UAB District Steam System construction project to begin

UAB Senior Project Manager Jerry Corvin has met with members of the consulting and design team planning every minute detail on the UAB District Steam System Project for the past two years. The engineering and design discussions have been intense — five days a week for the past year.

In the coming days, all the behind-the-scenes work will start to manifest itself in public when construction begins on the $69 million project.

“Practically everything we are building for this project is new,” Corvin says. “The construction schedules are very complex and detailed, and this has been a diligent process. And we know that at the best, there will be some issues.”

The District Steam System Project project was approved by the University of Alabama System Board of Trustees this past June. Alabama Power Co. will shut down its existing steam plant in 2013, which makes this project a necessary addition to the campus. The new steam-generation plant will be located at the corner of Sixth Avenue South and 13th Street, across from Bartow Arena and adjacent to the existing Alabama Power plant. The new distribution network will replace the existing steam system and construction of a new condensate-return system will provide high-quality steam service to the campus, research and medical center facilities, including the VA Hospital, Callahan Eye Hospital and Southern Research Institute.

The reason was simple: They wanted to affect young lives beyond the classroom.

“We wanted to show we are involved with the next generation coming through UAB, and this fund personifies the commitment to our youth,” says Loucrecia Collins, Ed.D., vice president of the AAFA and associate professor of educational leadership. “We’re not just here doing a job; we’re empowering the next generation.”

Five years later, the group now is close to making the endowment dream a reality. Almost $20,000 has been raised — primarily through pledges and gifts from African-American faculty and other supporters. The AAFA is kicking off a new campaign among its members to raise the $5,000 needed to reach the minimum $25,000 scholarship endowment before soliciting pledges from the larger UAB community.

Contributions can be made to the AAFA in two ways. Checks can be made payable to the UAB AAFA Endowment, Attn: UAB Gift Records, AB1230. Payroll deduction also is an option. Employees can choose. A pledge form is online at www.uab.edu/diversity/resources/committees/AAFA/afacm3.php.

“The AAFA has been in existence informally on the UAB campus for many years and an official organization since 2003. Its members voted in 2006 to endow a scholarship to encourage graduates of public high schools in the Birmingham metropolitan area to pursue their educational goals at UAB. The AAFA has awarded $1,000 scholarships to one student each of the past three years, including freshman Jesse Shrickland, a Minor High School graduate honored April 7.

“It’s an honor to receive such a scholarship,” Shrickland says.

AAFA awards third scholarship on the road to endowment

The African American Faculty Association (AAFA) established a scholarship fund in 2006 with goals that included raising $25,000 to endow it.

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“It’s an honor to receive such a scholarship,” Shrickland says.
Register to attend the annual Scholars Institute to learn more about best practices in teaching in online and blended settings. Hear a provocative keynote from a leading national voice in the field both days. An innovation forum will spotlight faculty projects and approaches, and experienced faculty will deliver presentations during concurrent tracks.

This year, faculty also can sign up for individual consultation sessions in three areas—copyright, security and technology. There is no fee, but registration is required. Registration and program information is online at training.ua.edu/uasscholarsinstitute.

Optometry doctoral convocation is May 23
The UAB School of Optometry Doctoral Convocation and Hooding Ceremony will be Monday, May 23 in UAB’s Alys Stephens Center. Families and friends will join the faculty and staff to recognize the accomplishments of the members of the Class of 2011 and celebrate their achievements.

Forty-three students will receive their Doctor of Optometry degrees. Twenty-four students have achieved a 3.2 GPA or higher, entitling them to become members of the Beta Sigma Kappa International Optometric Honor Society.

Attend a next-gen UAB seminar May 27
Register for a daylong workshop and symposium to promote the exchange of information between investigators using and interested in using next-generation sequencing and other state-of-the-art biology technologies on May 27. The emphasis will be on the research projects using these technologies and the analytical approaches available and under development to help understand the data generated by these technologies. Register at nextgen-uab.eventbrite.com. Direct questions to Elliot Lefkowitz at eliot@uab.edu.

Cinco de Mayo event to benefit young cancer researchers
The Young Supporters Board of the University of Alabama at Birmingham Comprehensive Cancer Center is hosting Fiesta Ball 2011 at 6 p.m. Thursday, May 5 in Innovation Depot, 150 First Ave North. The event features live music and Mexican cuisine, with proceeds going towards a competitive grant that is given to a young cancer investigator. Tickets are $30 in advance and $35 at the door or visit www.uab.edu/fiestaball.

