UAB’s campus continues to evolve and grow, and more construction projects are on the horizon. One of the largest — and most crucial — will be the District Steam System Project, which includes the construction of a state-of-the-art steam-generation plant and steam distribution and condensate recovery network. Also, the program includes purchase of the existing Alabama Power Co. Southside steam plant and distribution system, which will be decommissioned in mid-2013 due to age and condition.

The $69 million project was approved by the University of Alabama System Board of Trustees this past June. The new steam 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 network will replace the existing steam-distribution 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 when Alabama Power discontinues its steam operation in February 2013.

“Balance problems can be difficult to diagnose and treat because they can be caused by a combination of conditions and movement issues,” says Catherine Newhouse, administrative director of UAB Rehabilitation Services. “This new technology will help us provide the very best diagnostic and treatment options for patients with balance impairments caused by stroke, traumatic brain injury, orthopedic surgery, developmental disability or aging.”

“Balance is regulated by three different systems in the body — the eyes, the inner ear and the body’s general sense of its place. For patients with balance issues, the Neurocom machine enables therapists to determine which is not working properly. It also provides exercises to strengthen a failing system.”

“We can evaluate and we can also treat patients using this machine,” says Brian King, a UAB physical therapist. “We can see how far they can shift their weight and if they’re losing their balance.”

Preparations under way for construction of new steam plant, distribution network

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“We’ve been conducting feasibility studies and doing due diligence on this project for more than two years now,” says Jerry Corvin, UAB senior project manager. “It’s a very complex project, and there is a very target date is Feb. 12, 2013, for the transition, and right now, we’re on target.”

When Eric Essix walked into the Alys Stephens Center Sept. 1 at 8 a.m., it marked a milestone of sorts for the talented guitarist. He was “officially” employed. When was the last time he could say that?

“Well,” he says, pausing as a smile creeps across his face, “actually it’s been 20 years since I had a ‘real’ job.”

The laughter that follows his remark reveals Essix’s sense of disbelief that it has, in fact, been two decades since he was officially employed. It also gives a sense of his excitement for what is to come in his position as the new artist coordinator for UAB’s Alys Stephens Center (ASC).

Essix, a Birmingham native and accomplished jazz guitarist and recording artist, now has a “day job,” too. He began full-time Sept. 1 as the new artist coordinator for the Alys Stephens Center.
First-ever Faculty and Staff Climate Survey ends today

To find out what faculty and staff think about working at the university, UAB is conducting its first Faculty and Staff Climate Survey through midnight today, Monday, Oct. 4.

Faculty and staff with UAB e-mail accounts received a direct link to the survey in an e-mail Sept. 21. For those employees without easy e-mail access, arrangements still can be made with their departments; alternatively, they can visit a computer lab in the Medical Towers building (1171 11th Ave. South, Fourth Floor) from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. today. An outside firm, HR Solutions Inc., is administering the survey to ensure confidentiality; individual responses will not be seen by anyone at UAB.

“HR Solutions developed the engagement surveys that have been distributed in UAB Medicine for the past couple of years,” said Chief Human Resources Officer Alexis Jones. “They are experts in the development of satisfaction and climate surveys, and they will be able to analyze the results of our survey to provide important information on faculty and staff perceptions of the work environment at UAB.”

When the analysis is completed, the results will be shared with deans and senior administration. A summary also will be shared with the faculty and staff.

“This is your chance to make a difference in your work environment, and in the future of UAB,” Jones said. “I encourage each and every faculty and staff member to take the 15 minutes or less needed to complete this survey.”

Open enrollment now under way

The annual benefits open enrollment period is under way, which means that all benefit-eligible UAB employees should be making final decisions related to medical, dental, vision, voluntary AD&D insurance coverage and flexible spending accounts well before 5 p.m. Friday, Oct. 5.

Open Enrollment is being handled exclusively through the web. For more information on open enrollment, please visit our website at www.uab.edu/benefits.

Full court press

The Minority Health and Heath Disparities Research Center (MHRC) recently held its fifth annual gala, “Center Court with Sir Charles,” featuring honorary chair Charles Barkley.

