, and how their lives have changed as a result of the program. Banafa and Carrig say they witness these transformations regularly at Smith House.

One 15-year-old girl was determined to leave as soon as she turned 18, the women recall. She didn’t trust anyone and wouldn’t do her schoolwork during the COVID quarantine. One day, after an incident

that required Banafa’s intervention, the teen had had enough, and began packing her bags to leave.

It was late in the day, but Banafa went up to the girl’s room, sat down on the floor, and told her she was going to stay there until they worked this out. The girl, who seemed surprised Banafa wasn’t giving up on her, changed after that day. She caught up on her classes so she could graduate early; earned her nail technician certificate; received a promotion in one of her two jobs; and is planning to go to college.

Those “light bulb moments” are always inspiring, Banafa and Carrig say, but often it’s sharing in a teen’s small triumphs – learning how to drive, successfully cooking a meal – that makes them feel lucky to have the jobs they do.

“We love all the kids we work with,” Banafa says. “We know the things they’ve been through, and that they’re able to allow themselves to be a teenager even for a couple of minutes, that’s huge. And we get to be a part of that.”



^ Kat Carrig, '16, and Halla Banafa, '13



## Breaking the Code Midas Hampton, '15

**O**ne big question has defined the career of Midas Hampton.

Why does a person's ZIP code determine so much about their quality of life – their health, educational attainment, safety, job opportunities?

Looking for ways to eliminate disparities between communities has led Hampton on a journey that's taken him to the other side of the country and back. In his current role as founding executive director of Strategic Spartanburg, he focuses on data-based initiatives to improve the lives of Spartanburg County residents.

"I came to this work because my lived experience necessitated it for me, and it was a moral obligation," Hampton says. "For me, it wasn't like, well, that would be cool to do. It was, when I die, what would my eulogy say? And this is the work that I want to speak for me."

Hampton was born in Brooklyn, New York, but spent most of his youth growing up in Columbia. Even as a child, he wondered why there was so much poverty in his neighborhood when just a short distance away life was completely different. By the time he reached college, he thought he could make a small difference by becoming a police officer and improving the dynamics between law enforcement and the communities they police. Then he decided to aim higher and become an FBI agent.

While Hampton got his degree in criminal justice, the relentless cycle of police shootings of unarmed Black men deterred him from going into law enforcement. Instead, he packed up his car and drove across the country

to Seattle, Washington, to do a year of service for AmeriCorps VISTA.

Always central to his journey, which included a stint in Washington, D.C., was figuring out what one thing could change life for people in those disadvantaged ZIP codes. But every job peeled back another layer of the onion. He saw how academic success depended on secure housing, which in turn depended on economic opportunity. "Transportation, education, health care, the economy, getting job opportunities, all these things, were not the linchpin," he says. "They were all part of the linchpin."

Strategic Spartanburg offered Hampton the opportunity to develop a holistic approach to addressing all these issues. The organization already had a strong foundation in gathering and analyzing data, and Hampton wants to go a step further. He is building out a community research center that has two components: community-led research, where residents can ask for support on an issue that's important to them; and community-based research, where Strategic Spartanburg partners with other groups to work on areas of need identified in its data.

Those areas are significant. Transportation, child care and health equity are some of the greatest challenges Hampton says he's seen in the community. But far from feeling overwhelmed by the scope of the work, Hampton is excited about creating a robust research organization built on collaboration.

"I'm a real idealist, I root myself in the numbers, in the data," he says. "But I know we can be better."



^ Midas Hampton, '15

^ Tamieka Alston-Gibson, '07





## Practice Without Prejudice

Tamieka Alston-Gibson, '07

**T**he elderly patient was clearly ill and in need of care when she walked into the facility where Tamieka Alston-Gibson once worked. But she had an outstanding balance on her account – “it wasn’t a large one,” Alston-Gibson recalls – and was turned away.

The woman ended up hospitalized for pneumonia. That incident from early in her career inspired Alston-Gibson to dream about opening her own clinic, where she could treat any patient who needed help, whatever their circumstances.

“I truly feel that health care should be a human right,” she says. “Regardless of what your bank account looks like, your insurance looks like, or what you look like, you should be able to receive quality care.”

Alston-Gibson, a family nurse practitioner, opened Visions Medical Health Care in 2018. True to her vision, she sees a range of patients, from babies to seniors, at all ends of the financial spectrum. Twice a week she and her team also visit assisted living facilities to provide care to residents. They do house calls, too, for patients with mobility or health issues that make it difficult to leave home.

Even in the midst of the pandemic, the clinic remained open. Alston-Gibson said there were plenty of challenges, such as a shortage of protective equipment

and a few temporary closures when staff were exposed to COVID, but her team worked hard to keep seeing patients, either virtually or in drive-up visits outside.

“Care with purpose” is a core value at Visions, Alston-Gibson says. She was drawn to a nursing career early in her life, after seeing the supportive care nurses offered her uncle when multiple sclerosis immobilized him. “I just wanted to be able to help someone else the same way that they helped him,” she says.

While she’s proud of the work she’s done so far to build her clinic, Alston-Gibson isn’t done yet. In August she began an online doctoral program through Regis University focused on psychology and mental health, an area where she’s seen high patient need. “I want to be able to help in any way, and if I’m going to do it, I want to be one of the best and most knowledgeable in it,” she says.