For more information, call 934-0034 or email info@ccc.uab.edu.

Campus Rec starts Family Fun Night
Join Campus Rec for Family Fun Night the third weekend of the month beginning in May with a cookout and movie on the Green.

Join in water-safety seminars, kid-centered sport clinics and a climbing event. This is just one of the recent improvements the center has made; others include extended hours and locker room upgrades.

Noms sought for the Sam Brown Award
The UAB School of Public Health is accepting nominations for the 2011 Sam Brown Bridge Builder Award, given annually to a UAB faculty or staff member who embodies the vision, character, and bridge-building talents vital to the future of UAB.

Nominations must be received by May 15. Complete information about the nomination process is online at www.soph.uab.edu.
UAB Disc Golf Team competes, coached by world champion

Justin Leslie and his teammates found themselves traveling some historic real estate in Augusta, Ga., a few weeks ago when they made the long drive down famous Washington Street. But instead of turning right into Augusta National Golf Club, they kept driving to the Hippodrome Disc Golf Complex?

There were no majestic azaleas, no light piano melodies or Jim Nantz soliloquies. But there was a nicely manicured course, many talented golfers and intense competition for the 2011 National Collegiate Disc Golf Championship.

Leslie was making his third — and final — trip to the event. The Moody native will graduate this spring with a degree in biomedical engineering, but he will leave with three years of good memories from his days with the disc golf team.

“I just started playing disc golf my sophomore year, and I joined the UAB team the next year,” says Leslie, team captain. “I went to the national championships in 2009, and it was a great time. I knew it was something that would grow, and it has. It’s being recognized as a sport.”

They’ve been three pretty successful years for UAB’s team in this quickly rising sport. The Blazers have finished Nos. 10, 7 and 19 the past three years. This year 36 teams competed in the national championships.

“We have a chance of being a national championship team,” says Tom Monroe, adjunct professor in Human Studies and coach.

Monroe should be a pretty good judge of talent and UAB’s future prospects. He has won seven individual Professional Disc Golf Association (PDGA) World Championships and finished in second place on 10 other occasions. He has been a champion in almost all flying disc sports, including ultimate, freestyle and field events.

Monroe came to UAB to teach the flying disc sports course in 2008 and began putting a UAB team together around the time he was hired. Members of the PDGA told Monroe of their plans to start a national collegiate championship tournament and wanted him to put together a team to send to compete.

“I contacted a friend at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, and we let guys at the University of Alabama know about it, too,” Monroe says. “We’ve had teams from UAB, UAH and Tuscaloosa go pretty much every year since.

Disc golf is played much like regular golf except players use discs similar to Frisbees rather than balls and clubs, and players aim for baskets instead of holes. The object is to complete each hole with the fewest number of strokes.

Leslie posted UAB’s best individual finish at this year’s national championship, shooting 14-over-par through four rounds — good enough for a 23rd place finish out of more than 140 competitors. Other team members and their place of finish include: James Salvant, 56th overall; Kevin Dohoney, 83rd overall; and John Roberts, 129th overall.

Round out the team are alternates Marc Carr and Clifford Smith.

“These guys are athletes,” says Monroe.

“They practice and they train. They may come to practice and toss 50 to 100 shots. Many have practice targets in their backyards, and they will spend hours refining that part and learning different kinds of puts.

“The game is easy to learn, but hard to master.”

Disc golf has been the fastest-growing sport in America during the past 10 years, based on the number of courses built and discs sold. There are more than 3,600 courses nationwide — up from 1,100 in 2000. Membership in the PDGA also has grown to more than 14,400 people.

There are three courses in Birmingham. George Ward Park has a course that UAB students use, and two others are open in Trussville. Monroe’s club, Disc Golf Birmingham, is working to put a course up in the Irondale area near Highway 280 that should be completed this summer.

“Birmingham is becoming quite the disc golf town,” Monroe says. “And it’s growing everywhere. I get Google alerts for disc golf, and every night I have six to eight stories about disc golf in America. It’s seems like every day there’s a new course going up somewhere or a new tournament is being announced. It’s just amazing the growth this sport is harnessing right now.”

UAB’s Disc Golf Team will experience some new growth next year. Several players in addition to Leslie have exhausted their eligibility. Anyone interested in being a part of the team or just learning more about disc golf can contact Monroe at tom@discgolfwarehouse.com.

“It’s really a lot of fun, especially competing in the national championships,” Leslie says. “This year was the biggest and best field. No doubt it had the best teams and the best individual players.”

