Stephen Yoder honored for leadership

Stephen Yoder was the new guy in town in 1995, ready to assume his new role as general counsel of a large Birmingham bank.

He didn’t wait long to begin learning about his new community, becoming a board member of then-named Eye Foundation Hospital in 1996. By 1999 he had taken on the ambitious role of founding board chair for the Vulcan Park Foundation, which was charged with saving the iconic Birmingham Iron Man that overlooks the city.

It was at a Leadership Birmingham meeting that same year when Yoder, now an assistant professor and honors program director in the UAB School of Business, first saw a Birmingham icon who immediately became an inspiration.

“It actually was the very first meeting of my Leadership Birmingham class in the summer of 1999,” Yoder recalls. “The meeting was at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, and I saw...”

SHP raises the roof on an ambitious building project

For the past 10 years, the UAB School of Health Professions has measured its robust growth through steady increases in its student population and research funding. In the coming months, however, SHP’s growth will be more obvious for all to see — and it will be measured in square feet.

The long-awaited expansion of the Health Professions Building started in... See SHP p7

Reusable containers make take-out more Earth-friendly

The receptacles looked sturdy, and they felt strong, but Leigh Priecko wasn’t ready to believe the eco-friendly containers recently purchased by UAB Campus Restaurants were as rugged as the manufacturer claimed.

So the marketing manager for Campus Restaurants put them to the test — a 30-foot drop off the upper level of The Commons on the Green... See CAMPUS RESTAURANTS p3
Capitol Steps to support WBHM’s capital campaign

The political humor of The Capitol Steps will come to UAB’s Alys Stephens Center Friday, March 23 to support the $250,000 capital campaign for WBHM 90.3 FM equipment upgrades. “Capitol for Capital!” is a special election-year presentation of the comedy troupe that “put the mock in democracy” and is known for skewering both sides of the political aisle.

The political humor of The Capitol Steps will come to UAB’s Alys Stephens Center Friday, March 23 to support the $250,000 capital campaign for WBHM 90.3 FM equipment upgrades. “Capitol for Capital!” is a special election-year presentation of the comedy troupe that “put the mock in democracy” and is known for skewering both sides of the political aisle.

Tickets are $35 plus a $4 handling fee and are available through the ASC Box Office at 1-877-ART-TIKS or online at www.alystephens.uab.edu. Gifts to the capital campaign can be made online at www.wbhm.org. WBHM is a listener-supported service of UAB.

Volunteers needed for Discussion Book group leaders Aug. 14

The 2012 UAB Discussion Book is The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks by Rebecca Skloot, which tells the human stories behind the science of the HeLa cell line, which became the breakthrough tool for such medical innovations as the polio vaccine and in vitro fertilization.

Entering freshmen will gather Tuesday, Aug. 14 to hear panelists discuss the book and participate in small group discussions. The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks is guaranteed to generate an exciting dialogue about scientific discovery, bioethics, the interdependence of local communities and medical research, health disparities and other issues that have a particular resonance for our campus and state.

If you can be a discussion group facilitator, send your name, email address and campus mailing address to jsizemor@uab.edu by March 10. Once your selection is confirmed by email, you will be provided a copy of the book, a discussion group curriculum and the opportunity to attend a training session on Aug. 9 or 10.

Since 2005, discussion groups have provided a personalized introduction to UAB for new students and a stimulating, cross-campus experience for UAB faculty and staff. Consider submitting a nomination for future discussion books to mkurata@uab.edu. Nominations are accepted all year.

Livingstone is Ireland scholar

Harvard Medical School Professor Margaret S. Livingstone, Ph.D., is the recipient of UAB’s Ireland Distinguished Visiting Scholar Award. She will deliver a free, public lecture, “What Art Can Tell Us About the Brain,” at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 13 in UAB’s Alys Stephens Center Jemison Hall. A public reception will follow.

Mentors needed for at-risk kids

The Jefferson County Family Court Adolescent Mentoring Program (AMP), founded in 2009 through a partnership with UAB TASC and the court, is seeking volunteer mentors, ages 21 and older, to provide positive, one-on-one experiences for high-risk youthful offenders that may enable each of them to develop their full potential and learn to make informed, responsible decisions. There is a special need for African-American male mentors.

