The Office of Equity & Diversity has begun discussing the possibility of creating a Hispanic/Latino professional organization for faculty and staff.

Jose Fernandez, Ph.D., associate professor of nutrition sciences and director of diversity outreach for the Office of Equity & Diversity, recently met with a group of Hispanic and Latino faculty that unanimously supported the creation of the association and developed a strategy to move in that direction.

“There is representation of Hispanic/Latino faculty within the university, but there is no formal organization that provides an opportunity for the faculty self-identified as Hispanic/Latino to work to improve recruitment and retention of staff, faculty, and students,” Fernandez says.

“We’re in the very early stages. We’re just trying to create some visibility.”

A recent meeting provided a platform for the Hispanic/Latino faculty to explore an association that would work for the best interest of the Hispanic and Latino community, which is growing at UAB.

“We identified a subcommittee to look at this in detail, gather information to develop general objectives or goals for the organization and develop a potential plan of action that will be submitted to the Office of Equity and Diversity,” Fernandez says.

The number of UAB faculty who identify themselves as Hispanic/Latino is 88, Fernandez says, and the number of Hispanic students applying, being admitted and enrolling at UAB climbs steadily each year.

More than 275 Hispanic students applied to UAB as undergraduates in 2011, up from 35 student applications also are on the rise, to 122 in 2011. Exactly 200 Hispanic students were admitted to UAB as undergraduates in 2011, up from 35 in 2007. Of those 200 admitted, 93 enrolled, which is a significant increase from the 25 Hispanic enrollees in 2007.

Several Hispanic/Latino initiatives have been undertaken through the years, including Manos Juntas, the Hispanic/Latino mentoring program; S.A.L.S.A., the Spanish and Latin Student Association, and the Spanish Club.

Fernandez says the fact that these groups already exist on campus is a big step and falls in line with one of the objectives a professional Hispanic/Latino group would have — to make sure the overall environment of the university is positive.

“There are some initiatives that have been created in the past six to seven years to be able to provide a welcoming environment to the students,” Fernandez says. “Our organization will hopefully be able to provide a welcoming environment to the professional workforce at UAB.”

A committee has been created to research other academic institutions to gather information about existing Hispanic/Latino faculty associations in the United States. The members of the committee include: Maria Descartes, Thamar Soboros, John Moya, Rachel Nazer-Carmendi, Patricio D’Villiers, Mary Boggiano, Leandra Celaya, Roberto Mayoral, Giuseppe Squadrato and Michael Crowe.

For more information on the initiative, contact Fernandez at jose@uab.edu.

UAB trauma nurse treats injured soldiers in combat zone

Lyenne Vining has spent her entire career at UAB. The two-time UAB graduate of the UAB School of Nursing has worked in UAB Hospital for 23 years as staff nurse, charge nurse and nurse manager of Trauma and Burn units and transferred into the Medical Intensive Care Unit as nurse manager in the past two years. But right now, she is at war.

Vining is a lieutenant in the Navy serving as an intensive-care nurse specializing in combat trauma. She is the team leader at the NATO Role 3 Hospital in Kandahar Air Field, Afghanistan, in support of Operation Noble Eagle and Enduring Freedom — dirt sailors. “That’s what we call ourselves since we are nowhere near water or a ship,” Vining says.

Vining has been on the mind of many co-workers since her deployment began in February. She’s been in contact with friends and colleagues through e-mail during her time overseas, sending a note home when she can.

“Shes a very patriotic person,” says Pamela Autrey, Ph.D., administrative director for Medical Nursing. “She’s very open about who she is and loves what she does, both at the hospital and the military.”

Vining’s first e-mail was sent in early March to colleagues Velinda Black, chief nursing officer of UAB Hospital, nurse Jennifer Oswald and Autrey. Vining described in vivid detail what her life had been like in the first few short weeks in Afghanistan.

“Greetings from Sand Land,” her note began. “We are here and all settled in after a few weeks ... got broke in rather quickly with rocket attacks on day two. The first few days were a little frustrating as this place is confusing as far as directions go. I did learn where the bunkers were, and from that point I learned my way around. I was also without communication home the first 48 hours, but now everything is set and I am talking to mom each day, which makes me very happy.”

Vining describes the conditions as rigid. “The sand here is constantly blowing and has the consistency of baby powder,” she says. “Even if you can’t see it, you feel it in your eyes, nose and throat anytime you are outside. At night if you look up into a light you can definitely see the stuff you have been breathing all day.”

Travel is tricky with cars all over the road. Even though her hospital is only a mile from her NATO barracks, Vining says her group has to take a zig-zag path to the hospital to avoid the smaller two-lane roads.

“Traffic here is ridiculous,” she says. “You have a higher chance of getting run over by all types of vehicles than anything else.”

Vining says her living quarters are decent and “supposedly” rocket-proof.

May 28, 2012

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www.uab.edu/reporter

UAB trauma nurse treats injured soldiers in combat zone

Lyenne Vining poses with one of the therapy dogs in the NATO role 3 hospital in Kandahar, Afghanistan, where she is the team leader.