Campus Rec offers free training sessions and upgrades

So your New Year’s resolution went out of the window around Jan. 2, but you still are committed to starting that new workout routine. Now the question is, “How?”

UAB’s Campus Recreation Center staff is offering all faculty and staff non-members one free personal-training session and four more free sessions to those who sign up for a 12-month membership, says Jennifer Bahl, assistant director of marketing.

“We know getting into a fitness routine can be hard and challenging,” Bahl says. “Many people don’t know where to start. Some know what they want to do but don’t know how to achieve their goals. We want to help our faculty and staff reach the personal fitness goals they have, and we think these free personal-training sessions are a great way to get them started.”

The offer is valid through Aug. 31 on new, primary and annual memberships. Call Member Services at 996-5038 with any questions, and visit www.uab.edu/campus-rec for more information.

Various changes have been implemented at the Rec Center to help make it more accessible for faculty and staff. The ground floor of the Ninth Avenue parking deck recently has been converted to public parking, faculty and staff can park there free of charge during a workout — just get your ticket validated by Campus Rec Center staff.

Free transportation also is available to faculty and staff through Campus Ride.

Some changes for the spring include:

• Extended hours: Rec Center weekend hours have been extended to 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday and 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Sunday.

• Family Fun Night: Faculty and staff are encouraged to bring the kids and meet other families who are part of the Campus Recreation Center community the third weekend of the month beginning in May as part of Family Fun Night. The evening includes a cookout and movie on the Green. Later in the summer, events including water safety seminars, kid-centered sport clinics and a climbing event will be included.

• Locker room upgrades planned: The Campus Rec Center plans to add 150 additional half-size lockers for annual lease in each locker room (66 men’s and 84 women’s), convert 60 quarter lockers into men’s lockers for annual lease and convert an additional 108 quarter lockers into daily rental half-size lockers.

In addition, individual body-wash dispensers have been added in each shower. Installation of multiple fans also is planned to increase air circulation and make the locker rooms more comfortable.

“Many of these changes have been implemented due to the feedback we receive from our members,” Bahl says. “We are always reviewing our policies and procedures, and we’re happy when our members give us feedback and tell us what they would like to see.”

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All the world’s a stage for prof and Seasoned Performers

I was a pretty standard rehearsal for a play that still didn’t open for several more weeks. There were some missed lines, some props that didn’t work out quite right. But the cast of Night Call Nurses or What the Health!!!® soddered on. You notice something right away about this cast: Gray hair. A few wrinkles. Or more. They are The Seasoned Performers, Alabama’s only senior-adult theatre company; performing a play about aging, for seniors — but enjoyable to everyone else.

Andy Duxbury, M.D., is the playwright. He’s had a love of theatre since he was in high school, but his career path took him down a different road. Now Duxbury is a geriatrician at UAB and a lucky man who can continue his passion in a way that has a mission to improve society’s approach to aging. Night Call Nurses is the second play Duxbury has written for The Seasoned Performers. His first, Grimm and Bear It, was a comedy in which the aging villains of fairy tales learn a lesson about self-empowerment and the values that bring joy to society. The Seasoned Performers toured for two years with that show, ultimately performing it at the National Senior Theatre Festival in North Carolina. Night Call Nurses, as did its predecessor, has a message about aging.

“Night Call Nurses is about three aging actresses, who in their younger days had appeared on a local radio daytime soap opera called Night Call Nurses,” says Duxbury. “Now in their 70s and 80s, they are called back to the radio station for a reunion show and must deal with their own health issues, their place in society and the patronizing attitude of the Baby Boomer who runs the station.”

The show has five characters and a minimal set, and the troupe loads the production into a van and takes it on tour to senior centers, libraries, schools and churches — wherever they can find an audience, young or old.

“Children and teens can learn a lot from the show and from seeing seniors being actively engaged and engaging,” says Ellise Mayor, the artistic director for The Seasoned Performers. “There’s a message for the baby boomers, too, who are trying to avoid aging and pretend that it’s not happening. Fact of the matter is we’re born, we live, we die.”

But before we die, Duxbury says, seniors have a vital role to play in society.

“It’s important that seniors fulfill the natural role of the elder of the tribe,” he says. “To be the repository of wisdom and leadership and the carrier of culture and meaning to younger generations. It’s the role of the parent to provide shelter, safety and food to their kids. It’s the role of the grandparent to teach those children who they are and what it means to be who they are.”