Every second weekend, she visits the Lowcountry, where she’s from, to provide patient care there, and she hopes to eventually open a second clinic between Spartanburg and Greenville. But first she and her husband would like to open a residential care facility for those who need help with basic needs such as medication management.

“It’s important to me to be able to help those who ordinarily would get overlooked,” she says.







## Miracle Worker

Ryan Duerk, '13

**W**hen Ryan Duerk first came to Miracle Hill Ministries, he had hit rock bottom.

His life was one of “addiction and brokenness,” and he had nowhere else to turn. Now, as CEO of Miracle Hill, Duerk is dedicated to serving those who are desperate for help, just as he was years ago.

“I’m passionate about helping other people overcome the obstacles in their life,” he says. “I’m passionate about it because it changed my life. And I’m passionate about it because most people who are in the position that I was in can’t see a path forward.”

As head of a Greenville-based organization that each year serves an average of more than 335,000 meals and provides more than 200,000 beds to those experiencing homelessness, Duerk has worked in almost every area of the operation. He started as a warehouse manager, then moved into a case manager role with one of Miracle Hill’s addiction recovery programs, and eventually became director of that program.

From there he became vice president of adult ministries, managing Miracle Hill’s four adult shelters, before taking on the leadership of the entire organization three and a half years ago. “I tell people all the time, I have the best job in the world, I get paid to watch God at work in people’s lives,” Duerk says.

He recalls how the help he himself received transformed him. “I found this amazing family of counselors and case managers who just came alongside me and helped me in my brokenness.” Though he worked other jobs after his recovery, he knew he wanted to make a career out of helping others who were experiencing what he had.

When he came back to work for Miracle Hill – “I kind of begged my way in the door,” he says – he realized he’d have to get a college degree if he wanted to become a licensed counselor, his goal at the time. He attended Greenville Technical College, then transferred to USC Upstate to major in experimental psychology.

Duerk loved his time at Upstate. As an adult learner, he forged strong relationships with his professors and was inspired by his studies. But he also recognized he’d need an advanced degree in the field to have the kind of career he had envisioned, and the extra years of study weren’t practical with a wife and children now part of his life. His advisor suggested his administrative and leadership skills might be better served by an MBA, which Duerk earned at Anderson University. Both degrees have served him well in his current job, he says.

“The psychology degree helps me know how to lead our staff to offering the best care we can to the

people that come in the front doors of our facilities,” Duerk says. “And you can’t operate an organization this big without some kind of business acumen, so I use that degree every day as well.”

As big and intractable a problem as homelessness might seem, Duerk believes everyone in the community can do something to help. Indeed, he says, solutions are possible only if everyone – cities, nonprofits, the public – work together.

Something as simple as using the Miracle Hill app to direct a person in need to community resources can make a difference, Duerk says. Civic leaders also need to hear from residents advocating for policies that create more affordable housing, along with services in the area where it’s located, such as transportation, food and health care.

Growth in the Upstate is making homelessness more visible, Duerk says, as encampments formerly hidden from view are cleared out for development and the residents there forced into more public areas. That might make some people feel frustrated, even angry, but ignoring the issue isn’t an option, Duerk says.

“People should remember that every person they see is somebody’s son or daughter, brother, sister, mother, father. These are human beings that have families and hopes and dreams, just like you do.”

**“I’m passionate about helping other people overcome the obstacles in their life.**

**I’m passionate about it because it changed my life. And I’m passionate about it because most people who are in the position that I was in can’t see a path forward.”**



## The Right Equation

Shamaka Rice, '16

**A**s a math educator and tutor, Shamaka Rice knows that confidence is half the battle to mastering skills.

Some students, such as an elementary school boy who was a recent client, are eager to improve and get past their mental blocks. Others, such as a woman who aspired to take the aptitude test to join the military, first need to believe they're capable before they waded into new concepts.

Rice is happy to meet her clients wherever they are and help them reach their goals. "When I used to run track, I used to say, hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work," she says. "So if I've gotta practice the same problem 100 times and someone else only has to practice it once, great, if that puts me on the same level as them."

Rice has a seemingly inexhaustible work ethic. Her journey to entrepreneurship as the owner of iTutor grew out of tutoring she offered in the summer of 2018 while on break from her job as a Broome High School math teacher. When the pandemic hit in 2020, demand for her services soared, and continued to grow in the years following as students struggled with learning loss.

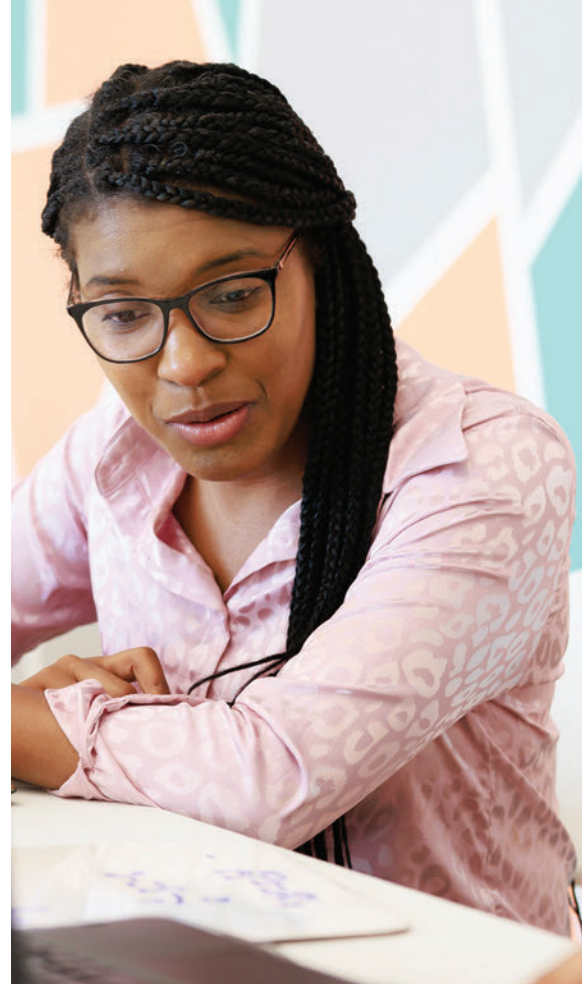
Rice quickly grew iTutor from one location to two, one in Gaffney and one in Spartanburg, and employs up to seven other tutors, depending on the semester. Half are certified teachers who come to the center after their school day is over, and the others are college students or college graduates who previously taught and