To learn more about becoming a mentor, email Khaddi Jones at kaj@uab.edu or call 264-8161.

New resources to improve online learning available

Faculty and staff can access resources provided by the Sloan Consortium, including free registration for a limited number of professional development workshops designed to hone your online and blended learning capability. Learn more about this resource at www.uab.edu/slogonet.

Apply for faculty grants

UAB full-time faculty members may apply for funding for new efforts in research, teaching and service-related projects designed to bolster their efficacy.

The application and guidelines are on the Faculty Senate website at www.uab.edu/facultysenate. The deadline for submissions is 11:30 a.m. Monday, March 26. An original and a copy of the submission must be received by the Faculty Senate Office in Administration Building Room 420.
Eat fresh and avoid excess sodium for your heart’s sake

Food is your friend and your biggest foe. A healthy diet sustains us, but a poor diet can raise blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar levels and weight and put you at risk for heart disease.

“Diet is just one component of the overall cause of heart disease,” says Donna Arnett, Ph.D., chair of the Department of Epidemiology and president-elect of the American Heart Association. But, Arnett says, it can exert a strong influence.

Heart disease is the most common cause of death for both men and women in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Diets high in saturated fats and cholesterol can lead to atherosclerosis, or a hardening of the arteries caused by build-up of plaque.

Sodium also is considered the culprit for the one in three Americans who develops high blood pressure. Sodium attracts water into your cells; the increased fluid raises your blood pressure and subsequently raises your risk of stroke and heart attack, heart failure and death, Arnett says.

Race also plays a role in risk. UAB researchers recently examined the effects of sodium intake by race using data from the ongoing Reasons for Geographic and Racial Differences in Stroke study and found a stronger association with death in black participants than whites, says Suzanne Judd, assistant professor of biostatistics at UAB and the study’s lead author.

Blacks with the highest sodium intake (average of 2,600 mg/day) had a 62 percent increased risk of dying, while whites had no increased risk, she says.

“You should eat fish twice per week; fish are sources of the good fats associated with reduced risk of heart disease,” says Arnett.

A healthy diet sustains us, but a poor diet can raise blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar levels and weight and put you at risk for heart disease.

Consequences of high blood pressure include an increased risk of stroke and heart attack, heart failure and death, Arnett says.

Diets high in saturated fats and cholesterol can lead to atherosclerosis, or a hardening of the arteries caused by build-up of plaque.

A big calorie-causing culprit is soda and sports and energy drinks, Arnett says.

“What constitutes a heart-healthy diet? First, Arnett says, increase the amount of fruits and vegetables you eat daily, especially the leafy kind.

“Fish also is on Arnett’s list of better food choices. “You should eat fish twice per week; fish are sources of the good fats associated with reduced risk of heart disease,” says Arnett.

Fish doesn’t have to be fresh every time. Arnett says that the AHA recommends two 3.5 oz servings per week, or about two small cans of tuna.

When preparing your food, limit saturated fats such as those in butter, hard cheeses and red meats.

“Avoid trans fats because they raise your bad cholesterol levels. So read food labels and look for partially hydrogenated oils, which is another name for trans fats,” Arnett says.

Fats considered to be suitable for low consumption — avocados, nuts, olives and olive oil — are monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, which can help reduce the cholesterol levels in your blood and lower your risk of heart disease.

A healthy diet sustains us, but a poor diet can raise blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar levels and weight and put you at risk for heart disease.

Campus Restaurants

CONTINUED from page 1

“The container itself is made of sturdy polypropylene that is 100 percent BPA-free, microwave- and dishwasher-safe and can be used again and again,”

“I dropped it on to the tile just to check,” she says, “and it didn’t break. So they’re pretty durable.” That’s just one added benefit of the new, reusable EcoWare — a new sustainability initiative to lessen the environmental dint of take-out dining at UAB.

The containers will cost $5 during a one-day sale Tuesday, March 6 to encourage their use. Afterward, diners can purchase a container from The Commons, The Diner or Blazer Café for $7. Participants can then return their used container to exchange for a clean one for their next meal.

