Levine to write photographer ‘Spider’ Martin life’s story

As if curating the UAB Visual Arts Gallery weren’t enough to occupy him, Brett Levine is undertaking his most challenging and time-consuming project to date — a biography of one of Alabama’s foremost photographers.

Levine says his work with the late James “Spider” Martin estate is one reason he received a 2010 Literature Fellowship Grant from the Alabama State Council on the Arts. Levine also was selected because of the merit of his work, career potential and service to the state.

“I’m incredibly honored to be given a literature fellowship,” says Levine, the only arts administrator to receive one. “To think an art historian, critic and writer could have been regarded enough by literary peers to be given an honor of this type is very humbling.”

Levine always has viewed Martin as a remarkable photojournalist, artist and larger-than-life character. The gallery hosted “Spider Martin’s Unseen Sixties” exhibit three years ago, which showcased never-before-seen fashion photos from the late photographer during an exhibit co-curated by Levine and his wife, Mindi Shapiro. It was then Levine began a friendship with Tracy Martin, the photographer’s daughter.

Jamy Ard, M.D., associate professor of nutrition sciences, says weight loss for the sake of weight loss might not be appropriate for older adults. Instead, physicians and seniors need to find strategies to help maximize and maintain lean muscle and minimize abdominal fat.

There may be an obesity epidemic in America, but UAB researchers are wondering if a few extra pounds on grandma and grandpa are a bad thing.

The CrossRoads trial, a collaboration between the Department of Nutrition Sciences and the Division of Gerontology, Geriatrics and Palliative Care, will examine the effect of physical activity and diet on body composition in older adults and any changes in the quality of life for seniors.

“Weight loss for the sake of weight loss might not be appropriate for older adults,” said Jamy Ard, M.D., associate professor of nutrition sciences and a study co-investigator. “We really don’t understand all of the potential risks or potential benefits of weight loss in seniors.”

“Studies have shown that overweight seniors tend to live longer than their leaner counterparts, and we know that rapid weight loss in older adults can lead to a decline in overall physical condition,” said Julie Locher, Ph.D., associate professor of gerontology, geriatrics and palliative care and a study co-investigator.

Locher says that the percentage of body fat — particularly abdominal fat that is associated with poor health outcomes — tends to increase with age. But, she says, when older adults lose weight they also have a greater tendency to lose lean muscle mass.

A new question has to be answered, said Locher. “What is a healthy weight for seniors, and how can we devise strategies to help them maximize and maintain lean muscle and minimize abdominal fat?”

The CrossRoads trial will enroll 180 older adults age 65 and older, and they will be divided into three groups. One group will be asked to simply increase their physical activity. A second will increase physical activity and switch to a healthier diet. The third will increase physical activity, eat a healthier diet and also reduce their calorie intake.

Summer blood drive to be held July 12-17

UAB and the American Red Cross have kicked off a week-long blood drive to boost summer stockpiles of blood. The need for blood products frequently is higher in summer months due to injuries associated with increased travel and outdoor activities. Blood-donation totals often are lower during summer as normal donation patterns are disrupted.

Donations can be made from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday, July 12 through Friday, July 16 and from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday, July 17 in the UAB North Pavilion second floor lobby.

The drive is part of UAB’s Blood Management Initiative to increase blood donation and decrease blood use.
The UAB Department of Music Summer Band presented its annual, free Fourth of July concert on the lawn in front of Bartow Arena. The concert featured patriotic songs, traditional band music, pop tunes, Disney favorites, movie and Broadway themes and an audience sing-a-long medley that included “America the Beautiful,” “You’re a Grand Old Flag” and “God Bless the U.S.A.”

UAB Resource Center offers Scream-Free Parenting seminar

The UAB Resource Center/Employee Assistance Program will present a seminar on Scream-Free Parenting by Sallie Lowman, Wednesday July 21 from noon until 1 p.m. in Whittaker Building Suite 104.

The one-hour seminar for parents aims to create calm, cooperative households in which children can grow into caring, responsible, self-directed adults. Practical principles of overcoming parental stresses and anxieties will be covered, teaching parents how to stay both calm and connected with their children at all ages and stages of life. Participants may bring their lunch to this presentation. Space is limited, call 934-2281 to register.

This class is open to all UAB and UAB Health System employees at no cost. The program provides counseling, supervisor consultation and a variety of educational programs designed to support the quest for health in all areas of life. For more information about these programs or other services, visit www.uab.edu/eap.

High-school students to tour UAB Hospital, explore job opportunities

High-school seniors with disabilities will tour UAB Hospital’s Dietary and Environmental Services departments Thursday, July 22 as part of the 2010 session of Career Prep, an annual program sponsored by the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS).