now tutor full-time. Rice says everyone has their specialty so the needs of all student clients are covered.

While Rice offers tutoring to all ages, more than half her students fall in the K-5 range. She says that reflects the toll the pandemic had on early learners, particularly with reading skills. The learning loss was even harder on students who were behind to begin with. "I feel like the only way for us to catch up would be if every single school was doing during the day what I'm doing after school with students," Rice says.

She is currently working to create small online classes, no more than four students at a time, where she can focus on a specific concept that the children are struggling with. From there students will go into breakout rooms to receive individual tutoring before returning to the group again to practice skills together. Rice says that will enable students who only see her twice a week in Spartanburg to get additional help online when she's in Gaffney. She also hopes to create a series of videos that her students could log on to review whenever they wanted.

Ultimately, Rice says, her goal is to help students learn in a way that makes sense to them, a lesson she learned in her math education classes at Upstate. "A great teacher can teach math in a way that people understand it, but the only way you can do that is if you specifically reach every student, or the majority of students, in the way that they learn," she says. "That's the beauty of tutoring in a nutshell."



^ Shamaka Rice, '16

^ Jerome Rice, '08







## Taking the Lead

### Jerome Rice, '08

**J**erome Rice was watching Barack Obama's victory speech on election night in 2008 when his oldest son turned to him and asked, "Dad, why have you never run for office?"

Given his active involvement in Spartanburg as a mentor and coach, Rice realized it was a fair question. It was the start of a political journey that's taken him from the Spartanburg City Council to the mayor's office. But it was never a path Rice envisioned for himself while growing up on Spartanburg's Northside.

"Just like any other teenage young man, I wanted to be in athletics," the mayor says with a laugh. "And if that didn't work out, I think it was a teacher. But I never saw a political spot in my future."

Rice has always been passionate about his hometown. He attended Spartanburg public schools growing up, and after losing his father as a child, he found strong male role models among his coaches, teachers, and mentors. After graduating from Spartanburg High School, he attended Wake Forest University on a football scholarship. But Rice admits he was more focused on sports than school, and eventually dropped out and came back to Spartanburg.

His former sixth-grade teacher, Judith Bazemore, was principal at Mary H. Wright Elementary School at that time, and she offered him a job "to be a little bit of everything," Rice says. In addition to being a substitute teacher, he was an attendance clerk and the in-school suspension monitor. He would even walk with kids who had been sent home so he could talk to their parents.

Rice also got involved with the Boys and Girls Club while at Mary H.

Wright, to further mentor students, and one day took a group to hear a speech by Bernice King, daughter of Martin Luther King Jr. Bernice King commended all the young African Americans who were graduating from colleges and universities and moving on to big cities, Rice recalls, but she concluded by asking, "Who will be here to take care of your home?"

"I truly thought she was talking directly to me," Rice says. "In the early '90s, the climate of our community and these kids really needing that male role model, it just kind of hit home with me."

Rice, who had always dreamed of moving to Atlanta, decided to stay and make a difference. He noticed the toll the crack cocaine epidemic had taken on the area, and young people's low degree attainment. He also lost a good friend and mentor, Ernest Rice (no relation), in a parking lot shooting following a church basketball game.

Following his conversation with his son in 2008, Rice began exploring a potential council run. He had recently received his bachelor's degree at USC Upstate in interdisciplinary studies, fulfilling a long-held goal of completing his college degree and showing his children – and the young people he mentored – the importance of higher education. When a seat opened up in Rice's district, he embraced the opportunity to help his city in a new way.

Rice served 12 years as a councilman, during which time he supported initiatives that transformed his old neighborhood. Redevelopment in the Northside brought new housing, parks, a dedicated space for the Hub City Farmers Market, businesses, the





Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine, and a recreation center. Rice says he's proud of the collaboration between the city and residents that has restored pride in the northside and made it a model for other cities.

Now, as mayor, Rice is overseeing other major changes in Spartanburg. Plans to bring a minor league baseball team to the city were recently announced, which will create new development near the downtown. Conversations are also ongoing on how to make Morgan Square, the center of downtown, a more vibrant space that welcomes all while balancing retail, dining and entertainment needs. More mixed-use development is coming to Main Street, along with a brand-new city-county complex on nearby Church Street. "So things

are changing around us daily, and change is good," Rice says.