“The container itself is made of sturdy polypropylene that is 100 percent BPA-free, microwave and dishwasher safe and can be used again and again,” PrIcecko says. “We can put it through our giant dishwasher and it’s not going to warp, but it will be sanitizable. Our employees and students can reduce their carbon footprint and reduce the amount of styrofoam in area landfills, even if they want their meals to go from any on-campus location.”

The Jefferson County Health Department gave the containers a passing grade earlier this year, and Campus Restaurants began selling the containers Feb. 13. To date, 59 employees and students have purchased a container. PrIcecko says reaction to the containers so far has been extremely positive.
President’s Award for Excellence in Teaching goes to 11

Eleven will be honored with the President’s Award for Excellence in Teaching during the annual Faculty Awards Convocation at 4 p.m. Wednesday, March 7 in the UAB Alumni House. Other faculty to be honored during the ceremonies include Stephen Yoder, assistant professor and honors program director in the School of Business, the Odessa Woolfolk Community Service Award; and Robin Foley, Ph.D., associate professor of Materials Science & Engineering and the Electron Optics Labs manager, The Ellen Gregg Ingalls/UAB National Alumni Society Award for Lifetime Achievement in Teaching.

The 2012 honorees for the President’s Award for Excellence in Teaching represent each school, the College of Arts & Sciences and the Joint Health Sciences departments.

Mark Bevsee Joint Health Sciences
Bevsee, associate professor of physiology and biophysics, takes complex concepts and makes them not just understandable but also enjoyable for students. “I went from hating everything about renal to loving it,” says one former student. A colleague adds, “Mark is able to simplify these complex concepts so that students can understand and appreciate the workings of the kidney.” His teaching success is due to his own preparation and knowledge of the subject and also to his availability to his students. “Mark spends a considerable amount of time outside of the classroom meeting with individual students and small groups to answer their questions,” says a former colleague. “I have witnessed many of these interactions and was impressed by his level of dedication to explaining the material and in his respect of the students’ point of view and the reasons behind their questions.”

John M. Coke Dentistry
Coke, professor of dentistry, “represents everything a great teacher and mentor can aspire to be,” says one colleague. He is loaded for his clinical skills, professional behavior and collegial demeanor. One former resident recalls his willingness to play — and suffer — pranks with “a fun attitude” that “is contagious among the residents. He is gifted at using humor to create a positive learning and working environment.” That humor, however, is balanced with a dedicated professionalism. “I learned early in my residency from Dr. Coke to treat the entire patient by listening and empathizing with what they are going through,” the former resident says. It is no surprise that, as another colleague notes, “his teaching skill with residents is a key reason why the general dentistry residency at UAB has such a successful track record.”

Leslie McClure Public Health
McClure, associate professor of biostatistics, believes that to teach effectively, one also must be a good student. “Outstanding teachers are lifelong learners,” she says. She incorporates this into her everyday work by deepening her knowledge of her subject area, teaching a broad array of courses to diversify her teaching experiences and getting to know her students on a personal level to better understand how to teach them. McClure is one of the most sought-after faculty for dissertation committees, which “reflects her deep understanding of statistical concepts and also her ability to communicate these concepts to students during this critical period of training,” says a colleague. “Dr. McClure is an excellent teacher,” says one former student. “She is always willing to help — one of the finest instructors in the department.”

Teena McGuinness Nursing
McGuinness, professor of nursing, teaches by example and is a role model both to students and to fellow teachers. “She shows us through her own behavior, how we should treat patients and others we come into contact with,” says a former student. “While encouraging our success and equipping us with the tools we need to succeed, Dr. McGuinness has always held high expectations for us and never has allowed us to take the easy route.” A colleague recalls the enthusiastic ways her students have responded to her guidance, including one who burst into song on the last day of class. Additionally, says the colleague, “As a junior faculty member, I consider it an honor to work with a more seasoned professor who has treated me as her equal from day one.”