May 28, 2012

Vol. 35 No. 39

A PUBLICATION BY AND FOR THE UAB COMMUNITY

www.uab.edu/reporter
UAB team wins Alabama Launchpad

UAB’s team, inDegree, has won the $100,000 grand prize in the Alabama Launchpad business plan competition beating out three other teams from UAB and one each from Auburn University and the University of South Alabama.

inDegree includes Molly Vaske, Ph.D., associate professor and chair of Management, Information Systems and Quantitative Methods in the UAB School of Business.

inDegree is developing an alumni-tracking service that helps universities build stronger alumni communities and helps students leverage their alumni networks in the job market.

Go on “rounds” with WBHM during the summer Radio Clinic

Join Public Radio WBHM 90.3 FM in The Radio Clinic during evening hours Monday through Saturday in June and July. The listener is the doctor and is invited to go on “rounds” of some of the most innovative content that public radio has to offer! Get a read on the vital signs of a variety of new music, talk, debate and entertainment programs, and then help WBHM evaluate these programs and possibly write a prescription for change.

In addition, the class will be featured in the June 2012 issue of National Geographic magazine and online at www.nationalgeographic.com/emerging.

UAB Women’s Club awards scholarships

The UAB Women’s Club recently awarded four scholarships to deserving students.

Sarah Patterson, Rayshonda Hampton, Candice Jones and Libby Kerley received scholarships for the 2012-13 academic year.

The UAB Women’s Club is a service organization focused on charitable and educational programs that connect and support the women of UAB. The group has an annual scholarship fund drive that begins each June.

Better Breathers’ Club meets starting June 13

The American Lung Association’s Better Breathers’ Club provides support, education and social opportunities for people with COPD and their family and caretakers. The club will meet every other month beginning June 13 at 3:30 p.m. in the UAB Highlands first floor boardroom. Anyone interested in attending should call 996-6132 for more information.

Download your total compensation statement by May 30

These statements show the value of your total compensation including your salary and benefits. These statements will be available on line only through May 30 at myuab.uab.edu statement. Statements will not be mailed to your home.

Apply for support for interdisciplinary R&D

The College of Arts and Sciences will award up to $30,000 each for as many as five interdisciplinary team proposals during the 2012-13 academic year. Download submission details at www.uab.edu/cas.

UAB Football season tickets on sale today!

Join new UAB Football Head Coach Garrick McGee and his Blazer squad on the gridiron this season by purchasing your 2012 season tickets today. Packages start as low as $75 and special discounts are available for UAB employees. Play your part in the newest chapter of the Green and Gold. For more information, call 975-8221.

Better Breathers’ Club meets starting June 13

The American Lung Association’s Better Breathers’ Club provides support, education and social opportunities for people with COPD and their family and caretakers. The club will meet every other month beginning June 13 at 3:30 p.m. in the UAB Highlands first floor boardroom. Anyone interested in attending should call 996-6132 for more information.

Innovation Forum to explore genetic medicine May 29

The next College of Arts and Sciences Innovation Forum will examine the ethical, legal and social implications of genomic health care at 1 p.m. May 29 in the Alumni House. Faculty from a variety of disciplines will speak on this topic.

Women at UAB or the spouses of employees at UAB

“We are a social and service group that tries to serve our membership through educational, fun and interesting activities throughout the year, especially to help newcomers see the university and city and network,” says Kyle Wick, immediate-past president of the group. “We want to do all we can to support women’s education at UAB.”

Visit www.uab.edu/uabwc to learn more about the Women’s Club.

May 28, 2012
Desire to help others just part of McDole’s Justice Sciences story

From former chairs of Justice Sciences Charles Lindquist and Brent Smith to current chair John Sloan, anyone who knows Davietta McDole likes to tell stories about her. And because McDole is shy and modest, they usually make her blush or laugh.

Lindquist hired McDole as a clerk-typist and secretary July 9, 1979. He always bragged on McDole and raved about her a little bit too. She made the mistake of telling him once that she always closed her eyes anytime she passed a cemetery. “He always told these great stories about how when I came here I was just a little baby, because he was two years removed from high school when I started,” McDole says. “And he always felt he needed to tell that cemetery story about me.”

Sloan is in on the act these days, too. When people ask him a question, he’ll tell them to go ask McDole to get their answer. “He likes to tell everyone I’m the boss,” McDole says laughing. “I’m flattened by that, even though I know I’m not the boss.”

But McDole, an administrative associate, is a big part of the success of the Justice Sciences department. Her professionalism, good humor, sunny disposition and knowledge of UAB policies and procedures make her an invaluable member of the department’s administrative operation and May’s Employee of the Month.

“Ms. McDole’s assistance during my early time as chair of the department helped keep me sane and avoid making mistakes,” Sloan says. “She always has time to listen and has proven a wonderful sounding board for me for new initiatives.”

Co-workers say McDole’s vast knowledge of UAB’s administrative systems is often put to the test, and she is considered the group’s expert in every aspect necessary for the smooth operation of the department.

“Every faculty member depends on Davietta’s expertise to guide financial decisions, assist in grant-related processes and answer academic and student related concerns when needed,” says Martha Earwood, teaching assistant professor and internship coordinator for Justice Sciences. “There is no one else in the department with her experience or knowledge, and we all depend on her to accomplish our own responsibilities.”

Trying to navigate through policies and procedures can be frustrating, which is why McDole is so valuable to the department, says Beth Gardner, assistant professor of Forensic Science.