Career Prep includes two one-week training sessions with a focus on improving job readiness skills and exploring various careers as well as job tours of Birmingham area businesses. Program participants work on a variety of skills, including customer service, money management, interviewing techniques, and resume preparation. The ADRS program culminates with a celebratory lunch featuring a motivational speaker.

UAB prepares to launch iTunes U

UAB on iTunes U plans to provide access to a wide range of academic and informational content in audio and video formats at www.uab.edu/itunesu/about. The site will include select content drawn from many campus entities to share academic knowledge and pertinent information about the UAB community; however, the site will not be accessible until it is populated with content.

Faculty and staff can learn more about UAB on iTunes U www.uab.edu/itunesu/about, find guidelines for use, learn how to contribute content and identify the appropriate iTunes U campus liaison for their school/area and view FAQs www.uab.edu/itunesu/faq online.

If your area would like to contribute content but is not listed on the campus liaison page, please contact AskIT at 996-5555 or e-mail askit@uab.edu.
Danny Welch, Ph.D., is a senior scientist in the UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center and a renowned expert in the biology and genetics of cancer metastasis — the process by which cancer cells break away from a primary tumor and enter the bloodstream or lymphatic system and spread to other parts of the body.

Now, Welch is taking his expertise to the Susan G. Komen for the Cure Scientific Advisory Council. He recently was selected for the council, which includes more than 60 top-ranked scientists, physicians and advocates from seven nations and a wide range of disciplines. The group will help guide the organization’s extensive research program.

Welch, director of UAB’s Graduate Biomedical Science Program in Cancer Biology, will serve a two-year term, which may be renewed. The council will provide scientific review for the research grants and programs the organization funds annually, and council members will help guide Komen leaders toward best-practices in cancer education and policy initiatives.

The new advisory council spans a wide range of specialties, including clinical research, laboratory research, surgery, pathology, radiation oncology, epidemiology, medical oncology, behavioral sciences, disease prevention, bioinformatics and international health. Council members in the United States will be liaisons in 21 communities across the nation.

Welch recently spoke to the UAB Reporter about breast-cancer research, his role and his opportunity to work directly with Komen for the Cure, the world’s largest breast-cancer awareness and research organization.

Q. How excited are you to serve on the Komen advisory council?

A. Very. Although there is a great responsibility associated with serving this position, the chance to influence research priorities is exciting. Of course, I have an agenda to promote the area of metastasis. It is disconcerting that the outcome of cancer cells causing greater than 90 percent of cancer deaths receives far less than 5 percent of government or foundation funding in the area of cancer. That statistic must change.

Q. Why is your pathology lab positioned to lead in uncovering secrets of this disease?

A. The mechanisms underlying metastasis continually are being identified. Though the focus of most research during the past 50 years has been on what has gone wrong with the tumor cells themselves, the research focus in the past four to five years has been evolving toward how tumor cells interact with normal cells.

Our own research on metastasis suppression is beginning to uncover how tumor cells respond to different environments in which they find themselves during their movement around the body.

Q. Is breast cancer more likely to metastasize than other cancers?

A. The short answer to your question is probably not. However, your question raises an important point: Cancer is multiple diseases. Even breast cancer can be subdivided into at least five subtypes. The predisposition to metastasize for those different types of breast cancer varies widely. Some types rarely metastasize, whereas others frequently metastasize.

Q. Have researchers determined why breast-cancer frequently metastasizes to the bones?

A. This is an area of active interest for which the field still has very few answers. The bone is a very rich environment with regard to growth factors and as the depot for generating the immune system. Breast-cancer cells in the primary tissue of this environment. How they know to do so still is a mystery. Perhaps more troubling is how the tumor cells that arrive in the bone manipulate the environment to benefit the tumor cells. One of the advantages of being at UAB is the juxtaposition of a Comprehensive Cancer Center and a center for bone research (Center for Metabolic Bone Disease). The answer to the questions regarding bone metastasis will come by bridging research silos and integrating the findings on both disciplines.

Q. Why is your pathology lab positioned to lead in uncovering secrets of this disease?

A. We have a growing base in Birmingham, an ideal location. “Part of our strategy is to partner with others like the Calloway Medical Center and other outlying cities to systematically expand to different communities that will enable people to access our programs easily,” Ard says. “We have set goals to expand our footprint to Montgomery, Huntsville, Dothan and Mobile — some of our major populated centers in Alabama. They are our targets.”