Sylvie Mrug Arts & Sciences
Mrug, associate professor of psychology, is a prolific researcher, mentor of a substantial number of students and notoriously strict grader. Yet she is also a favorite among students, who describe her as “very responsive,” “fair,” “prepared and professional,” “accessible,” and “flexible.” “She is known for having high expectations of students, while at the same time helping them balance their personal and professional lives,” says a former student. Her mentees have performed research and authored award-winning papers under her guidance. She is a role model for female students entering the scientific field and sought out students from under-represented minority groups to offer mentorship. “I never would have expected me, as an African-American, first-generation college student, to accomplish all the things I have accomplished as an undergraduate,” says another former student. “I know all of this was possible under the tutelage of Dr. Mrug.”

Tonya Perry Education
Perry, an associate professor of curriculum instruction, has a daunting job: to educate students in the chosen fields of study, as well as to prepare them to educate others. She rises to the task by constantly updating her own knowledge and modeling best teaching practices to her classes. “Dr. Perry” exemplifies the highest standard of ethics and professionalism in her work,” says a colleague. Her students praise both her high expectations and her willingness to help students attain them. Says one former student, “She motivates her students to excellence and doesn’t accept anything less.” Much of that is because Dr. Perry holds herself to the same standard of excellence. “I try to model for students the importance of growing as a teacher,” she says. “I want them to know that all effective teachers are learners and constantly reflect on their practice — including me.”

Talat Salama Engineering
Salama, associate professor of civil, construction and environmental engineering, is a favorite among students for the enthusiasm he displays for his field and for the individual attention he provides. “His passion for teaching creates an exciting and engaging learning environment for his students,” says a colleague. A former student praises his open-door policy, saying, “Dr. Salama is a diligent, hard-working, sincere instructor who gains the respect and admiration of his students.” “He is kind, cares for his students and really breaks down the material for you to understand,” says another. Salama sees those interactions as an essential aspect of his teaching philosophy. “All students have a unique and valuable perspective, a life history and a need to be heard,” he says. “Too often students are not heard because they are not listened to in the rush to teach them.”

Elizabeth Steele Optometry
Steele, assistant professor of optometry, was selected by unanimous decision to receive the President’s Award for the School of Optometry, through praise by students and colleagues alike. Students show appreciation for her positive attitude and her willingness to devote extra time to guidance, encouragement and mentoring. “One of Dr. Steele’s strengths is her ability to communicate with students in a positive, constructive manner at a time when they are highly anxious” about an upcoming exam, one colleague says. Other faculty appreciate her passion and dedication as coursemaster of one of the school’s most challenging sequences, taking on a workload far above that which would be expected and still sharing a positive attitude with those around her. “She is always encouraging, energetic and willing to provide a helping hand whenever she is needed,” says another colleague. “Being able to work with Beth always makes my job more enjoyable.”

Joseph Van Matre Business
Van Matre, professor of business, is embarking on his 41st year of service to UAB. He brings to the job four decades of experience, constant learning, dedication and passion. “Joe is one of the few faculty you can count on to be in the office every day from early in the morning until late in the day,” says one colleague. “His availability allows him to provide personalized attention to students.” Throughout his career, he has continued to advance his knowledge with seminars and courses, “at considerable personal expense. His longevity, ability to teach challenging material and recognition from business leaders years after taking his class are examples of the rest
of us as educators.” Says a former student, “He inspired us to do more, not to be afraid of learning and to vow to make a positive difference in our chosen career.”

Jonathan Waugh
Health Professions
Waugh, professor in the respiratory therapy program, is a teacher of students and other teachers. In addition to his daily work, he also leads an enrichment program guiding and encouraging new faculty members. “I can say unequivocally that Jonathan is the best teacher I have ever met,” says one colleague, a beneficiary of the program. Another lauds his innovative teaching methods. “He is noted for his dynamic and interesting presentation of material and his ability to explain difficult concepts,” the colleague says. “Jonathan’s enthusiasm was contagious among the faculty. He encouraged many faculty who had been using the same teaching methods for years to consider a new approach.” Says yet another, “In the classroom, he has the ability to bring his lectures to life, like a painter painting vivid images on a canvas.