“Her knowledge is so broad and deep that when she asks a question it’s usually the one overwhelmed. How does she stay so calm?”

“I just manage. I get through it,” McDole says.

“Davie is extremely knowledgeable about university policies and procedures, and if she doesn’t know the answer, she knows who does,” Gardner says. “More important, she is always pleasant and willing to do what it takes to get the answer.”

McDole says she understands navigating the system can be stressful. She believes her role is to be a calming influence on those around her. That also includes those times when she can be the one overwhelmed. How does she stay so calm?

“I just manage. I get through it,” McDole says.

“Davie always awkw...”

TRAUMA NURSE

Continued from page 1

“I would like to take their word for it and not find out for sure during my tour,” she says. “The mountains where the rockets come from.”

Vining says, “There is no place in my building that I am in good shape.”

The Role 3 Hospital where Vining works has four operating rooms, 16 trauma bays, a clinic and a 35-bed general ward.

The working conditions aren’t quite what she’s used to in UAB Hospital. The lack of luxury items forces Vining and her co-workers to be creative, using medical supplies they have on hand.

Vining, who was a member of Alabama’s Army National Guard from 1966-92, says working in trauma and burns at UAB prepared her for combat-zone deployment.

“I always felt the most confident and calm in codes or pretty serious patient situations back home, and I love that to the leadership at UAB and the trauma surgeons I worked with at the hospital,” Vining says. “[Chief of Trauma/Burns] Loring Rue and [Trauma Surgeon] Sherry Melton and others were teaching me when they didn’t even realize we had to know what to do here and get it done. There is no time for the trauma surgeons to tell you what to do. That is the discipline and focus that is expected of those in trauma at UAB Hospital, and that same expectation is what keeps my head on straight here in Afghanistan.”

The injuries Vining sees in Afghanistan are the worst of the worst. Many occur from improvised exploding devices, gunshot wounds and fractures.

“We get our troops, coalition forces and, yes, the others,” Vining says, referring to enemy soldiers. “Eye-to-eye contact with the latter is chilling, but I am getting the hang of it. My thym on my lip gives me great comfort. I also have a Navy Seal knife in my boot and a flip-knife on my belt. Never thought I would be pricking nursing with all the extras but you will just have to trust me — you would not want us doing it any other way.”

Autrey has known Vining for almost all of her time at UAB Vining was her master’s student in the hospital administration program, and the two have become very good friends through the years. The practical jokes they pull on each other — mostly the ones Vining pulls on Autrey — are legendary.

Autrey has two care packages of supplies donated by friends ready to ship. “I’m holding my breath about how much it’s going to cost to ship them,” she says. “It was $15 to ship a small box to my daughter in Florida. We’ve got a lot of stuff to send her.”

“Autrey, a former Army captain in the nurse corps and member of the Army helicopter pilot program, says she asked Vining once if she wanted to join the Navy as a nurse and serve in a combat zone.

“She said because it’s the right thing to do, and I’m glad I’m doing it,” Autrey says. “That’s Lynne. She’s awesome and just an unbelievable person.”

“The worst of the worst. Many occur from improvised exploding devices, gunshot wounds and fractures.

“This was on my bucket list,” Vining says of being commissioned and serving overseas.

But she’s more than halfway through her nine-month deployment and knows she will see them all in September. For now, Vining’s e-mails certainly convey the sentiments that she’s right where she belongs at the moment — among the sandstorms, chaff and her fellow soldiers, especially those she treats.

She has watched young men and women reduced from strong, upright soldiers to triple and quadruple amputees flying through the ER doors. They are almost always awake, tourniquets to all extremities and no breathing tubes when they come in.

“But they look over at you and say, ‘So glad you are here. Thank you. I know I am going to be alright now,’” Vining says. “The visuals of the injuries do not affect me as much as their strength and will to survive — and they do survive.”

Bedside Purple Heart medal presentations often follow these traumas. Those, she says, are never easy.

“They are hard to get through without tears, so I don’t even try,” Vining says. “There are no tears of pity but tears full of respect, admiration and love for your fallen comrade and their commitment to sacrifice. They are my sons, my brothers, my daughters and my sisters. I am not sure how anyone could serve in the Role 3 and not relate to those emotions.”

Vining shares her experiences — good and bad — with her friends in her e-mails home. She’s glad to get an opportunity to remind everyone of the dangers our enlisted men and women face each day.

“Those are hard to get through without tears, so I don’t even try,” Vining says.

“Sometimes you just have to take a breath and focus on what you’re trying to do and not let things get to you. I try to stay calm in every situation.”

Co-workers marvel at how McDole can play the role of teacher, too. Jason Linville, assistant professor of Justice Sciences, remembers how important McDole was to him when was first hired seven years ago.

She still helps him with the day-to-day administrative duties in his position as graduate program director, and it was those duties she was responsible for teaching him when he was hired.

“I had a vague notion of what the duties of my position were, but I had absolutely no idea how to accomplish any of them,” Linville says. “For something as simple as ordering lab supplies, Davietta had to show me the process. For more complex tasks, such as submitting a contract and hiring students, she had to show me the forms, how to fill them out, the names and contact information for departments across campus.

Davietta demonstrated an understanding of how UAB functioned well beyond the walls of our department.”