In addition to his mayoral duties, Rice is also the transition specialist at Spartanburg High School, where his wife is an assistant principal. In both jobs, Rice promotes the transformative power of education, something his own personal story demonstrates. He's grateful for all Spartanburg has given him, and sees that affection reciprocated. When he goes out with his wife, he notes, "We're constantly stopped and asked, "Can we take a picture?"

"Knowing that this face may resonate with someone else, that they can understand that one day they can be the mayor of their city, that's what's so special to me," Rice says. "I can't think of a better time or a better place to give back to my community."

# Studentpreneurs

# 3.



## What's Your Story?

If your work involves community service, we'd love to feature you on our social media channels!

Fill out the news form at [uscupstate.edu/updatealumni](http://uscupstate.edu/updatealumni) and let us know a little about what you're doing. Recommendations of fellow alums to highlight are also welcome.





## Entrepreneurship is a major at USC Upstate,

but some students are putting it into practice outside the classroom. It's a way to earn money doing something they enjoy while working on their degree. A few have even changed majors to learn more about running a business. Below are some of the products and services students offer to the campus community – and beyond.

# 1.

### Amaya Brockington (@beadedbeauty\_bymaya)

#### Handmade bracelets, anklets, necklaces and waist beads

What began as a pandemic pastime for Amaya Brockington has grown into a steady business for the community health major. She uses marble beads or gemstones for her bracelets, necklaces and anklets, and creates customized waist beads based on a customer's specifications. Her advice to other budding entrepreneurs is to believe in yourself and not be afraid to get started. "It's nice to be my own boss and make my own money," she says.

# 2.



### Zaria Benson

#### (@sixteentwentyclothing)

#### Clothing and trucker hats

Zaria Benson got her first job at 16, but quickly realized she'd rather be in business for herself than work for someone else. She had always loved fashion, so she invested her paychecks into purchasing some ballcaps and accessories for women to resell under the name 16.20 Clothing, reflecting her age and the year when she got started. To expand her clientele, she added shirts, trucker hats and hoodies that she began branding with her own designs and logo. Her foam trucker hats are currently her most popular item, and before each new design release, Benson posts photos of the different colors and styles on her social media accounts.

### Cameron Smith (@camxyou)

#### Photography

Cameron Smith, '22, M.S. '23, has been experimenting with photography ever since he found an old camera in his dad's closet five years ago. While he didn't have a specific interest in the field, he wanted to do something creative, and discovered he loved expressing himself through film. Free photo shoots for clients in the Charleston area, where he's from, enabled him to build up a portfolio on Instagram and find a following among recording artists and clothing brands.



# 4.

### Thailyn Williams

#### (@thaitastytreats\_)

#### Candied fruits, baked goods and other sweet treats

Thailyn Williams was looking for something to do during the pandemic when a church member offered to teach her how to make candied apples. That launched the then-high school student on a small business venture that has expanded to include baked goods and other confections. Now in her second year at Upstate, Williams sells her popular chocolate-covered strawberries, candied fruits, gusher grapes and other sweet treats via her Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook pages. Her mother helps her manage the business and inspects Williams' products to make sure they're high quality.

# Faculty Achievements

**Richmond Adebaiye** (Informatics) co-authored “Machine Learning Models for Extrapolative Analytics as a Panacea for Business Intelligence Decisions” in the International Journal of Engineering Technologies and Management Research. He also became certified in machine learning (AI).

**Wren Bareiss** (Communication) presented a workshop on “Strategies for Writing Effective Qualitative Research in Healthcare” at the Medical University of Vienna as part of the International Society for the Study of Self-Injury in Vienna, Austria.

**John Barnett** (Library) published “Review of the Community College Library: Assessment” in the Journal of New Librarianship.

**Stephen Bismarck** (Education) authored the article “Analyzing Unexpected Data After a Novel Mathematics Lesson Using the Critical Friend Process” in Educational Research Quarterly.

**Brian Brady** and **Sam Cooper** (Business) co-authored the article “Giving Students More Opportunities for Impact,” which appears on the AACSB website. AACSB is the top accrediting body for business schools.

**Logan Camp-Spivey** (Nursing) received the Professor for Affordable Learning (PAL) Award from the Partnership Among South Carolina Academic Libraries’ South Carolina Affordable Learning Initiative. She also co-authored, with **Shirleatha Dunlap** and **Tracy Hudgins**, “Leveraging innovation to design a psychiatric mental health simulation for undergraduate nursing students during the COVID-19 global pandemic” in the journal Nursing Education Perspectives.

**Shirleatha Dunlap** and **Toshua Kennedy** (Nursing) were awarded the Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Nurse Faculty Loan Program award to support MSN students seeking a faculty role. Dunlap also co-presented “Accreditation and Transfer Student Success: Connecting the Dots Between Equity, Quality, and Outcomes” at the National Institute for The Study of Transfer Students. She co-authored the white paper “Beyond Transfer Advisory Board, Raising the Bar: Leveraging Accreditation and Its Influence on Transfer and Credit Mobility.”

**Ron Fulbright** (Informatics) was granted a patent from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office for his “Swarm-Based Firefighting Drone and Mass Aerial Drop System and Method.” The invention has the potential to fight wildfires more cost-effectively and also quickly and safely deliver supplies to natural disaster zones.

**Muhammad Hameed** (Mathematics) presented “Instability and pinching of a slender fluid thread with variable surface tension” at the 13th AIMS Conference on Dynamical Systems, Differential Equations, and Applications in Wilmington, North Carolina.