Duxbury is a faculty member with the UAB Center for Aging, which has collaborated with The Seasoned Performers to allow him the liberty to be both physician and playwright. The messages he delivers in clinic to his 70s, 80s, and 90-year-old patents differ little from the ones that permeate Night Call Nurses.

In its original form, the play focused on senior empowerment. But in rehearsals, Duxbury and Mayor, both baby boomers, saw there was a valuable message for their youth-obsessed generation. Just as seniors must embrace their role as the village elder, then the boomers also need to accept their position on life’s timeline. In short, the play tells everyone the same thing — act your age.

“We all grow old — it’s the journey of life,” says Mayor. “So it’s important that we don’t try to hold on to youth, to pretend that we’re still in our 20s or 30s. We will have important things to say in our 60s and our 70s — things no one else will have the experience or life-lessons to say.”

“Our culture is so youth-centered that age brings knowledge, experience and value. I want seniors to know they are valuable and have something to say. And I want the rest of us to realize that we ought to be listening to them.”

Night Call Nurses performances are touring through 16 counties in Central Alabama. A performance schedule is online at www.seasonedperformers.org.

CONSTRUCTION PROJECT

Corvin’s team has worked closely with the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) and the City of Birmingham to ensure plans are in place to minimize inconveniences to campus traffic. Weekly construction schedules will be made available to the public at www.uab.edu/steam-project, still under construction. Detailed information, including maps, construction projects, frequently asked questions (FAQs) session and an email address, also will be made available.

In addition to the website, project progress — including planned traffic and parking disruptions — will be regularly communicated through The UAB Reporter, The eReporter and GreenMail. Those communications will begin in the coming days and continue throughout the construction.

“Our goal is to be able to keep everyone informed on the construction sequences, traffic impact, dates and more,” Corvin says. “There will be some inconveniences for foot and vehicle traffic. But, the contract documents require the general contractors to coordinate and comply with Americans with Disabilities Act access, fire, emergency, building deliveries — all of those things. By working in conjunction with our contractors, we’ll be in position with our website to adequately communicate to the campus the status of the project on a weekly basis.”

The first phase of construction centers on installing the new network that will replace the existing steam-distribution system. Russo Corporation of Birmingham was the successful bidder for the South Loop construction package. They are in the process of mobilizing for construction and anticipated beginning activities early in May. One of the first construction activities crucial in the South Loop package is the crossing of University Boulevard at Parking Lot 5A to the Campus Recreation Center.

That’s one of the first critical segments of construction,” Corvin says. “We’ll have to get manholes built and do the actual piping installation and crossing within a required 10-day period during the summer and be complete by Aug. 15. We’ve developed a traffic plan with ALDOT to maintain traffic flow on University during this phase.”

The North Loop and steam-generation plant package bids will be received May 10 and May 12, respectively. The mechanical process package bid will be late June. The condensate-recovery packages, which will retrofit approximately 20 buildings that receive steam to capture the condensate and reuse it, will bid in August and September as four separate projects.

A request for purchase on the boilers should be completed in the coming days. They are committed for delivery and set to be fitted into the plant in late December.

“We’re excited about getting this project under way,” Corvin says. “We’ve got this pretty well planned to where we believe the impact on street crossings and traffic will be minimized. We’re asking for patience and understanding. We understand it’s an inconvenience to our campus. At the same time it has to be done to provide future service to our campus, hospital and research buildings.

“We’re trying to keep the fact that this is an urban campus at the forefront of the minds of everyone involved in design and construction of the project. Everybody’s on board, but things will happen. They always do.”

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CORD's outreach helps students qualify for science fair

Area middle- and high-school students who competed at the Central Alabama Regional Science and Engineering Fair at UAB and advanced to the state competition won 75 percent of all place awards during the Alabama State Science and Engineering Fair in April.

"It's amazing how much and how fast our fair has grown," says Mike Wyss, Ph.D., director of UAB's Center for Community Outreach Development (CORD), which hosted the largest regional fair in the state's recent history in March. "We had more than 400 competitors this year from 21 counties, and the projects were just phenomenal."

Fifty-four students in grades six through 12 advanced to the Alabama State Science and Engineering Fair in Huntsville. Collectively, those 54 young scientists won 145 awards, or 44 percent of all awards presented, including three of the four grand-prizes. Also, eight of the top 10 individuals who received the most awards advanced to the state competition from the UAB-CORD fair.