For her part, McDole says she has been fortunate to be a part of Justice Sciences for almost 33 years. Her daughter has asked her to consider retiring to take care of her 5-month-old grandaughter Trenton. “He’s my little joy,” she says.

But McDole isn’t quite ready to do that just yet. She’s made plenty of great memories — enough for many more stories — and she’d like to make a few more.

“I’ve been fortunate because from the beginning of my time here, I’ve had very support-ive people behind me,” McDole says. “It was a little rough for me in my younger years when I first started because I was still new-ness. There were times I thought, ‘Wow, am I going to make it? ’But I had good people behind me, and I still do.”

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VA Nursing Academy gives Lee chance to pursue her dreams

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n 2007, Mary Lee and her friend Brittany Gardner were college graduates with big dreams that had yet to be fulfilled. Lee always had an interest in both the military and nursing. But she was doing good work — high-impact work — after graduating from UAB in 2003 with a health promotion degree. She worked for the YMCA, organizing the group's youth sports and fitness efforts and spearheading a childhood-obesity program. But still she dreamed of a career in the military and nursing. Because the military offers world-class education, training and opportunity, she thought joining the Army would be the first step in realizing her dreams.

"Brittany and I were sitting around one day, and we just decided we needed to make a change," Lee says. "We wanted to serve our country and make a difference. And we could receive all the academic benefits and training while saving to pay for nursing school."

Five years later, Lee is an Army veteran and a graduate of the UAB School of Nursing's Veteran's Affairs Nursing Academy. She graduated earlier this month and will begin her nursing career in the Surgical Intensive Care Step-Down Unit (SICU) in UAB Hospital in June.

"I really feel I'm prepared after being a part of the VA Nursing Academy," Lee says. "You get focused and intense education, especially with the veteran population. I know my education combined with the experience I'm going to get in the SICU is going to help me reach my ultimate career goal of becoming a MedEvac air flight nurse."

The UAB School of Nursing was designated a VA Nursing Academy by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Academic Affiliation in 2009, joining 14 other schools in the country with the prestigious designation.

The designation enables the school and the Birmingham VA Medical Center to work collaboratively to educate compassionate, highly skilled nurses to look after the health care needs of the nation's veterans. It also expands learning opportunities for nursing students at VA facilities and funds faculty-development opportunities.

"Nurses are at the frontlines of America's health-care system in every community and setting where our veterans and their families work and live — from doctor's offices to hospitals to home care at home and abroad," says School of Nursing Dean Doreen Harper, Ph.D. The Birmingham VA Nursing Academy is a mutually beneficial partnership that educates the next generation of nurses through collaboration and knowledge-exchange to help improve care outcomes through innovative practice and care models that we develop and learn together.

The School of Nursing and the Birmingham VA Medical Center have a long-standing academic partnership through faculty practice, nursing research and clinical education. The project links institutional missions and governance, creates a pipeline for the development of VA Nurse Scholars and faculty and develops shared clinical, educational and leadership opportunities for students, staff and faculty.

"Students, faculty and VA nurses work collaboratively to discover and disseminate effective care-delivery models for our veterans to advance the highest-quality treatment and prevention," Harper says. "Our partnerships expand learning opportunities for nursing students at VA facilities and fund additional faculty positions."

UAB nursing students perform all their clinicals at the Birmingham VA Medical Center with the exception of obstetrics and pediatrics, and VA-based nurses are clinical and classroom instructors.

Lee says that experience has been invaluable to her. And when her patients notice her VA nametag says "veteran" on it, she's seen how it makes a difference and helps her connect with them on a different level.

"The patients instantly start talking to you when they see you're a veteran," Lee says. "They'll ask, 'where were you stationed? Were you overseas?' They're automatically more trusting. If you get them talking about when they were in the service, it gets their mind off what they're going through. It puts them at ease."

Army and nursing for life

Lee's summer promises to be intense as she realizes her dreams of a career in the military and nursing. She will complete her training to become an officer and an Army Reserve nurse.

It will be quite a change for Lee, a photographer when she was deployed to Iraq in 2009. The move from sergeant to officer also means more leadership opportunities.

"There are great leadership opportunities available, and opportunities for me to further my nursing education," Lee says. "And that's great, because I plan on staying in the Army and working as a nurse. I will retire from the Army as a nurse." Lee's pull to the military is strong for many reasons. She says she admires the men and women who volunteer to serve, and the opportunity to join them is a humbling one for her.

"I have a heart for soldiers and all they do and give for our country," Lee says. "I just enjoy it so much. It's so rewarding being a part of the military and nursing because both are so big and enable you to do so much good. My dreams have come true."

3-D MRI better evaluator for patients with mitral valve disease

Using MRI analysis with 3-D imaging instead of a traditional echocardiogram could help physicians better manage patients with mitral regurgitation and better predict when surgery for the condition is necessary, according to a study co-authored by UAB researchers and published in the May 15 issue of Circulation.

"These findings could be a game-changer for patients," says senior author Mustafa Ahmed, M.D., of the UAB Division of Cardiovascular Disease. "More than 2 million people in the United States suffer from mitral regurgitation, which occurs when the mitral valve fails to close properly and blood that is supposed to be pumped out of the heart flows back. The number of people with this likely will double by 2060 because of aging and population growth."