President Carol Garrison discusses the MHRC’s unrelenting efforts to reduce health disparities across our community and state, as well as the upcoming inaugural MHRC Luncheon with Maya Angelou, in her latest post on the web. For more information on open enrollment, please visit our website at www.uab.edu/benefits.

Training for UAB Safe Zone volunteers to be held Oct. 5

UAB HRM Training and Development will train volunteers for the UAB Safe Zone program from 1 to 4 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 5 in Medical Towers 419A. The Safe Zone program is an established, visible network of trained faculty, staff and students who provide confidential support and reliable information to other faculty, staff and students regarding issues related to sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

Register online for the workshop at www.uab.edu/trandeve; click on “Professional Development Program Information”; click on “Professional Development Courses”; click on “Safe Zone Program,” under the list of courses. For more information, contact Debbie Marquette at marquette@uab.edu.

Alabama Launchpad accepting business plans for competition

The Alabama Launchpad competition is back for a fifth year, and UAB faculty and staff interested in participating in the start-up business competition have until Oct. 15 to register. The first business plans are due Nov. 1.

The organization awards $175,000 annually as part of the competition. First place receives $100,000, second place receives $50,000 and third receives $25,000. For more information on this year’s competition, visit www.alabamalaunchpad.com.

Volunteers needed for Blazer BEST Oct. 7-9

The School of Engineering is seeking volunteers for its upcoming Blazer BEST robotics competition Game Day event weekend, Oct. 7-9. Blazer BEST is a contest among more than 25 Central Alabama high-school teams hosted in Bartow Arena. Volunteers will serve as event judges and referees.

For more information on faculty and staff perceptions of the work environment at UAB.

School of Nursing to mark 60 years with luncheon Oct. 22

Nurse practitioners, health-care administrators, university presidents, deans and professors from around the globe will gather in Birmingham in October to celebrate the accomplishments of 60 visionary leaders and the 60th anniversary UAB School of Nursing.

The event, featuring UAB President and School of Nursing alumna Carol Garrison as keynote speaker, will be held at 11:30 a.m. Friday, Oct. 22 at The Club in Birmingham. Tickets are $75 per person.

For more information or to purchase tickets, call 975-8936, e-mail nursehum@uab.edu or visit www.wvub.edu/hsn60.

Theatre UAB to present “The Rocky Horror Show”

The camp classic opens at 7:30 p.m. nightly Oct. 6-9 and at 2 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 10 in UAB’s Alys Stephens Center Sirote Theatre. Tickets are $15 and $18; $7 for students and $12 for UAB employees and senior citizens. Call 975-2787 for tickets. Visit the UAB Department of Theatre at theatre@uab.edu. “The Rocky Horror Show” is the first mainstage play of Theatre UAB’s 40th anniversary season.
GGA test driver expands researchers’ calculating power

CAMPUS NEWS

Genome-wide association studies (GWAS) are perhaps the newest wave in human genetic research. The approach involves rapidly scanning markers across complete sets of DNA—or genomes—of many people to find genetic variations associated with a particular disease. Once new genetic associations are identified, researchers can use the information to develop better strategies to treat, prevent and even reverse the disease.

But investigators need to answer key questions to satisfy themselves and grant reviewers. How many subjects are needed? Should you study more single-nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) and fewer subjects or the reverse? For any design/analysis plan, what are the expected false positive and negative rates?

The Section on Statistical Genetics has created software that gives UAB investigators the power to answer those questions. The new GWA Test Driver enables researchers to test-drive combinations of prospective designs and analyses and produce reports containing publication-quality plots and tables of power analyses and sample-size calculations ready to include in manuscripts and grant applications. The GWA Test Driver is available online at grantdrivers.uab.edu.

Researchers can investigate up to 1 million-plus markers, across the genome in a GWAS and that increases the probability of finding something by chance. But to detect statistical and clinical significance, they have to determine the sample size they need. The GWA Test Driver does that.