Seven participants will travel to Los Angeles May 7 and compete with other future scientists in the INTEL International Science and Engineering Fair. Seven participants will travel to Los Angeles May 7 and compete with other future scientists in the INTEL International Science and Engineering Fair.

Wyss says the success of the UAB-CORD fair can be attributed to several factors — especially the hard work by CORD Administrator Shirley Sanders Guinwright and Outreach Development Coordinator Kevin Jarrett.

"Shirley's hard work cannot be emphasized enough," Wyss says. "She makes things happen, and the people who visit our campus notice. And Kevin is instrumental because he visits the teachers in the 21 counties and encourages the kids in these schools to get into science and create competitive projects."

Wyss says Jarrett and the CORD staff work with the students to make sure they were fully ready for the state competition.

"Our winners performed outstandingly at state fair, largely because Kevin and some of the other staff brought all of the competitors together at CORD and prepped them for the state competition," Wyss says. "Many places just aren't willing to go that extra mile."

Of course, the science projects themselves have to be of high caliber too. More than 75 UAB faculty, post docs and graduate students were judges for the UAB-CORD regional fair, led by Thane Wibbehs, Ph.D., and Roger Gilchrist, Ph.D., in biology. One of the judges was UAB freshman student Mason McFarland, who went through the UAB-CORD fairs as a high-school student and won a grand prize at the INTEL International Science and Engineering Fair in 2010 for his research on suppressing the growth of kidney tumors, a study in UAB's Science & Technology Honors Program, was impressed with what he saw from the middle- and high-school students.

"He was judging the middle-school division, and when he finished, he looked at some of the high-school projects and walked over to me and said, 'You know, Dr. Wyss, I am not sure that my project would have made it this year. They've gotten so much better,'" Wyss says. "There were some fantastic projects this year."

Wyss says the judges also make a positive impact on students and their families, and the UAB-CORD fair is the perfect opportunity to show them what UAB has to offer.

"Our judges are very important to our fair, and they do a great job of talking to these kids and making them feel their worth as future scientists," Wyss says. "That experience is mind-changing for a lot of kids and their parents. They start to see UAB as an excellent option for their young scientist's future education."

Wyss says the scholarship also make a positive impact on students and their families, and the UAB-CORD fair is the perfect opportunity to show them what UAB has to offer.

Where did they come from?

Here is a list of counties that sent a total of more than 400 students to compete in this year’s Central Alabama Regional Science Fair at UAB — the largest science fair in the state's history.

- Autauga
- Bibb
- Blount
- Calhoun
- Chilton
- Clay
- Cleburne
- Coosa
- Dekalb
- Elmore
- Etowah
- Lee
- Jefferson
- Montgomery
- Randolph
- Russell
- St. Clair
- Shelby
- Talladega
- Walker
- Winston

AAFA

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aship," Strickland says. "It lets you know people who have succeeded are looking out for the younger generation and providing us an opportunity to succeed."

Powell has worked closely with the AAFA in its efforts to endow the scholarship and attended Strickland’s reception.

"Jesse is an outstanding young man, and I know he will continue to achieve success in his academic endeavors and his career," Carolyn Walden, chair of the scholarship committee and all of the members of the AAFA deserve a big thank you for all of the work they have done to see this endowment to fruition and for all they do to enhance it for future generations.

Strickland is pursuing a degree in nursing and plans to specialize in emergency or adult care. He earned a 4.0 GPA during his first semester this fall.

"The scholarship will give me an opportunity to fulfill my goals, including graduating from college, and it's definitely lifted a burden from my family," Strickland says. "I'm blessed and privileged to receive it."

Past recipients echo his sentiment.

Erica Jackson, a junior majoring in exercise science, received the 2010 scholarship, which she says enabled her to stay in school.

"I come from a single-parent home, and my mom has worked really hard, but she hasn't been able to save enough money for me to go to college," Jackson says. "This scholarship has given me an opportunity to pursue a career in occupational therapy."

The 2009 scholarship recipient LaTavia McCall, a junior majoring in materials science engineering, is an intern in a new steel-testing lab at Mill Steel.

"She says the scholarship enabled her to focus on her studies and motivated her to continue to excel. It gives a student recognition and shows other hopeful students it is possible to be rewarded for going to class, getting good grades and studying," McCalls says. Providing financial help, she says, can keep students from being discouraged and distracted by the cost.

Walden, head of cataloging and collection management at Sterne Library and chair of the scholarship committee, says these students are a shining example of the way financial aid can positively affect someone's life.