Guidelines now recommend using an echo-cardiogram to measure the dimension of a single spot in the left ventricle as each heart beat pumps blood out of it to see whether or not the regurgitation has caused the ventricle to dilate beyond what is acceptable and to detect decreased function in the ventricle. Both of these help physicians decide if surgery is needed to correct mitral regurgitation. But, Ahmed says, this single measurement fails to provide a full picture of the health of the whole ventricle, and significant changes in its size and geometry can be missed.

"A conventional echo measures what you could consider an ice pick-like dimension at the base of the heart," says study co-author Louis Dell'Italia, M.D., of the UAB Division of Cardiovascular Disease and Birmingham Veterans Affairs Medical Center. "MRI and 3-D analysis measures this dimension and it also shows the change from the normal football shape to a spherical shape of the entire heart, known as remodeling. Such a global picture provides an accurate volume of the heart, which previous research suggests is the best predictor of the patient's outcome."

The researchers report the MRI with 3-D analysis uncovered more spherical remodeling of the heart than the standard echocardiographic dimension, and significant remodeling was associated with poorer heart function outcomes. These findings, the researchers say, suggest that the volume of the heart plays an important role in outcomes following surgery and should be considered when evaluating patients for a surgical intervention to treat mitral regurgitation.

"Using the MRI with 3-D analysis, we are able to get a better handle on the way the heart is remodeling due to mitral regurgitation and that can better help us determine the optimal time to operate on a patient," Dell'Italia says. "Using this marker for surgical intervention could improve heart function after valve surgery. Though the sample size for the study was small, it should open a dialogue about changing treatment guidelines to include using MRI scans or newer echocardiographic methods that include a 3-D analysis of the heart."
V

A Nursing Academy Instructor Randy Moore has seen quite a bit in his life. The Birmingham native opted to join the Navy after graduating from UAB’s School of Nursing in 1993. He was stationed in San Diego twice and single and in Guam and South Carolina. Moore also served one tour in the deserts of Iraq, providing support for the Marines.

During Moore’s seven-month tour in Iraq, he was a combat nurse in Forward Surgical Hospital in Al Taqaddum in 2006. “The hospital was in the desert in Al Anbar province between Fallujah and Ramadi, and the experience brought to the forefront all of the skills and training I had accumulated,” he says. “I also got to function independently at times, which was really good for me.”

Moore is a 20-year Navy veteran — 14 of those years spent on active duty — and hopes to be a three-time UAB graduate soon. “I am well into the Doctorate of Nursing Practice curriculum with the goal to earn my degree later this year,” Moore says.

In many ways, Moore is a perfect fit for the instructor for the UAB VA Nursing Academy. His field experience gives him plenty of pull with students, especially those who are veterans.

“I was able to relate to him,” says Mary Lee, a member of the Army Reserves who graduated the VA Nursing Academy this spring. “He taught the importance of quick assessments, which he learned from the field. When somebody’s life is on the line, you’ve got to make sure you make a good, solid decision under pressure. He epitomizes that and has an innovative and creative way of teaching it.”

Moore talked with the Reporter recently about his experiences, his role as a teacher and the benefit of a training ground like the VA Nursing Academy on veterans and their families.

Q. Why did you become a nurse and join the Navy?
A. I joined the Navy Reserves at age 20 and was able to go to boot camp and Hospital Corpsman “A” school in San Diego. I received excellent and robust medical training and was afforded the opportunity to perform clinicals in the hospital alongside the nurses. I knew it was something I could do and that completing my undergraduate degree and becoming a registered nurse would position me at the bedside and allow me to provide a higher level of care for sick and injured patients. The Navy seemed to offer the most of what I felt I needed at that time. Plus, most Navy bases are near the ocean, and that was a lifestyle I could embrace.

Q. How would you describe your experience in Iraq?
A. I was the senior nurse for our Forward Surgical Hospital. I had completed graduate school at UAB as a clinical nurse specialist with a focus on emergency nursing and trauma. That skill set put me on the short list for going to the war in Iraq. We were stationed on a base with a large airfield so the security was pretty good. Occasionally mortars would be shot in our direction but we were on a plateau — about 300 feet above the mortar origination point — and most of the time they missed people and buildings. We did get some casualties on base, including one of our own nurses, so the danger was ever-present.

Q. What was your primary mission?
A. Our primary mission was to care for U.S. forces and coalition troops. When the ground forces would catch an enemy combatant who had sustained injuries we cared for them, also, and civilian contractors needed medical care from time-to-time.

Our surgeons, along with everyone else, worked very hard. They would perform life-saving emergency surgery, and if the patient was going to have a significant recovery period we would transport them to a Level III hospital — we were Level II — like the Army Combat Surgical Hospital in Baghdad or the Air Force hospital in Balad. These patients frequently were ventilated and still being resuscitated so a RN would fly with them. I really enjoyed this aspect of the job. It was frightening sometimes when I could see bomb blasts in the distance, but the trip outbound with an injured service member required intense focus so the fear had to become secondary.

Q. What do you remember most?
A. I cherish the fact that I was part of a high-functioning team that was able to provide an extremely high level of health care to our patients in hopes that they could be reunited with their families.