“This software will permit more investigators more easily, quickly and effectively to test if scenarios they can propose for GWAS are likely to be sufficiently powered and worth doing,” says David Allison, Ph.D., director of the Section on Statistical Genetics. “In turn, when they decide a study is worthwhile, it aids researchers in justifying those studies effectivity in grant proposals.”

Nita Limdi, Ph.D., Pharm.D., associate professor of neurology and epidemiology, already has had discussions with GWA Test Driver lead programmer Jelai Wang about the value of the software and its robustness at estimating sample sizes. Limdi’s primary research focus is to reveal the effect of genetic and environmental factors on drug response, specifically those associated with toxicity and lack of efficacy. Currently her research efforts are focused on tailoring warfarin to reduce the risk of hemorrhagic complications.

Limdi received help from Allison, Wang and others to obtain her first major grants—a K23 Mentored Patient-Oriented Research Career Development Award, which she was awarded in 2003, and an R01 grant awarded in 2007.

“I was successful on my first try for both of those grants; a big reason is because of the help they provide,” Limdi says. “They do cutting-edge methodology research, like the GWA Test Driver, and that’s critical for our grant applications.”

For example, Limdi says when a research body reviews a grant application, they can see well thought-out power calculations and know that the investigator has an idea of the exact number of patients needed for their study. That combine with numbers generated by materials built on their own campus makes a highly competitive package. Limdi says.

“For example: I want to find the genes that affect blood pressure, and I want to find people who need to be treated before they become hypertensive,” Limdi says. “You work with a statistician and an epidemiologist to figure out if the study is doable. You want to show you are estimating the effect you will find and the number of people you need. That is done using tools like the GWA Test Driver. And if that tool is developed on your campus, you’re showing the NIH the intellectual capacity is available on your campus that’s going to help you solve the problem.”

Making it work

The Section on Statistical Genetics developed the GWA Test Driver using a grant from the UAB Health Systems Foundation General Endowment Fund. The group submitted the proposal and secured funding three years ago.

The GWA Test Driver can aid researchers in several ways:

• Search among real and simulated datasets for those with similar characteristics to the study-in-planning and view a pre-calculated power-analysis report.
• Upload their own preliminary data for a custom power-analysis report.
• Perform an analytic power calculation.
• Follow links to other genetic power software.

“I think the HSF-GEF and our researchers will be happy with this product,” says Wang, system programmer lead in bioinformatics. “It will help investigators know how many samples they need to recruit. We’ve implemented several power calculations in the Test Driver, one of which we invented. We’ve also implemented a very simple analytic power calculation, and we link to other people’s power calculation software. It’s a very advanced, thorough product.”

Statins, statins everywhere: Are they right for everyone?

Cholesterol-lowering statin drugs successfully treat millions of Americans with high cholesterol and heart disease that momentum is gathering to broaden their use.

A 2008 study called JUPITER showed that taking rosuvastatin (Crestor) reduced participants’ risk of death by 20 percent and reduced the incidence of major cardiovascular events in men age 50 and older and women age 60 and older who had “near optimal” LDL—or “bad”—cholesterol levels (less than 130 mg/dL) and no history of cardiovascular disease or diabetes, but did have elevated high sensitivity C-reactive protein levels.

The interpretation of the JUPITER study results has been hotly debated in the scientific community. Some say the effects are statistically significant but don’t have much clinical impact for people at normal risk. Others, such as cardiologist Vera Bittner, M.D., point out that many people who do not fall into a high-risk category in the near term still have a significant lifetime risk of heart disease.

“I would argue that our current definition of high cholesterol is not correct,” Bittner says. “More than half of all first heart attacks occur in people whose LDL cholesterol levels are below the level at which physicians would prescribe statin drugs.”