"We've had three impressive students win these initial awards," Walden says. "They're all excellent students, and their accomplishments have been remarkable. We're so pleased to have had the opportunity to be a part of their education, and we're excited about the future students we will be able to help."
New summer series at the Alys... so hot, it's cool

Birmingham summers always are hot, and UAB’s Alys Stephens Arts Center has found a way to turn up the heat a little more — in a very, very good way.

Chris Isaak, Steve Earle, Ben Folds and Matisyahu will join the recently-renamed Herbie Hancock for a new, sizzling summer 2011 music series presented by the ASC. Summer at the Alys will include these five big concerts, a visit from The John Lennon Educational Tour Bus May 15, a College Rewind Backyard Band Party with Downright June 9 at ArtPlay, and Birmingham Arts and Music Festival performances on the center's outdoor plaza August 12-13.

The new summer concerts kick off with Hancock June 1, followed by Isaak June 23; Earle with his electric live band The Dukes (and Duchesses) featuring Allison Moorer July 14; an evening with Ben Folds Aug. 20; and Matisyahu Aug. 28.

“It’s a pretty exciting and diverse lineup,” says Jessica Simpson, director of programming and marketing for the ASC. “Opening with Herbie Hancock — one of the greatest jazz artists — is just amazing, and he crosses a lot of musical boundaries. Chris Isaak and Steve Earle are both fan as well as personal favorites. They’re phenomenal and both are known for putting on great live performances. And then in August, to celebrate school coming back in session, we have Ben Folds and Matisyahu. And we’ve added lots of smaller events throughout the summer as well. We’re excited to bring all of these artists to Birmingham and to UAB.”

All four shows will be held in the Jemison Concert Hall. Each concert will feature a free, pre-show party 90 minutes prior. Enjoy cocktails and tunes in the outdoor plaza; The Fish Market’s mobile Yellow Bicycle will have food for sale. Enjoy a community art project, live music, cash bar, prize giveaways and more. The shows are part of the center’s Davis Architects “Music We Love” Series. Tickets now are on sale for all shows. Call the Alys Stephens Center Box Office at 975-2787 or visit online at www.AlysStephens.org.

The ASC started the summer series in an effort to expand to year-round programming. Simpson says the shows have a different atmosphere, which she believes adds to the interest.

“The whole vibe during the summer is so much more relaxed,” Simpson says. “It kind of duplets that myth that the arts are stuffy and aren’t for everybody.

Another example of this is the art-project concert. The ASC will celebrate the 15th anniversary of the opening of the performing arts center beginning in September, and those attending the Summer Series events will have an opportunity to help prepare for the celebration. A community arts mural will be created during the summer shows, and concert attendees will be able to put their artistic foot forward and add work to the canvas.

“You can make your own art and experience this great music,” Simpson says. “It’s arts being interactive.”

The artists selected to perform as part of the Summer Series came from community suggestions, a look at artists who are on tour this summer and the ASC’s wish list. “We ask for suggestions on our website at AlysStephens.org and through our Facebook page,” Simpson says. “We look at suggestions from our audience, and we see who is on tour. And we certainly have a wish list of people we want. Ben Folds has been on that wish list for three years. I’ve tried year after year to bring to Birmingham. Folds hasn’t worked out. But this year we were so excited that we were able to make it happen.”

The ASC soon will announce a second summer series, “GoodSongs/GoodPeople,” which will feature today’s hottest singers, songwriters and performers in the calm, cool oasis of the center’s Stirote Theatre. Check www.AlysStephens.org for updates.

Summer Series lineup

**Herbie Hancock, 7 p.m. Wednesday, June 1**

The 14-time Grammy Award-winning pianist, bandleader and composer will return to the Alys with an out-of-this-world ensemble of jazz and rock music’s hottest players. Few artists have had more influence on acoustic and electronic jazz and R&B than Hancock. Enjoy a pre-show party in the ASC outdoor plaza at 5:30 p.m. Tickets are $64.50, $47.50 and $32.50, with 20% student tickets. A limited number of $125 tickets that include a post-show champagne reception and meet and greet with Hancock are available.

**Chris Isaak, 7 p.m. Thursday, June 23**

Singer-songwriter, actor and surfer Isaak is known for balancing the ecstasy of great romance with the agony of pure heartbreak with his passionate music. Throughout his impressive recording career, from his stunning 1985 debut to his latest “Mr. Lucky,” Isaak has tunefully and artfully explored the good, bad and ugly of love and other profound human interests. Enjoy a pre-show party in the ASC outdoor plaza at 5:30 p.m. Tickets are $59.50, $46.50 and $32.50, with 20% student tickets.