Lisa Willett
Medicine
Willett, associate professor of general internal medicine, is known for her unwavering commitment to the well being of her patients, trainees and house staff. “Her perspectives as a woman pursuing an academic career have helped many of our residents as they make career choices,” says a colleague, and she and co-authors have published an academic paper describing difficulties and barriers female residents face. Residents appreciate her “biography rounds,” in which she gets to know her trainees individually and personally. “Time and time again, I have seen her open herself up to students, interns and residents. Not only is she a kind ear, but she also is a problem solver and a mentor,” says one resident. Says another. “Although I have had many advisors over the years, Dr. Willett has perhaps been the best. She has helped me improve in all aspects of my career and has been supportive in every endeavor.”

Robin Foley (right), associate professor of Materials Science & Engineering and the Electron Optics Lab manager, works with Andrew Uehlin on the School of Engineering’s new Scanning Electron Microscope. Foley has been a key figure in the lives of thousands of students during the past 23 years.

Robin Foley
Health Professions

The School of Engineering has long had a strong research effort in casting technology and metals processing. Robin Foley, Ph.D., associate professor of Materials Science & Engineering and the Electron Optics Lab manager, has been an important part of the metallurgical engineering research team for more than 23 years and is a recognized expert in materials characterization.

In addition to being responsible for the materials characterization aspects of many research projects, Foley has brought her experiences associated with the analysis and characterization of materials failures into the classroom and laboratory to motivate her students and aid in their education.

The students respond to her teaching, and Foley consistently receives high evaluation marks. They say she is well prepared, enthusiastic and inspirational. Her hands-on lab instruction is cited by many as critical to their achievement.

For her efforts, Foley is the 2011 recipient of the Ellen Gregg Ingersoll/UAU National Alumni Society Award for Lifetime Achievement in Teaching.

For engineering, I believe hands-on is the best way to learn,” Foley says. “For the technical field we’re in, actually doing stuff — and that includes writing and presenting — is a way the students learn more than just by taking tests. I try to put that a lot into my class. And you don’t teach a lab by leaving them by themselves. You stay with your students while they’re doing the work. You’ve got to put the hours in.”

Viola Acuff, Ph.D., professor and head of the UAB Department of Metallurgical & Materials Engineering, certainly remembers the hours Foley put in on her behalf.

Acuff had just started her graduate studies at UAB about the time Foley was hired. When Acuff began work on her master’s thesis, her advisor noticed that she needed to evaluate her specimens using the transmission electron microscope (TEM). However, it was going to be a couple of terms before the TEM course was offered, which would have delayed the completion of her master’s degree.

Foley immediately began to help Acuff and personally trained her on the TEM so her work would not be delayed.

“She worked side-by-side with me until I advanced to the point where I could operate the TEM on my own,” Acuff says. “Even then, she was always just a phone call away whenever I needed advice or assistance.”

Acuff’s work was later recognized twice for international Best Paper awards for the Microscopy Society of America and the Welding Journal, which is a peer-reviewed publication.

Joseph Puckett, who earned his undergraduate (2000) and graduate degrees (2002) in materials engineering, says Foley was a driving force for him at UAB and graduate degrees (2002) in materials engineering, says Foley was a driving force for him at UAB and afterword, when he was preparing for his professional engineer’s licensure examination. Puckett says Foley’s methods have paid big dividends in his professional career.

“I have often used the services of the microscopy and diffraction laboratories that Robin manages for the department. She has been able to provide information and insights that have been of great value to my employer and our customers,” Puckett says. “On a much larger scale, Dr. Foley’s research in areas including machinability, defect reduction and nondestructive evaluation have helped to improve the products and processes of the entire foundry industry.”

Foley says she views teaching as a complicated process, which involves emotional and technical components. The technical components, Foley says, include deciding what should be covered, organization of the material, grading decisions and use of technology. But she believes to be an effective teacher, she also has to be emotionally and socially aware and adjust to the situations that arise with her students.

But Foley says the most important aspect of teaching — and the most difficult — is teaching by example.

“Since I expect my students to turn things in on time and do good work, I try and do the same,” Foley says. “I tell them when an exam will be returned, and it is returned on that date. I am never late and use my entire class time. These are simple things, but have a profound effect on the student’s attitude.”