Weighing the risks

Statins are already a proven therapy for people with heart disease, so what’s the big deal about using them to prevent heart disease in the first place? For one thing, statins—like any other drug—have side-effects. Some people who take them suffer recurrent muscle pain; for others the drugs can cause liver-enzyme abnormalities. A further issue is that people who start taking statins will likely have to continue taking them for years—perhaps for life. But while there is no study data on the effects of taking statins for decades, Bittner notes that there also has been no evidence of harm from clinical trials or on subsequent follow-up studies. She argues that the benefits of increasing statin use certainly appear to outweigh the real but relatively small risks.

Statin prices have fallen steadily in recent years, which makes the prospect of long-term use financially feasible for more people. A 2009 study in the Annals of Internal Medicine estimated that when statin costs fall below a dime per pill, the U.S. health-care system would actually see a net cost savings if everyone with LDL cholesterol levels over 130 mg/dL got a prescription.

The debate over statin reflects a broader scientific quandary: We still do not understand all the mechanisms underlying heart disease, and despite hundreds of studies, the evidence supporting current treatments—from drugs to surgical procedures to lifestyle management—is not sufficient to tell doctors how best to reduce the incidence and deadly outcomes of the disease.

According to recent research, 88 percent of Americans rely on at least one risk factor for heart disease, and most of us have more than one. “So the question is,” Bittner says, “do you just let all those people live out the consequences, or do you step in and try to intervene?”

To read more about statins and Bittner’s research, visit www.uab.edu/ualmagazine.
Construction projects continue throughout campus

Major capital project planning is under way, and ongoing construction, renovations and improvements are proceeding on schedule. Also, UAB administrators informed the University of Alabama System Board of Trustees during its September meeting that they hope to add a new College of Arts & Sciences building, new buildings for biomedical research and another dormitory in the next five years.

Here is an update of some projects:

**Volker adds labs**
Renovation for the department of pharmacology in Volker Hall Research Tower is complete. The renovated first and second floors — approximately 32,420 square feet — provide new laboratories and associated research space for pharmacology.

**Wallace Tumor Institute renovated**
Construction on the Wallace Tumor project has been under way for more than a year to completely renovate all six floors and portions of the basement — a project covering approximately 154,000 square feet. The $27.6 million renovation will provide new research laboratories and associated laboratory support space, offices, a new lobby and exterior improvements. Phase I is scheduled to be completed in November.

The Phase II renovations in the basement, which houses elements of the UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center, will provide housing for two new scanning machines and a cyclotron.

**Classroom improvements made**
Renovations to west campus classrooms, ongoing since 2004, are in Phase VI.

The Education Building, Business-Engineering Complex, Campbell Hall and Humanities Building have received new carpeting, drywall, paint, white boards, ceiling tiles, lighting, plus improvements to the heating/ventilation/air conditioning and audio-visual systems and new furniture.

**Alumni Affairs facility**
The $3.8 million Alumni Affairs project comprises the design and construction of a 13,419-square-foot facility on the southeast corner of 10th Avenue South and 13th Street.
The project is scheduled for completion this fall and will include office and meeting spaces and event space for use by Alumni Affairs, Annual Giving, the National Alumni Society and other on-campus organizations.

**Baseball, softball building ahead**
Fundraising efforts are under way to construct a new one-story, brick athletic-support building for the baseball and softball programs. The facility will be approximately 11,000 square feet and provide space for team meeting rooms, athlete study rooms, player locker rooms with showers, coaches offices with locker rooms, conference rooms, storage and a vending kitchen.

**Other improvements planned**
The UA System Board of Trustees gave their approval for several other projects at the September meeting:

- Fitting out 16,000 square feet of empty space on the top floor of Lister Hill Library — a $2.8 million project that will provide space for School of Public Health researchers.
- A $3 million project to build two new floors atop the School of Health Professions Building for classrooms and other space.
- A new drainage system and turf at Young Memorial Baseball Field.
- Replacing the original moveable risers that make up the lower 2,100 seats at Bartow Arena.

**STEAM PLANT**

**Continued from page 1**
The project comprises four components. The first is the steam-production plant to be built. The second and third elements are a distribution system with north and south loops.
The final component of the project is the construction of a condensate-return system. A condensate-recovery system will be constructed in each building for which steam service is provided. The condensate will be collected and piped back to the plant to be used again, saving the university as much as 15 to 20 percent in steam-generation costs.