**Steve Earle, 7 p.m. Thursday, July 14**

Earle has a new release “I’ll Never Get Out Of This World Alive,” the anticipated follow up to the Grammy Award-winning 2009 release “Townes” and a debut novel of the same name. A protégé of legendary songwriters Townes Van Zandt and Guy Clark, Earle has become a master storyteller in his own right beginning with the

1968 release, “Guitar Town,” and followed with diverse releases including the bitting hard rock of “Copperhead Road” (1988), the minimalist beauty of “Train A Comin’” (1995), the politically charged masterpiece, “Jerusalem” (2002), and the Grammy Award-winning albums “The Revolution Starts” Now (2004) and “Washington Square Serenade” (2007). Enjoy a pre-show party in the ASC outdoor plaza at 5:30 p.m. Tickets are $49.50, $41.50 and $29.50, with 20% student tickets.

**Ben Folds, 8 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 20**

Singer-songwriter, multi-instrumentalist and king of cool collaborations, Folds is an artist the Alys Stephens Center has long hoped to bring to Birmingham. Folds first found mainstream success as the leader of the critically acclaimed, platinum-selling Ben Folds Five. He has since has had a successful solo career, recording three studio albums and a pair of records documenting his renowned live performances and a remix record. Enjoy a pre-show party in the ASC outdoor plaza at 6:30 p.m. Tickets are $50.

**Matisyahu, 7 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 28**

Few artists make an impact as impressive as the one Matityahu made with his 2005 Top 40 hit single “King Without a Crown.” A Hasidic Jewish musician from New York City, he made an impression with a fresh perspective, singing reggae songs about his religious devotion. Fans responded to this one-of-a-kind voice, driving “Youth,” his Grammy Award-nominated 2006 studio disc, to the top spot on Billboard’s reggae albums chart. That album, as well as Matityahu’s first CD, “Live at Stubbs,” went gold. On his CD “Light,” 29-year-old Matityahu covered stylistic ground from hard-edged dancehall, hip hop and ska-inflected New Wave to laidback pop-rock and acoustic folk soul. His latest is a return to Stubbs in Austin, Texas, for a live CD/DVD that demonstrates originality and depth in his craft.
Coker’s oil spill research focuses on degrading microbial oils

James Coker, Ph.D., has spent his adult life searching for the smallest of living organisms that thrive in harsh environments. His graduate student work was searching for bacteria in Antarctica, and his post-doctoral work examined an organism that grows in high-salt environments including the Great Salt Lake in Utah and the Dead Sea near Jordan and Israel.

Now he’s in search of microorganisms closer to home. Coker, assistant professor of biology, hopes to find new microorganisms that will dominate in the carbon-rich environments of the Gulf of Mexico affected by the April 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Coker is part of a consortium of researchers from Alabama State, Auburn University and the University of West Florida that received a $60,000 Small Grant for Exploratory Research (SGER) from Alabama’s Marine Environmental Science Consortium. The study will link ecosystem contamination by oil and dispersants to its effect on prokaryotic microbial communities.

“We’re trying to see how the microbial population has changed and find out what’s there,” Coker says. “We think the oil was spilled into the Gulf; it’s a natural selector for certain groups of organisms that are able to degrade oil naturally. Therefore the amount of microbes there, or at least the numbers of certain types, should shrink. But certain groups will thrive.”

As an example, imagine that there are 100 groups of microbials in the ocean, 30 of which are predominate. The hypothesis is that now — after the spill — there will be fewer predominate microorganism groups. But the ones that are there and can degrade the oil will be flourishing. “Certain microbials now have a bunch of food available to them, and they’re all like pigs to a trough,” Coker says. “They’ll run there and eat it all up. And because pigs to a trough, Coker says. “They’ll run there and eat it all up. And because they have a lot of nutrients, they are able to divide and grow and multiply faster, so there will be hundreds of thousands more of them than everything else.”

The research team will take pre- and post-spill water samples to calculate the number of microorganisms currently there. Coker’s main role is to find the archael communities so they can be comparatively analyzed with the bacterial communities, which is the area of research focus for the other investigators. The group will employ technical advances in DNA molecular microbial community analyses — known as denaturing gradient gel electrophoresis (DGGE) and automated ribosomal intergenic spacer analyses (ARISA) — to understand ecosystem response to assaults of this scope and magnitude. They also plan to develop a model for aquatic ecosystem response at its prokaryotic base and provide a generalized approach for further studies of ecosystem response to different stressors.