Q. Have your experiences helped you as an educator?
A. For some veterans, military service was a small part of their life. For others, it was a defining point and the rest of their life has revolved around their military experiences. If a veteran wants to talk about his or her time in the service, I allow them to express as much as they feel compelled. For those who elect to not divulge their military contributions, then I allow them to keep that information private. As for students, I essentially have worked with 18- to 24-year-old health-care professionals in my whole career. I usually connect with them on a personal level, despite being in the same age category as their parents. I understand that many paths may lead one to nursing school, but the goal is the same — to graduate, pass the RN licensure exam, care for patients and financially support themselves and their families. I appreciate their efforts and have been fortunate to have some highly motivated students be selected as VA Nursing Academy scholars. Their motivation is always present, so my job is to teach them how to care for the patients and to also help mentor them. Through my nearly 20 years of being a RN, I haven’t seen it all but I’ve seen a lot. I think the students appreciate when I tell them both why the right way is right and why the wrong way is wrong.

Q. How vital are partnerships like the nursing academy for teaching nurses?
A. The visionary leadership of the Veterans Affairs Office of Academic Affairs in creating these partnership opportunities really helps close a gap in care. There are many unique populations that have special health-care needs. The homeless, children, women, etc., all have unique needs of which the health-care team must be cognizant. Veterans are another unique population found in almost every health-care facility across the nation. I appreciate that the Department of Veterans Affairs has sought to establish these partnerships that help build bridges with academia to provide the highest-level care available.

Q. How does caring for a soldier or wounded veteran differ from others?
A. Most veterans appreciate the care they receive, but some have trouble adjusting to illness or injury and don’t care for being in any hospital. I know that military members are taught to be self-reliant problem-solvers. Though the majority of our patients served in WWII or Vietnam — and obviously I am too young to have served with them — when they are in a hospital, they are serving under a military, specifically in a war, for a brief moment that can transport them to a time when they had to see “medical” while on active duty and can see us as part of the team that cared for them then. This cracks open a window of opportunity where they might accept the help we are trying to deliver.

Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan definitely can have some issues transitioning back into civilian life, especially when dealing with an injury or illness, either seen or unseen. Sometimes these men and women just need a safe place to open up. If their spouse and employer and friends don’t understand, sometimes those emotions can surface at a time when they are most vulnerable, such as when they are in a hospital.

Q. Describe the students in the UAB VA Nursing Academy.
A. We have been really fortunate in the caliber of students accepted as part of the VA Nursing Academy. Many have connections to the VA through family members. Some have parents or grandparents that served in the military, some have spouses serving and others served themselves. Our students have been in the Navy, Army, Marine Corps and Air Force. Since our students progress through the SON as a cohort, they learn from one another and gel as a team. Students in clinicals work ahead to build a little time in their day so they could offer the teammates assistance. And the students actively seek opportunities to render assistance. They don’t wait to be asked.

Q. What’s the one thing you hope your students know or understand when they leave your classes?
A. To remember to ask whether the patient has served in the military, no matter where they care for patients. If the answer is yes, it is okay to thank them for their service. Veterans never tire of hearing that. Understand that military service sequence may start, and seek out these problems. A patient may qualify for care at a VA Medical Center. That same patient may be having trouble paying for his care and prescriptions. Through the RN’s personal interaction and communication with the patient and their family they may be able to help a veteran transition into the VA health-care system. Veterans are everywhere. Nurses are everywhere.

Read more at www.uab.edu/reporter
environmental health risks are focus of new UAB program

mental exposures.”
This program will study and treat the effects on human health from any environmental exposure.
“Some, such as COPD and idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, have no cure. Prevention, or at least early diagnosis, is essential.”

Pratt and his classmates did better than that. They brought home two.
Carver students shocked the competition winning both first- and third-place honors among 40 competing teams from 15 high schools around the state. The competitors included three nationally ranked schools, and Carver was the only urban school competing. Oh, and the students did all of this despite just learning robotics programming in January.

“This really is unheard of success for a school competing for the first time — and an inner-city school at that,” says Michael Wyss, Ph.D., director of UAB’s Community Outreach and Development (CORD) program, which trained the students through a National Science Foundation-Broadening Partnership in Computing (NSF-BPC) grant.

“We thought one of the teams might place in the competition, but both of them did. It’s just an unbelievable feat for a group of talented students.”
UAB students Dalorion Johnson, Brannon Shipp and Kaush Shauku have spent the better part of the past six months training the Carver students first in the pre-Java program ALICE and robotics. CORD also taught the same program at Ramsey High School this past year. “It’s really our students who run this program, and they do an excellent job,” Wyss says.

Johnson and the other UAB students started the semester teaching them basic computer concepts. The students learned about algorithms and binary numbers, “just to get them thinking methodically and step by step,” Johnson says, before moving to robotics.

The students already had competed in the BEST Robotics competition in fall 2011, where they had to build a robot and navigate it with a remote control. That competition focused more on the mechanical side of engineering. The students had to learn how to program their robots to complete tasks for the statewide Alabama Robotics Competition. Their robots had to perform on an obstacle course and find parking places in a space it could fit in, among other tasks.

“This instruction is all about the programming — giving the robot an instruction and see it act it out,” Johnson says. “We set the parameters for what they want their robot to accomplish and tell it to move a certain amount of feet or inches. It’s another step in trying to get them to think step-by-step and solve problems in a most precise way. What we’re trying to get across is that this robot is a computer, and you have to be very specific with your instruction to get the computer to do what you want it to do.”