## GOVERNOR’S STORM NOTICE

**Jon Storm** (Biology) was awarded the 2023 Governor’s Award for Excellence in Scientific Awareness at a special reception in the state Capitol rotunda in July. Storm was recognized for sharing information about the region’s natural history through his Southern Piedmont Natural History page on Facebook, and his Field Guide to the Southern Piedmont and Southern Piedmont Natural History coloring book.



Chancellor Bennie Harris, Jon Storm and his family, and Gov. Henry McMaster

**Araceli Hernández-Laroche** (Modern Languages) is a recipient of the 2023 Akers Prize for the public humanities from South Carolina Humanities. She also authored “The Urgency of Making Public Work Count” in the open access, peer-reviewed Public Humanities issue of the Modern Language Association ADFL/ADE Bulletin.

**Tina Herzberg** (Education) co-presented “Orientation and Mobility Referrals and Assessments: Policy and Practice” at the International Mobility Conference in Warsaw, Poland, in May.

**Polinpapilinho Katina** (Informatics) co-authored “Advanced manufacturing management: A systematic literature review” in the journal *Sustainability* and the book *Blockchain-enabled Resilience: An Integrated Approach for Disaster Supply Chain and Logistics Management*.

**Bridget Kirkland** (Graphic Design) was elected to a three-year term as a member of the Chapman Cultural Center board of trustees.

**Colby King** (Sociology) was guest co-editor for a special issue of the journal *Teaching Sociology*. King also was part of the ASA Task Force on First-Generation and Working-Class People in Sociology, which published a paper in the journal *Socius* on how and why first-generation and working-class backgrounds shape inequalities in academic job attainment.

**Celena Kusch** (Academic Support) co-authored, with **Colby King**, a chapter on utilizing podcast-based assignments in the book *Emerging Stronger: Pedagogical Lessons from the Pandemic*.

**Robert McCormick** (History) is the author of the new book *Founding the ACC: The Origins of a Major Athletic Conference, 1951-1953*. McCormick also began the “McCormick on History” podcast on Spotify,

covering topics such as North and South Carolina history, European history, sports and crime.

**Benjamin McCraw** (Philosophy) published “Wittgensteinian Blasphemy: What It’s Like to Be a Heretic” in the journal *Religious Studies* and “Duncan Pritchard on the Epistemic Value of Truth: Revision or Revolution?” in the journal *Philosophia*.

**Kristi Miller, Amanda Coates** and **Heather Dewitz** (Nursing) won the USC Upstate Library Unit Competition for saving students in Nursing 306 and 320 the most money on course/unit materials. Miller also was awarded the Service Learning and Community Engagement award for excellence in online/blended service-learning course design.

**Maria Francisco Montesó** (Spanish) presented “Language Access in Education” and “Meaningful Communication and Collaborating with Professional Interpreters” at the virtual 2023 South Carolina Multilingual Program Conference in July. At the invitation of the Mexican Consulate in Raleigh, North Carolina, she and **Araceli Hernández-Laroche** (Modern Languages) co-presented “Lidera cambios en tu entorno educativo y comunidad, a través de los tres pilares del Centro Latino de Carolina del Sur” at the sixth Binational Education Week.

**Ben Montgomery** (Biology) co-authored the article “Spatial variation of pollen receipt and the effects of heterospecific pollen on seed set in *Salvia przewalskii*” in the journal *Ecology and Evolution*.

**Rebecca Mueller** and **Refika Turgut** (Education) co-presented “Mainstream teachers’ perceptions of leveraging multilingual learners’ home languages and translanguaging pedagogy” at the American Educational Association Annual Conference in Chicago.

**Calvin Odhiambo** (Sociology) was awarded a Magellan grant with student Lacey Frye. Their research will explore racial disparities in maternal health outcomes.

**Laura Rikard** (Theatre) served as the intimacy coordinator on the “Untitled Josh and Lauren Project,” a new Starz series under development by director Ava DuVernay and starring Joshua Jackson and Lauren Ridloff. Rikard also was invited to speak about intimacy coordination at the SXSW Film Festival in Austin, Texas, and facilitated the Theatrical Intimacy Education Educator Advocate Program at USC Upstate. She was a guest artist at the Cal State Summer Arts Program in Fresno, California, and published “Focus on Impact, Not Intention: Moving from Safe Spaces to Spaces of Acceptable Risk” in the *Journal of Consent Based Practice*.

**Lina Shu** (Nursing) published the article “Provider’s Perspectives Related to Parents’ Choice of Pediatric Provider of Record and Newborn Screening: A Qualitative Study” in the *Journal of Primary Care and Community Health*.

**Nolan Stolz** (Popular Music) released the studio recording of his song “Murdered by the Sky,” performed by Los Angeles-based singer Amanda Achen, on SoundCloud in January. He also was interviewed on Radio Beat, a network of 62 FM stations in the Czech Republic, to discuss his forthcoming composition for symphony orchestra, the “Route 66 Suite.” The video performance of his composition “Gravitation” was selected by the 2023 Kalakari Film Festival (India) and Festival Angaelica (USA) film festivals.

**Justin Travis, Kenneth Barideaux** and **Susan Ruppel** (Psychology) co-authored “Are students self-regulating their device usage? The effects of off-task device usage in a classroom setting” in the journal *College Teaching*.