Coker knows there are three big microbial players — Alcanivorax, Vibrio and Pseudomonas — he expects to see. Alcanivorax is known especially for its ability to degrade oil.

“One of the reasons the dispersant was spread throughout the Gulf after the spill was because it’s thought that it breaks the oil apart well enough to enable these microbes to chew it up and bioremediate it,” Coker says. “The real data behind that is a little bit sketchy. However, we know about Alcanivorax, Vibrio and Pseudomonas, and we know they do all of this on the surface or close to the surface because they need oxygen in order to break apart the oil and to grow. The question is, what’s further down in the water that’s getting rid of the oil — or is there anything getting rid of it? We believe there is, but they haven’t been discovered yet or studied as well as the big three.”

The ultimate goal

The communities of bacteria in the ocean naturally primed to bioremediate or remove the oil work at a much slower rate than researchers prefer.

Coker points to the 1978 Amoco Cadiz oil spill off the coast of France as an example. At the time, it was the largest oil spill of its kind in history. Coker says it took almost a year for the microbes to remove the near 220,000 tons of light crude spilled by the tanker.

“The microbes idea of using all of this oil up is on the scale of months, years and decades,” he says.

That’s one reason why this current research work is important.

The idea of trying to do bioremediation in waters all over the world has been around for a long period of time. One of the first patents taken out on any sort of microbial species was on an organism thought to be good at degrading oil. And spraying oil spills on sand with dispersant has shown that it will help stimulate bioremediation.

Scientists hope to eventually create an environmentally friendly microbe from scratch that will degrade the oil, possibly using it in addition to or instead of a sprayed dispersant like that used in the Gulf spill.

“That’s the long term, ultimate goal — to create a microbe that would take care of all of it,” Coker says. “There are some problems with that. There already are microbial groups there that do this, and they are adapted to live in that environment. So if you’ve got some outsider coming in, they’re probably going to have a harder time out competing the ones that are already using the oil as a food source. There are still many questions, but it’s something many researchers are looking into.”

Funding for the SGER is for one year, and Coker and the other collaborators hope to have their work completed early next year.

James Coker, assistant professor of biology, hopes to find new microorganisms that will dominate in the carbon-rich environments of the Gulf of Mexico affected by the April 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

Henry Panion to receive Governor’s Arts Award this May

UAB University Professor Henry Panion, Ph.D., will receive a 2011 Governor’s Arts Award from the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

The Governor’s Arts Award honors individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the arts in Alabama. The Alabama State Council on the Arts promotes Alabama’s diverse and rich artistic resources while highlighting excellence and educational experiences.

Panion, a professor of music, is one of eight outstanding Alabamians who will be honored at the council’s 2011 “Celebration of the Arts” awards ceremony Tuesday, May 17 in Montgomery. Specially tailored performances will salute each honoree’s career and body of work, similar to the Kennedy Center Honors. Click here for more details.

The event is free and open to the public, but tickets are limited and must be reserved. For tickets, contact the ASF Box Office at 334-271-5555, or The Arts Council at 334-342-4076. More information is online at www.arts.alabama.gov.

Panion is well-known for his work as conductor and arranger for superstar Stevie Wonder. The two-CD set “Natural Wonder” features Panion conducting his arrangements of many of Wonder’s award-winning, chart-topping songs with Wonder and the Tokyo Philharmonic.

As a producer, composer, arranger, and orchestrator, Panion’s work has earned him two Grammy awards, two Dove awards and a host of other national music awards and nominations. He was the creative force behind “Gospel Goes Classical” — featuring Juanita Bynum, Jonelle Pat获 and the Canadian Symphony Orchestra and Choir; Panion made history topping the Billboard charts on both the gospel and classical crossover charts simultaneously.

One of his most recent projects, and one he feels is among his most important, is the “Are You Listening: A Love Song for Haiti” recording. Written by gospel music superstar Kirk Franklin, and featuring a venerable who’s who of the gospel industry.
JUST ANNOUNCED!

HERBIE HANCOCK  june 1
COLLEGE REWIND  with DOWNRIGHT  june 9
CHRIS ISAAK  june 23
STEVE EARLE  july 14

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BAAM FEST  august 12-13
BEN FOLDS  august 20
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