"Alabama Power did not have a condensate-return system, which means there was thermal and water waste," Corvin says.

"When we recover the condensate, we recover that as water loaded with a thermal value of up to 180 degrees. It gets sent back to the plant and can be used with regular city domestic water and heated back up to 212 degrees much faster. That's where the project becomes green, and it will greatly reduce energy costs."

More than 20,000 linear feet of piping — the equivalent of almost four miles — will be used, and Corvin says the enormity of the construction will affect campus traffic on foot and by vehcile.

Approximately 55 to 60 percent of the project will be confined to campus property. Some sidewalks and streets will be affected, including some of the newly paved streets.

"Our plan is to repair — not patch — the street cuts," Corvin says. "Were going in with a very detailed engineering correction to the excavation to put the asphalt pavement back properly. There likely will be some traffic issues until we get repairs made properly, but we are planning to phase those in as quickly as we can after piping is installed."

**Construction begins in 2011**
The project now is in the design phase. KPS Group of Birmingham is the project architect. IC Thomasson of Nashville is the design engineer. The project will be bid in multiple packages, with Corvin's team providing construction management. The first bid packages are expected to be out later this fall for mobilization in spring 2011.

The first boots-on-the-ground construction activity is scheduled to begin in May 2011. Construction of the physical plant across from Bartow is scheduled to commence in June 2011, and the north loop distribution system construction will begin in July 2011.

The target date for completion and commissioning activities is September 2012.

"Then we've got a bit of high-level loading and integrity testing of the systems for transition on Feb. 12, 2013," Corvin says.

Corvin has been in construction for 45 years, completing heavy construction, buildings, pipelines and refineries domestically and abroad in the Far East and the Middle East.

He has spent the past eight years at UAB and his team, including field project manager James Guyton, built and managed the design and construction of the Shelby Building, Research Support Building and the Southeastern Bio-Safety Lab — almost $200 million worth of construction. In addition, the steam project management team will include Susan Zambado and James Cayton as project managers for the steam plant and condensate recovery systems.

Corvin says the steam project ranks high on his list of construction challenges, particularly because of its complexity.

"Mostly because this is an urban campus," Corvin says. "I've done miles of pipelines, plant processing and oil pipelines, but it's different when you cram four miles of it into a square encompassing about eight square blocks."

"I can promise you we're trying to plan it to minimize the inconvenience," he says. "We will have a communication plan to update everybody frequently on our construction activities to help faculty, staff and students plan accordingly."
UAB is one of 14 emergency response learning centers

M ost people don’t like to think about the worst-case scenario, but there are some whose job it is to plan for it and prepare others to respond to it. This is the work of Peter Ginter, Ph.D., Lisa McCormick, Dr.P.H., and Andrew Rucks, Ph.D., in the School of Public Health.

“We tend to be looked at as the doomsday folks,” Ginter says. “Everybody asks us, ‘What should we look out for this week?’”

UAB faculty and staff have been training organizations and first responders — ranging from law enforcement officials to first receivers to veterinarians — for a decade through the Center for Public Health Preparedness (CPHP). The organization includes a partnership with Tulane University and the states of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

A new five-year, $937,000-per-year grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) enhances the profile of the group by establishing the new Preparedness and Emergency Response Learning Centers (PERLC). The grant, in which the CDC awarded $13 million to 14 accredited schools of public health — will support public health and workforce training.

UAB’s South Central PERLC will assist in building national capacity in preparedness and response training and education to meet the needs of the U.S. public health workforce. It also will provide unique workforce-developmental assistance to state, local and tribal public health authorities.

“This is a significant grant in that it enables us to stay involved with the preparedness community,” says Ginter, professor and chair of Health Care Organization & Policy. “We will continue to work closely with public health emergency preparedness and response in three states by offering training and assistance to public health professionals and other emergency responders.”