**Julie Wade** and **Michael Dinger** (Management) co-authored “Affect and information technology use: the impact of state affect on cognitions and IT use” in the journal *Internet Research*. Wade also received a RISE grant for her research “IT Professionals’ Work-Related Identity: Impacts on Job Search Behavior and Work Effort.”

**Ginny Webb** (Microbiology) and **Justin Travis** (Psychology), with USC Upstate students Colleen Phan and Brandon Mercado, co-authored “Knowledge and Identity Antecedents of COVID-19 Vaccine Status: A Study of South Carolina Residents” in the *Journal of Preventive Medicine and Hygiene*. Webb is also president of the American Society for Microbiology, South Carolina branch.

**Summer was a busy travel time for several Upstate students and faculty.**

**1. Alex Lorenz** (German) led a two-week program dedicated to German language and culture in Munich, Germany.

**2. Lee Neibert** and **Laura Rikard** (Theatre) took students to the FUSE Festival in London, where Rikard directed them in the play “Gruesome Playground Injuries.”

**3. Maria Francisco Montesó** (Spanish) and her students enjoyed culture and study during five weeks in Alicante, Spain.

**4. Allison Ellis** (Political Science) and her students explored what government looks like in Belgium and the Netherlands.

**5.** Students of **David Wallace** and **Emily Kofoed** (Communication) had the opportunity to collaborate on a multimedia project with students from Hochschule Magdeburg-Stendal and tour Berlin.

**6. Stephanie Barnhill** and **Monique Jones** (Nursing) and upper-level nursing students combined service with travel during their trip to South Africa.



## A PODCAST IS BORN

**Monika Shehi Herr** (Communication), the recipient of a RISE grant from the University of South Carolina, created the podcast “Making a Baby in South Carolina.” Inspired by Herr’s own pregnancy experience, the nine-part series examines the conversations, or lack thereof, around pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum recovery through the stories of six pregnant Upstate women, including Herr. She is currently working to turn the podcast into a book. “Making a Baby” can be found on Spotify.



# Global Spartans





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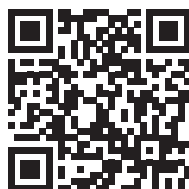
# Alumni



## Join us next time! Alumni Meet-Ups

Over the summer Alumni Relations hosted three meet-ups to welcome newly admitted students and their families. The first event was held at Bowens Island in Charleston; the second at the Riverbanks Zoo in Columbia; and the third at Spare Time Pineville in Pineville, North Carolina. Alumni and donors in each area also were invited to participate. Watch the Alumni Newsletter for information about next year's events. We hope to see you there!

**Write a book? Star in a movie? Have a baby?  
Run a marathon (or two)?  
Share the news with your fellow alums!**



**Share Your  
Classnotes**

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out the form at  
[uscupstate.edu/updatealumni](https://uscupstate.edu/updatealumni)**

## 1980



**Steven (Steve) Victor Harvey** retired in 2020 and moved to San Diego, California. He is an avid tennis player, and recently played on back-to-back San Diego County USTA 3.5 Level Championship teams. He and his wife recently completed a retirement celebration trip to Spain, Portugal and France for seven weeks. In his spare time, Steve does consulting about family business issues.

## 1982

**Carmelina Onorato Livingston** is the lead STEM education specialist at STEM Centers SC/SC Coalition for Mathematics and Science.

## 1987

**Ericka Clemons Wooten** was named director of culture and values at The Sisters of Charity Foundation of South Carolina in February 2023. She has been at the Foundation for about five years, and was previously the director of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

## 1996

**Elizabeth (Beth) Threadgill Herlihy** is excited that her daughter is attending USC Upstate this fall.

## 1999

**Shawna Lee Chadwick Rose** is a registered nurse at Sacred Ground Residential Hospice House.

**Robert Isenhardt** was recently promoted from deputy chief information security officer to chief information security officer for the state of Maryland Department of Human Services. Robert was also appointed by former Gov. Larry Hogan to the state's Modernize Maryland Oversight Commission, which focuses on strengthening cybersecurity for critical state infrastructure and ensuring the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of residents' data.

## 2000



**Nicholas (Nick) Eugene Gregory** was recently promoted as claim team manager for State Farm Fire & Casualty Insurance Co., managing a team covering the territory encompassing Spartanburg, Cherokee, Union, Laurens, York, and Lancaster counties in South Carolina.

## 2002

**Angel Cagle Sorrells** works at CSL Plasma. She was promoted from chemist II to senior chemist on May 1, 2023.

## 2006

**Frank Carlton Mervin** is the manager of academic interventions at Valdosta State University.

## 2007

**Melissa Payne Craig** received her MSN in 2020 from Capella University.

**Lakisha Spears McNair** has a new job as executive director of the Lupus Foundation of America, North Carolina Chapter.

## 2009

**Alyssa Ryan Ashdown** is the associate director of digital and visual media at Stanford University. She previously worked at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta and Emory University.

**Johnny Lorenzo Rhode III** was appointed principal of Shoally Creek Elementary School by the Spartanburg Country School District 2 board of trustees. He began his new role this fall.

## 2010

**Jasmine Buckmire Herbert** is the president of The Employee Handbook, Career & Workforce Solutions in Spartanburg, South Carolina. She served as the keynote speaker at the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences Career Day event at USC Upstate in February 2023.

## 2011



Johnny and Gina Rhode

**Gina Wright Rhode** was appointed assistant principal of Boiling Springs Middle School by the Spartanburg School District 2 board of trustees. She began her new role this fall.