Foley has taught undergraduate and graduate engineering classes ranging from Introduction to Engineering and Introduction to Materials Engineering to Characterization of Materials and Seminars in Materials Science and Engineering. She also has taught numerous lab courses, including Characterization of Materials, Casting Metallurgy and Ferrous Metallurgy.

“It’s fair to say that no materials engineering student goes through our program without the direct help of Dr. Foley,” says J. Barry Andrews, Ph.D., chair of Materials Science & Engineering. “She is a superb teacher that has had a dramatic impact on the students in our program.”

Foley’s family moved to St. Louis almost immediately after she was born at UAB Hospital several years ago,” she says. She attended the University of Illinois for her undergraduate degree and received her doctorate at the University of Wisconsin.

Her family ties brought her back to Birmingham frequently for visits, and a job interview led to her joining the UAB faculty in 1989. When the job was offered, she jumped at the opportunity. “When people ask me where I’m from, I always say UAB,” Foley says.

More than two decades later, Foley says she still can’t see a life for herself without students and without teaching.

“One I went to university, I never wanted to leave,” Foley says. “I love the university life. My mom and aunt were teachers — very good teachers. My son Joseph Jablonksy is going to UAB now, and he wants to be a high-school English teacher. My sister-in-law is a teacher. We’re a family of teachers. It’s just what we do. And it’s a great life.”
Exercising studied as a prescription for pain, chronic illness

M ost everyone — from public officials to personal trainers — agrees that exercise promotes health and fitness. But if queried, very few exercise enthusiasts would know exactly how much exercise is necessary to prevent disease. The same is true for their health-care providers.

This past spring, UAB established the Center for Exercise Medicine (UCEM) to determine the best prescriptions for physical activity. More than 40 scientists, representing at least 13 departments in the School of Medicine and other areas of UAB, will investigate the specific amounts of exercise — and the most advantageous types of activity — needed to prevent and counteract different chronic diseases, including heart disease, diabetes and even asthma. Some collaborative studies will explore the interaction of exercise and prescription drugs in treating different diseases, and others will focus on injury prevention and rehabilitation.

Raising the Bar

“The UCEM is one of a handful of interdisciplinary exercise medicine centers nationwide that’s attached to a school of medicine,” says Marcus Bamman, Ph.D., director of the center and professor in physiology and biophysics. This point was reiterated by officials of the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) at a recent exercise conference Bamman attended in Denver. The ACSM, in conjunction with the American Medical Association, has introduced a national initiative, Exercise in Medicine, to spotlight the relationship between health prevention and exercise and encourage health providers to raise the exercise bar for their patients. “The ACSM leaders I met with voiced excitement about the research being conducted at the UAB center,” Bamman says. “And since the ACSM is actively involved in providing public-health information on exercise recommendations, I took the opportunity to point out that it’s time to define exercise-medicine dosages.”

Marcas Bamman, center, works with trainers and patients to understand the effects of exercise on the prevention and treatment of health conditions.

Yoder believes it’s important for students to listen to the experiences and ideas of leaders, and also to talk to them. It’s a big step toward learning to be a leader.

Another project will determine which of two different exercise doses will work best to optimize insulin sensitivity for individuals who are insulin-resistant and for diabetic patients who want to improve insulin action and glucose homeostasis.

Some of the UCEM’s most important findings, however, may benefit older adults.

Research on strength training in particular could have a profound impact, says Bamman, who has spent more than 15 years studying exercise and its effects on aging. One current UCEM study is investigating strength training as an avenue to restore mobility, muscle mass, and metabolic function in older adults.

“We’re doing this with a dose-response treatment project involving four different exercise prescriptions,” he explains. A separate, recently completed study is the first to suggest that older adults need more frequent weekly doses of exercise to maintain muscle size than younger people.

Exercise-medicine research is just warming up, as are preclinical and clinical studies, discoveries, and solutions. For example, “we don’t know how much resistance training is required or is optimal to increase bone density in the hip and spine and prevent osteoporosis,” he says. “That study has not yet been done.”

“We are committed to help get the greatest quality of life,” Bamman says.

$16 million project

Yoder rallied together what Vulcan Park and Museum President and CEO Darlene Negrotto calls an exceptional team of civic leaders around a clear, shared vision. Yoder led as the founding chair and president of Vulcan Park Foundation and crafted a public/private partnership that has since become a model for the city.