The new South Central PERLC will replace the CPHP, which had been in existence for eight years. UAB’s School of Public Health partnership with Tulane University’s School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine will continue as part of the PERLC grant. Within the partnership, the group maintains a preparedness center, a public health training center and a leadership institute that teaches public health workers how to better managers and leaders.

Partnering with tribal nations

A unique aspect is that tribal partners, including the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and the Poarch Band of Creek Indians of Alabama, are included for the first time.

The South Central PERLC also is partnering with the United South and Eastern Tribes to conduct an intertribal planning conference — a need cemented in the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, when the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians reservation suffered a great deal of damage.

“The state of Mississippi’s resources were mostly allocated on the Gulf Coast and unavailable to help communities further north immediately following Katrina’s landfall,” says McCormick, assistant professor of Health Care Organization & Policy. “The Choctaws were able to call on other tribal nations in the region to bring resources such as generators and other essentials needed on the reservation.”

Now, the South Central PERLC will help them establish mutual aid agreements and memorandums of understanding with each other to ensure a strong working relationship.

“This means during times of crisis, they will have a formal channel available to call on each other for assistance when state or federal aid is not immediately available,” McCormick says. “That’s something that’s never been done in this part of the country.”

Planning experience

The PERLC will continue working with various state agencies to develop response plans. Alabama Gov. Bob Riley directed all state agencies to develop All Hazards Continuity of Operations Plans two years ago, and UAB’s group was a leader in establishing protocols to assist.

“We assisted the Alabama Department of Public Health and the Alabama Emergency Management Agency by creating a template and providing training,” says Rucks, associate professor of Public Health. “If there is an influenza pandemic or any kind of disaster that exacerbates absenteeism or denies access to facilities, how would they remain in operation? How would they keep delivering services and keep serving the public? It’s important for government agencies and other agencies that deliver vital services to remain in operation in the event of any kind of disaster. We try to help them prioritize their services and keep those that are critical functioning.”

The PERLC also has aided in other areas, including developing a surge network for pediatrics due to the limited capacity of children’s hospitals in the Southeast. The Presidential Commission on Children and Disasters recently recommended an increase in focus on regional surge capacity and something the PERLC has been establishing for several years. A network and organization to link pediatric specialty hospitals in Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi, Florida and Louisiana will enable them to work with regional hospitals to care for children.

“Pediatric hospitals tend to operate at 90 to 95 percent capacity at all times, so there’s very little surplus capacity to deal with disasters and emergencies — even small ones like a school bus accident,” Rucks says. “This network is intended to provide a formal mechanism for specialty and regional hospitals to share resources and provide the capacity to deal with an emergency.”

The brunt of the PERLC’s work focuses on preparedness such as this, with a fundamental mission to build capacity in the public health and responder communities.

They do this through face-to-face trainings, online courses and training, satellite broadcasts, webcasts and podcasts. They deliver training in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana and conduct traveling, full-functional exercises often involving local responders. They provide training on disasters ranging from a bus accident involving children to chemical spills and earthquake response. They also invite national experts to aid in training in certain specialized areas, including in the area of school violence.

For more on the South Central PERLC, including a list of online courses and upcoming activities, visit www.southcentralpartnership.org.

BALANCE MACHINE

CONTINUED from page 1 determine how they are standing.”

For example, patients might be standing with all their weight on one leg and not know it.

“For patients at risk of falling or who already have fallen, we can identify the cause and then treat those issues,” King says.

After her third session, Crawford already is seeing results.

“I walked 200 feet in six minutes, then the second time we did it, I walked 400 feet in six minutes,” she said. “I’m working toward the day when the cane goes away.”

The balance machine was provided by the Women’s Committee of Spain Rehabilitation Center, which raised the $100,000 to purchase the machine. The group also has funded other therapeutic devices at Spain, including the aquatic therapy pool and a weight-bearing treadmill.

To see the machine in action, visit www.youtube.com/southtubecom.

UAB’s South Central Preparedness and Emergency Response Learning Centers (PERLC) is one of 14 such centers in the nation and will replace the Center for Public Health Preparedness. The PERLC will manage planning for natural and man-made disasters and training responders to be prepared. A good portion of the training they provide is in the form of full-functional exercises often involving local responders.