Travares Hicks and Prof. Emeritus Charles Love

**Travares Gregory Hicks** was recently appointed principal of Julius Chambers High School in Charlotte, North Carolina.

## 2012

**Daysha Level Meekins** has been married almost seven years to fellow USC Upstate alumnus **Frank Corbett Meekins '05**. They were married on the USC Upstate campus. She has a 1-year-old son and is the assistant principal at South Mecklenburg High School.



**Jessica Murphy Prado** received her MA in industrial and organizational psychology from Adler University in 2019. She also received her Ph.D. in industrial and

organizational psychology from Adler in 2022. While a student, Jessica was president of Psi Chi, was a member of the Psychology Honor Society, and was vice president of the Hispanic Latinx Student Association. She was valedictorian of her class, and was elected by the faculty, staff and students to be the graduate speaker in 2022.

**Lacey Boyd Walker** is married to Jeremy Nathaniel Walker and they have three girls.

## 2013

**Kimberly Archer Young** has become a certified public accountant and has earned her master's degree in accountancy. She is currently teaching at Greenville Technical College and won a national award for innovative teaching and a regional award for teaching excellence. She has spoken at many teaching conferences around the country on captivating a classroom and taking control of your personal finances. She has also written two books on controlling your personal finances, the most recent of which is *Big Bucks: A Money Management Book for Teens*.

## 2014

**Grey Hampton Ramsey** was named athletic director and football coach of the new Spartanburg charter school Mountain View Prep. He will begin his new job when the school opens in fall 2024, but until then will continue to serve as the assistant head football coach at Spartanburg High School.

## 2015



**Michael (Midas) Joseph Hampton** was named Strategic Spartanburg executive director in July 2023. He was previously the national director of research and evaluation at Urban

Alliance in Washington, D.C.

**Brittany Kanika Stubblefield** has a son, Noah, who is 3 years old.

## 2017

**Joshua (Josh) Louis Murphy** has been hired as a photojournalist at WYFF 4 in Greenville, South Carolina.

**Erika Laurence Parker** was married in December 2018 to Gunnar Parker. They have two children, Lilliann Reed, born June 2020, and Owen Buell, born February 2023.

**Sydney Ashley Sawyer** moved back to Boiling Springs, South Carolina, in February of 2022 to take a job with WSPA Channel 7 News. She started as a national sales associate, and within eight months was promoted to a digital account executive in the Greenville office.

## 2018

**Danielle Louise Cassells** will soon be an attorney in the state of Alabama.

**Tierra Laverne McMillan** is the housing coordinator at the South Carolina Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services. Tierra recently was the keynote speaker at the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences Scholars Day event at USC Upstate.

**Brianna Smith Moseley** is married to Doug Moseley, and they have two children, James and Finley. She has a new home and a new employer, Elliott & Painter LLP, which merged with her previous employer, NJCO.

**Courtney Amber Pitts** is a licensed veterinary technician and works at Columbia Veterinary Emergency Trauma and Specialty.

## 2019

**Shelby Ward Perkins** began a job as sales and marketing director at Manning Square Assisted Living in Greer, South Carolina.

**Alicia Shaw** started a financial planning practice after working at Scansource.

**Adailia Adrianna Talley** has been employed as an initial licensing coordinator at the South Carolina Department of Social Services since 2019.

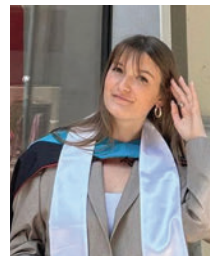
## 2021

**Tera L. Adams** bought a new house in July 2022.

**Katlin (Katie) Owens Perkins** was married on October 8, 2022, to Trevor W. Perkins.

## 2022

**Dawson James Adams** began graduate school this fall at Maynooth University in Maynooth, Ireland, where he is studying military history and strategic studies. He had been working as a substitute teacher for District 5 schools in Spartanburg County and for High Point Academy since graduating from USC Upstate.



**Irene Biganzoli** recently earned a Master of Professional Studies in fashion management from Parsons School of Design - The New School in New York City.



Burroughs



Stolz

## Alums Making the Grade

Meredith (Jack) Burroughs, '19  
Samantha Stolz, '17, M.Ed. '22  
Burroughs was named Spartanburg School District 7 Teacher of the Year for 2023. She teaches social studies and coaches volleyball at Spartanburg High School.

Stolz was honored as the 2023 Teacher of the Year by Fairforest Middle School. She teaches sixth-grade math.



**Amaris Rose Delgado** is currently working as the client services specialist for the United Way of Greenville County.

**Keiana Therese Dillard** has a new job at Boiling Springs Elementary School as an after-school counselor.



**Destiny Kimberly Dominguez** has a new job as business resource coordinator at OneSpartanburg, Inc.



**Cameron Smith, MSBA '23**, worked as a financial processes and systems intern at Milliken & Company over the summer, and now has been hired as a full-time associate.

## 2023

**Caitlyn (Hunter) Arms** is an assistant account executive at Smoak Public Relations. Prior to being hired full time, she was an intern with the company while a student at USC Upstate, then continued as a part-time employee until she graduated.

**Phillip Tommy Johnson** is the marketing and communication assistant at Spartanburg County Public Libraries.

**Madison Danielle Lark** will be pursuing her master's in economic research in Prague.



## The Spartan Way - Making a Difference

Dyanne Letbetter, '22

**D**uring her years working with military children, Dyanne Letbetter developed a passion for psychology. But after starting her degree program at USC Upstate, Letbetter felt drawn to learning more about the forces that shape a person.