“These commands also are much more complex because the robots use multiple sensors,” Wyss adds. “Through this instruction, which overlays Java, the students begin to learn the underlying concepts behind this, and it will be much easier for them to access Java when they move on to it. This is laying the foundation for them to have the concepts that can move them forward.”

Engaging these students and encouraging them to continue to pursue their interests in engineering is a key focus of the NSF-BPC grant. The grant’s emphasis is on using multiple mentoring to facilitate access to the computer science education and career program for inner-city minority students in grades five through 12, with a special focus on girls.

African-American employees account for 5 percent of the total computer-software industry despite representing 14 percent of the population. Women in general are greatly under-represented in the industry, totaling approximately 20 percent.

“They’re under-represented in the profession because we don’t engage them early,” Wyss says. “Early engagement is vital to build a pipeline so the entire population can enter into the 21st century economy.”

Pratt says he’s been interested in computers since elementary school, and when he got to high school he “decided to take a step further and pursue it.”

These students, all part of Ramsey math teacher Maia Lake’s robotics class, also will be mentors this summer for area middle-school students through this grant program.

Wyss says teachers like Lake and the results of the robotics competition highlight the possibilities for Birmingham’s inner-city students.

“The important thing to note is in a city where the media seems to picture a floundering school system, great students and teachers can achieve great successes,” Wyss says. “With a little support they can do terrible things.”

UAB training helps students win robotics competition

Carver High School senior Josh Pruitt was excited about the opportunity he and his classmates had to compete at the Alabama Robotics Competition April 21, even if they were dragging a little bit once they got to the University of Alabama campus in Tuscaloosa.

“To be honest, I didn’t think we would do well at all,” Pruitt says. “I was out the week before on a field trip, and we had Prom night the night before the competition, too. I was tired. But we had to get past the sleepiness and do our best to bring a trophy back to school.”

Carver students shocked the competition winning both first- and third-place honors among 40 competing teams from 15 high schools around the state. The competitors included three nationally ranked schools, and Carver was the only urban school competing. Oh, and the students did all of this despite just learning robotics programming in January.

“The environment can have a profound effect on human health,” said Victor Thannickal, M.D., professor and director of the Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine and director of the new program “Some environmental issues arise from pollution or man-made toxins, but others are natural, from bacteria present in the air, water or soil, for example.”

The program has three components: providing clinical care for patients with disease tied to environmental exposure; public education on the health effects of such exposure; and a research component that will work to better assess the risks of exposure, identify sources of exposure and search for ways to mitigate or reduce exposure.

“This initiative will put UAB at the forefront of environmental medicine,” said Victor Thannickal, M.D., professor and director of the Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine. “We will bring together experts from across campus — physicians, public health professionals, engineers, chemists and biologists — in a wide-ranging collaboration of basic science, translation research and community outreach.”

One of the first projects of the program is the Birmingham Clean Air Initiative, a multi-disciplinary effort to solve air pollution problems. It involves the UAB Schools of Medicine and Public Health, in partnership with the Southern Environ- mental Center at Birmingham Southern College, Jefferson County Department of Health, Southern Environmental Law Center and GASP, a community advocacy group.

“In addition to improving lung health for those in Central Alabama, this initiative will add to the body of knowledge about the health impact of air pollution on people worldwide, a growing problem in industrialized and developing nations in which public policy promoting clean air often lags behind economic development,” said Antony. “These findings also hold promise for treatment of lung diseases such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and pulmonary fibrosis.”

“Chronic lung disease is endemic in the Birmingham area,” said Thannickal. “Some, such as COPD and idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, have no cure. Prevention, or at least early diagnosis, is essential.”

Environmental health risks are focus of new UAB program

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Treatment helps woman make most of life after cancer

What: Celebrating Life
Where: 6 p.m. Friday, June 1
Where: Regions Park in Hoover
Note: Educational opportunities, children’s activities, giveaways and more are planned. The first 200 cancer survivors will receive a free T-shirt and ticket to the Barons’ game.

Mary Ann Harvard spent a lot of time trying to find out why she didn’t feel good — years, as a matter of fact. It was a helpless feeling, Harvard says. She was in pain, and she couldn’t get any answers.

Finally, UAB Assistant Professor of Medicine Amy LeHuene, M.D., provided the first glimpse into Harvard’s problem and saved her life. A chest X-ray revealed a tumor the size of a football, and LeHuene immediately referred her to the Comprehensive Cancer Center. When Hematology & Oncology Professor Andres Forero, M.D., saw the X-ray and diagnosed Harvard with Hodgkin’s lymphoma in June 2003, her outlook was bleak.

“I was very ill, with only a week or two to live,” Harvard says. “It’s a miracle that I am alive.”

Harvard plans to applaud that miracle with other cancer survivors Friday, June 1 at “Celebrating Life,” a National Cancer Survivors Day event at Regions Park hosted by UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center, Birmingham Barons and various Alabama cancer-related organizations. The event begins at 6 p.m., with educational opportunities, children’s activities, giveaways and more. The first 200 cancer survivors will receive a free T-shirt and ticket to the Barons’ game against the Charlotte Knights. An honor wall will enable participants to honor a loved one who has or had cancer; for information or to submit a name, visit www.uab.edu/survivorsday.