For more information on the UAB EatRight Weight Management Services, go to www.eatright.uab.edu or call 934-7053.
OB/Gyn resident clinic adds after-hours appointments

Laura Lee Joiner is the director of the UAB Obstetrics & Gynecology Resident Continuity Clinic, which has relocated to the UAB campus and added a Monday evening after-hours clinic to better serve employees, students and the community. The clinic will provide services for gynecology visits, including breast exam, pelvic exam and pap smear.

Joiner says the clinic provides excellent care, quality resident and medical student instruction and an excellent continuity of care to benefit patients and physicians. The clinic will accept new patients for annual gynecology visits, including breast exam, pelvic exam and pap smear. Regular returning patients also will be seen.

“We also provide a referral point for patients who need after-hours care in addition to gynecologic care,” Joiner says.

The after-hours clinic will be from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. each Monday and will be staffed by Joiner and a third-year resident. Joiner says the economy has played a role in deciding to offer the after-hours clinic. She has had a number of employed patients and students who don’t want to miss class appointments.

“Many of us who work in the medical field feel an obligation to our patients,” Joiner says. “It’s very difficult for a resident physician to take off to get their own health-care maintenance done. We hope this will be a help to them, as well.”

The Obstetrics & Gynecology Resident Continuity Clinic accepts insurance plans in accordance with University of Alabama Health Services Foundation polices. Patients can make appointments and physicians can refer patients by e-mailing WRHC-Patients@obgyn.uab.edu. Appointments also can be made by calling 934-9074.

SENIORS

CONTINUED from page 1

“We’re going to look at changes in body composition among the three groups during the course of one year,” said Ard. “We’ll be measuring the percentage of body fat and track the participants overall health, physical condition, wellness and quality of life.”

LEVINE

CONTINUED from page 1

Levine approached Tracy Martin a year ago about the possibility of writing a biography on her father. Martin is best known for his Birmingham News photos from Bloody Sunday in Selma during the Civil Rights Movement. But his family — and Levine — believe Martin’s contemporary work also is compelling. His photos appeared in the pages of Avondale Mills, Playboy and Birmingham Magazine. Coupled with a personal life that was intriguing on many levels, Martin’s story in art history they believe needs to be shared.

“Spider’s family for many years has been concerned about the way his legacy would be portrayed,” Levine says. “The fact that I was here at UAB and able to do the exhibition — which was incredibly well received — put us in a position to build a relationship to do something else. I felt like I was the right person to write his biography, and when I approached them, they agreed.

“The book project is just commencing,” Levine adds. “It’s a major undertaking. It will be years in the making; there’s no doubt about that. But through the type of relationships I’ve established with the people involved, the capacity for the work gets better and better.”

New challenges

Levine is an accomplished art history writer. He has written for national and international art publications including Art Papers, Art New Zealand, Urbis and Object. He has more recently started contributing regularly to general publications designed for non-arts audiences. Levine has written for a newspaper in Kentucky and Birmingham Home and Garden and now is a regular contributing writer to B-Metro magazine. His motivation is to bring complex work and ideas to audiences that may be unfamiliar with any of the contemporary art.

The Martin biography will present new challenges.

“I’ve written some major catalog essays for people, but you’re talking about 10,000 to 15,000 words, 40 to 70 pages — major monographs on people,” Levine says. “You’re not talking about trying to fairly, faithfully and interestingly try to represent someone’s entire life.”

Levine says the key to the project is the access the Martin family is giving him.

“From the outset, it’s all about people who agree to tell me what they know,” Levine says. “Tracy and her family are being very supportive and trying to tell people that they would rather them be honest than protect them. I feel as people understand what it is I’m doing, their desire to participate will be greater and the project itself will be as open-ended as it can be. My challenge will be keeping parameters on it and writing the story that needs to be told, within the type of story people actually want to read.”

Faculty support

That Levine has been able to tie this project to an exhibit the Visual Arts Gallery hosted is equally gratifying, he says. He also is grateful for the support he has received from faculty in pursuing the biography.

“We all are interested in anything to highlight what we do here at the university,” Levine says. “We all work on our day-to-day projects, but we’re also extending ourselves and our scope, reach and knowledge. It’s good to be here with these opportunities and have the freedom to be able to pursue a project like this.”

Levine has researched archives and compiled some background work in recent months. Interviews on the project begin this month. Levine is confident Martin’s life story has enough intrigue to make the book a page-turner.

“I think people in Alabama, and nation-wide, are interested in Spider,” Levine says. “I think they’re interested in some of the more fascinating aspects of his personal life. And the last part of this is the mystery surrounding how he passed away. You start with some kid in Alabama on a bridge in Selma making a name for himself, and you end up alone on somebody’s rented farm in Blount Springs dead of a gunshot wound. It’s an interesting story. So here we go.”