"I felt like a lot of the issues people had that were related to the mind had a lot to do with their environment," she says. "So I switched my major to sociology to learn more about the reasons people do the things they do."

Now the community alliance specialist for Family Connects Greenville, a program offered through the state Department of Health and Environmental Control, Letbetter is helping develop a network of resources for parents of newborns. The information she gathers is shared with nurses who visit parents about three weeks after a birth to see what support they might need.

Letbetter, who is also pursuing her master's in social work at Winthrop University on a full military scholarship, says it's always been important to her to help others. "I wanted to serve the community, I wanted to give back and be involved and just do as much as I could to help out," she says. Her work with Family Connects aligns with those goals, she says.

Because the program is new to South Carolina, Letbetter meets frequently with community agencies such as United Way and First Steps to identify the resources they have available for parents and to discuss partnerships. She also does outreach events to help get the word out about the program and encourage other groups to share information about services that benefit parents and newborns.

Letbetter says knowing she's assisting families is the most rewarding part of her job. By gathering information and getting answers to questions, she can ensure Family Connects is a one-stop resource for people who don't know where to go. "Just helping one person has the ability to help many," she says.

## In Memorium\*

Pamela Willes Copeland '75  
Archie D. Dixon '76  
Thomas (Randy) Randolph Johnson '76  
Gay Clement-Atkinson '77  
Barbara Murphy Hendrix '78  
Doris B. Johnson '78  
James T. Turner '78  
Linda Melton Cassels '79  
Shirley Cherry Williams '79  
Cynthia Dale Wofford '80  
Tamara (Tammy) Boone Caldwell '88  
Kevin Randall Brown '91  
David L. Clary '91  
Arleen Smith Harmon '99  
Sharmayna Elaine Smalls '21

## Faculty

Edward (Ed) Clyde Babin  
Judith (Judi) Ann Harris  
Raymond (Ray) Lee  
Edwin (Ed) F. Wilde

\*since Jan. 2023

## Signature Event

The pinning ceremony has always been a special moment for USC Upstate nursing graduates, but another tradition used to be part of the celebration: signing nursing uniforms. In this 1977 photo, Cindy Hyatt, standing, has her uniform signed by Patti Fowler. Hyatt, who received her associate degree in nursing, recalls how much fun the program was. "I just soaked in everything," she recalls. "The people were amazing." Hyatt was voted most likely to succeed in her class, and went on to have a long career in nursing, starting in the medical-surgical unit at Mary Black Hospital and continuing with the cardiac unit at Spartanburg Regional. Hyatt's love of nursing is shared by her daughter, who also became a nurse.



Babin  
Geography



Harris  
Criminal Justice



Lee  
Theatre



Wilde  
Vice Chancellor of  
Academic Affairs

# Running the George

Jeffrey Stinson began his tenure this summer as the new dean of the George Dean Johnson, Jr. College of Business and Economics. Stinson, who previously served as dean of Central Washington University's College of Business, has a Ph.D. in marketing from the University of Oregon, an MBA and M.A. in recreation and leisure studies, both from the University of Minnesota, and an undergraduate degree in sport studies and management at Bemidji State University. Here he shares his passion for outdoor activities and his decided dislike of a certain yellow fruit.

**Where were you born?** Champaign, Illinois.

**What did you dream of being when you were a child?** Professional athlete or veterinarian.

**Who was your favorite teacher, and why?** Dr. Dennis Howard, who was my dissertation advisor and still very good friend and mentor. We just hit it off from day 1. He could be my second dad.

**What was your first job?** Coaching, training volunteer coaches and managing Special Olympics events.

**What's a talent you wish you had?** The ability to instantly remember names.

**What book is on your nightstand right now?** Insight by Tasha Eurich.

**What's your favorite way to unwind?** Run, bike, hike, kayak...really any outdoor activity.

**Do you have any pets?** Yes, two dogs. Nutmeg (mixed breed) and Kip (chow chow).

**What three albums would you want with you on a desert island?** Anything by the Goo Goo Dolls or Gryffin.

**What's your favorite vacation place?** Whistler, British Columbia.

**What or who inspires you?** Our students.

**Favorite TV or streaming show?** Any live sports.

**What 3 people, alive or dead, would you invite to a dinner party?** I generally try to avoid dinner parties, but if I had to, Eluid Kipchoge, Meb Kebelezighi and Deanna Kastor, all great marathon runners.

**What five items (not counting pets) in your possession have special significance for you?** Inukshuk (from Whistler); stuffed bears from my mother representing each university I have attended or worked; pictures of the soccer teams I have coached over the years; certain running race awards that I have won over the years.

**What's something on your bucket list.** Tough question, as if there is something I want to do I generally go do it.

**What's your guilty pleasure?** Long hikes.

**Do you prefer the mountains or the beach?** Mountains.

**What's your favorite holiday and why?** Summer vacation, not really a holiday, but getting away for a week or two in the summer is my favorite part of the year.

**What's your favorite thing about USC Upstate?** The people. Everyone I have met has been wonderful.

**What's something most people don't know about you?** Well, it seems to already be out here, but I hate bananas. I will starve before I will eat a banana or any food that has bananas as an ingredient.

# JEFFREY STINSON





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