“With grace and respect, Mr. Yoder built strong relationships among diverse groups and individuals that inspired citizens to recognize our ability to unite to achieve a truly significant goal,” Negrotto says.

In fact, Yoder’s vision extended beyond restoring Vulcan to creating a park and museum that has welcomed more than 1 million visitors from all states and more than 80 countries. In 2006, the restoration of Vulcan received the nation’s highest honor from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Yoder says his leadership role in the project developed over time and says none of those things could have been accomplished without the dedicated help of numerous members of the community. “One lesson from that experience for a leader is surrounding yourself with the right people and largely getting out of the way,” Yoder says. He cited as examples in the Vulcan project Philip Morris, Alice Bowsher, Victor Hanson III and Stewart Danby.

“I had never even set foot in Birmingham until 1995, but I was really interested in the history, and it was a way to get to know people,” Yoder says. “It wasn’t work. It was an enjoyable process of getting to know about the history and the people of the city.”

Leading by example

Yoder believes it’s important for students to listen to the experiences and ideas of leaders, and also to talk to them. It’s a big step toward learning to be a leader.

“I really want the students to see that leadership is about interpersonal relationships,” Yoder says. “It’s not a formula or something you can build in a spreadsheet. It’s all about relationships. And the best way to do that is to let them see up close the actual leaders.”

School of Business Dean David Klock, Ph.D., says his students are fortunate to have the opportunity to learn from a leader that is more of an “ Covenant Curriculum” loan program to help Birmingham-area residents affected by the April 27 tornadoes. Anonymous community leaders provided the money for the program.

“Steve immediately agreed to lead this effort and recruited UAB students to be engaged in this service project,” Klock says. “It was a complex project requiring technical insights in banking and in law, as well as skills in nurturing students in how best to be servant leaders in helping many individuals with pressing financial issues resulting from the devastation. His dedication and effectiveness in getting past numerous complex technical and behavioral issues has positively changed many lives — both tornado victims and our students.”

6 UAB Reporter March 5, 2012
Sandra Pilkinton was answering phones, greeting patients and collecting insurance information at the front desk of the genetics clinic when Nathaniel Robin, M.D., arrived at UAB more than eight years ago.

Pilkinton’s knowledge, work ethic and upbeat demeanor impressed Robin, a professor in the Department of Genetics. Others also told Robin how valuable Pilkinton was to the genetics enterprise, and when an office associate position opened up, Pilkinton was asked to take on the role.

Since that time, Pilkinton has kept the schedules of four doctors, edited their letters and papers and in many ways kept their life organized. “She made me a much more productive and efficient faculty member,” Robin says. She’s also expanded her role to include program coordinator for Robin’s medical genetics residency program and played a key role in preparing for the genetics residency re-accreditation this spring. Because of her efforts, Pilkinton has been named February’s Employee of the Month.

“It really is an honor to be named — one I appreciate very much,” Pilkinton says. “But this is totally out of my comfort zone. I do things behind the scenes, and I love what I do. I’ve been able to learn so much.”

Pilkinton’s primary job is the scheduling and coordination of clinical activities for Robin, Lane Rutledge, M.D., Maria Descartes, M.D., and Edward Lose, M.D. Rutledge describes Pilkinton as a self-starter who finishes her tasks outstandingly, efficiently and with a positive attitude.

“She is in charge of four doctors and probably should lock us all in our offices,” Rutledge jokes. “But she keeps us organized, functioning and running smoothly. I know that if I give Ms. Pilkinton something to do, I no longer have to even think about it. I know it will be done and done well.”

Pilkinton says that’s exactly how she views her role — as the first line of support for the doctors. Her goal is to make their lives easier, and she says that comes with a big benefit.

“These are such brilliant and dedicated doctors that we have, and they have got so much to be responsible for,” Pilkinton says. “If I can help them on my end with the mundane and administrative tasks, it enables them to do their work better. And if they can do that, that only improves the education and patient care at UAB.”

It was just this past summer when Pilkinton was given the extra responsibility of the educational activities for the genetics residency program by James Camell, administrative director of genetics.