National Cancer Survivors Day is an annual celebration of life that is held in hundreds of communities during the first weekend of June each year. Participants unite in a symbolic event to show the world that life after a cancer diagnosis can be meaningful and productive.

Harvard certainly has tried to live her life in that way since her diagnosis. Her cancer was so advanced that she has been treated six different times since then in an effort to beat back the disease. That’s why these events are so special.

“Cancer changes a person in such a dramatic way that it is really something to celebrate,” Harvard says. “When we all get together, you can feel the power and energy of everyone there. There are many people like me who have exceeded their life expectancy, and that is a worthy cause to celebrate. Events like this really help you see a strong feeling of love, support and community.”

Part of a clinical trial

Harvard, a Birmingham native, was 22 and a student at the University of Montevallo when she was diagnosed. She was engaged to her now-husband Mark, whom she met in 2001 while working at Our Lady of Sorrow Learning Center, and she wanted to become a kindergarten or first-grade teacher. Cancer changed those plans.

Harvard recalls those early days after her initial diagnosis as a blur.

“I was so sick that I really didn’t understand what all was going on,” she says. “I could tell from my family that something wasn’t right. I was not completely awake for that week in the hospital. My life was never the same after that work.”

Forero, a co-leader in the experimental therapeutics program at the UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center, worked closely with the company Seattle Genetics in the development of the pre-clinical data on cancer drug SGN-35 and eventually collaborated in writing the first Phase I clinical trial in human beings. In fact, UAB treated the first human patient to ever be given the drug.

At the time Harvard was given SGN-35, no one knew if it would work.

“It was a shot in the dark,” Forero says. “When she was in the Phase I clinical trial, it was exploratory and we didn’t know how active the medication was. Fortunately, we have shown it to be extremely effective. It’s the most active medicine ever discovered for Hodgkin’s lymphoma.”

SGN-35 is a protein that recognizes the Hodgkin’s lymphoma cells. A toxin is bound to the protein and then injected into the body where it circulates and finds the tumor cells. Once it binds to the tumor cells, the toxin is delivered inside the tumor. The drug has proven to be effective in trials for Hodgkin’s lymphoma and anaplastic large cell lymphomas that were resistant to prior therapies or came back after a period of time.

The FDA approved SGN-35, now known as Ad cetris, for treatment of these types of lymphomas in August 2010.

“We were extremely active in the development of the drug up to the point it was approved,” Forero says. “The drug worked very well for Harvard initially. It stopped working for a while, but she began using it again in January of this year and it wiped out her cancer completely in two treatments.

Making most of a new life

Harvard says her “new life” began after diagnosis in 2003, and while it has been difficult at times, it has also brought her tremendous opportunities.

Harvard had a stem-cell transplant at UAB in 2004 and Mark — her fiancé at the time — lived in the hospital with her for three weeks. He slept, showered and washed his clothes in the hospital.

“He was the main reason I kept fighting and endured all those treatments,” Harvard says. “He could have easily left in the beginning, in 2003, and I wouldn’t have blamed him. He stayed and gave me the love that I live for every day.”

She married Mark in 2005, and they were flown to New York for the NBC “The Today Show” in October of that year where she received a makeover from a famous stylist. Harvard also was featured in a 2008 episode of “Mystery Diagnosis” on Discovery Health.

One of the things Harvard is most proud of is being one of the founding members of the Young Supporters Board of the UAB CCC. The board, which comprises young professionals ages 22-35, was established in 2006 to introduce the next generation of Alabamians to the importance of cancer research and awareness.

The Young Supporters Board hosts projects and fund raisers throughout the year and provides services and activities for cancer patients in the inpatient and outpatient units. The group has raised more than $230,000 since its inception for the UAB CCC and UAB’s cancer research efforts.

“We want to help patients who are sick,” Harvard says. “We want to give them hope that there are other survivors out there. There are people who have walked in their shoes and know what it’s like.”

She also is happy to promote UAB’s services when she has the opportunity.

“I have received excellent care at UAB,” Harvard says. “Dr. Forero and I have been through so much together. I am very blessed to have him as my doctor, and the staff has been so kind and always ready to help.”

Harvard continues to take SGN-35 once every three weeks as a precaution. Because of her long history of relapsing, Forero wants her to stay on the medication as long as she continues to respond well.

Harvard says she has come to peace with her health. She says she knows there will be more ups and downs, but she is ready to handle whatever comes her way.

“I try to make the most out of the life that I have been given and try to live the best life possible,” she says. “My family is so dear to me and they are the support that drives me to keep pushing ahead.

“No matter what life brings your way if you have faith that will carry you through,” she says. “I can’t say enough just how blessed I am to have such a great support system of family, friends, doctors and nurses. There really are angels here on Earth who help us through the trials of life.”

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Andres Forero (back), M.D., a co-leader in the experimental therapeutics program at the UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center, worked closely with the company Seattle Genetics in the development of the pre-clinical data on cancer drug SGN-35 and eventually collaborated in writing the first Phase I clinical trial in human beings.
Join us as we knock cancer out of the park!

Cancer Survivors Day

Barons vs Chattanooga Lookouts

June 1 • 6PM
First pitch at 7:05 PM | Regions Park

Educational opportunities
Children's activities
Giveaways and much more!

The first 200 survivors will receive a free ticket to the baseball game and a free t-shirt!

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