Pilkinton was thrust into the role of resident coordinator despite having no experience, minimal training and no real transition phase. She quickly adapted.

“Sandra actively pursued learning opportunities, attending all the program coordinator meetings and asking all the right questions,” Robin says. “In fact, in the past year, she has helped me engineer revisions to our residency program, including the review process and educational curriculum.”

Pilkinton is the first line of contact for many medical students and physicians who are interested in applying for a position in the residency program. She also coordinates the clinic schedule for the many medical students and residents rotating through genetics.

“This is no small feat given that we have genetics residents and genetic counseling students already in our clinic, which are limited with regards to the number of people who can observe them,” says Katie Rutledge, director of Genetic Counseling Services. “Sandra is a vital member of this program.”

Pilkinton just finished one of her biggest tasks — preparing for the re-accreditation of the Genetics Residency Program. The program’s continuation is contingent on a successful review.

Pilkinton has been preparing packets, pushing out correspondence, touching base with faculty, tracking down past residents, formulating statistics and documenting past performance.

“It was a big task,” Pilkinton says, “but also a great learning experience.”

Co-workers say it’s that type of work ethic and attitude that make her so deserving of the award.

“Sandra is the type of person on whom you can always count,” Katie Rutledge says. “Regardless of what she is tasked to do, she accomplishes each undertaking to the very best of her ability and with a positive and helpful attitude. She is a huge asset to the Department of Genetics.”

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Sandra Pilkinton’s knowledge, work ethic and upbeat demeanor have earned her the honor of being named February’s Employee of the Month.

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January when construction crews began adding two stories and 35,000 square feet of new space to the facility. The project is expected to take approximately 18 months to complete, in time for the start of the 2013-14 school year.

The expansion will allow the school to consolidate all portions of the Department of Health Services Administration into one building and provide classrooms for the executive master’s and doctoral programs now held elsewhere because of lack of space.

“Everybody in the department will finally be able to have a home together,” says Dean Harold Jones, Ph.D. “That’s a major part of the need for this expansion.”

The centerpiece of the $13-million project will be the Executive Learning Center, which will consist of a primary classroom of approximately 100 seats surrounded by several smaller meeting rooms. The facility will be able to provide continuing education either on-site or off-site through the center’s technological capabilities. “It’s going to be a very high-tech environment with the ability to broadcast using the most current electronic technology,” Jones says.

More than half the cost of the project is being provided through a $7-million bond that was passed by the University of Alabama System Board of Trustees. A fund-raising project is set to begin this year with a goal of replacing the $6 million the school is spending on the building expansion. Jon Vice, the retired president and CEO of Children’s Hospital & Health System, and Mike Williams, president and CEO of Community Hospital Corp., are co-chairs of the campaign.

The fund-raising will offer naming opportunities to commemorate an individual, family, group, organization, foundation or corporation that range from a $15,000 donation for the building’s common area to $1 million for the Executive Learning Center.

“This is definitely the most significant fund-raising project in the School of Health Professions’ history,” says Katie Davidson Adams, SHP director of development who is leading the campaign. “It’s going to involve everybody — alumni, corporations, foundations, even our students. But we’re going to reach out to alumni. They’re the ones who have been through the programs and understand the needs.”

SHP graduate Lynn Elgin, who has a Master of Science in Health Administration degree from UAB and is now co-owner of Birmingham-based Clarity Consulting Group, says she believes alumni will recognize the need for more space and be supportive.

She points out that since 2001 the SHP student population has doubled to nearly 2,000 and the school’s research funding has quadrupled. “The only thing that is limiting the school is the space. We’re absolutely bursting at the seams,” Elgin says. “The addition of these two new floors is going to provide all sorts of synergy, because the programs that need to be together will be together. And there will be an incredible opportunity to grow in these next 10 years, much like we have these past 10.”

In addition to the increase in space, there also will be work done on the front and back of the building, including the construction of a formal rear entrance. Jones says most people enter from the back along Seventh Avenue South because of a lack of parking in front of the building. “So we’re going to dress that area up,” he says.

For more information on donating to the fund-raising campaign, contact Katie Adams at 996-5469 or katiedv@uab.edu.
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