October 4, 2010 UAB Reporter 5
Owens cherishes opportunity to help, encourage others

Co-workers say Gail Owens is the face and voice of the Office of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and it’s a responsibility she values every day.

“I want to make a good impression for UAB and for this department,” says Owens, an office services specialist. “Because I’m the first person people meet or talk to. I want to represent the IRB in a positive light and show that we care about the participants. That’s what inspires me to help. It’s the way I’ve of giving back to others, and I totally believe in paying forward in life.”

Owens’ selfless personality resonates in everything she does — professionally and personally — say her co-workers. When someone needs help, Owens is there to provide it. When a distraught investigator calls, she provides reassurance. The respect Owens has earned among her colleagues for her drive, desire to help others and attitude has led to her selection as September’s Employee of the Month.

Owens supports the IRB senior staff and the board itself. She purchases supplies needed for the office and arranges breakfast and lunch for each week’s board meeting in addition to providing other administrative assistance as needed.

It’s the calming and helpful demeanor that makes Owens really shine, co-workers say.

“The volume of traffic that the IRB sees in person and via telephone is enormous,” says Carl Oliver, assistant director. “Thousands of dropoffs and phone requests arrive each year, and generally, Gail is the first to field each question. We have young investigators who are worried about completing requirements for their dissertation and seasoned veterans who are anxious to get started so that they can release funding for their research. Gail handles each one with respect and kindness, making sure they are treated fairly and expediently.”

Oliver estimates 100 phone calls and 50 walk-ins come into the IRB office on any given day. Owens does her best to process the information she’s given from the callers and visitors and they get the help they need.

“Whatever problems come up, we try always to tell them we’ll get an answer,” Owens says. “I might not know the answer, but I tell them, ‘We will find one, and it’ll be OK. We’re going to take care of it. Sometimes just explaining the process to them eliminates all of their concern.’”

Owens has the same calming and uplifting affect on her co-workers.

Sally Blake Headley, a technical writer for the IRB, says she begins every work day with a warm greeting from Owens — starting her day off on the right foot.

“Gail is the face and voice of the IRB. The respect Owens has earned among her colleagues for her drive, desire to help others and attitude has led to her selection as September’s Employee of the Month.”

During a recent conversation, Headley said she could live full time with Owens.

“She has enlisted all of us to be a part of the girls’ lives,” says Sheila Moore, director of the IRB. “Gail truly is one of a kind. She has expanded her family and become a foster mom to one of the girls who, hopefully, will be a student at UAB in January.”

Indeed, Owens recently became a foster mother to Alyssa Dunaway, one of the girls at the home. They met two years ago and Alyssa soon began to spend her weekends and holidays with Owens family.

Dunaway had attended six high schools heading into her junior year at Hayden High School, and the two of them decided she would remain at Hayden through graduation even though Owens did not live in that school district. This past May, three days before her graduation, the court system said she could live full time with Owens.

“It was a wonderful feeling,” Owens says. “She’s been my daughter in my heart for a long time, and it’s great to have her as part of my family.

Real-time technology puts experts anywhere, virtually

Frustrated when performing a task for the first time, we might wish that we could beam an expert pair of hands into the room to guide us through the task. Often, this is the tedious process of furniture assembly or do-it-yourself home repair. Now it might not be long before that wishful thinking becomes a reality.

The Virtual Interactive Presence, a software technology developed at UAB, uses techniques from areas of virtual and augmented reality to combine local and distant video elements. Aimed initially at uses techniques from areas of virtual and augmented reality to combine local and distant video elements.

“Facing increasing economic and energy challenges from UAB and share our experts’ knowledge as a leading center of excellence with other medical professionals worldwide,” says Guthrie, a professor in the School of Medicine Division of Neurosurgery.

Pursuing his goal, Guthrie enlisted the help of software engineering experts from the Enabling Technology Laboratory and the School of Engineering’s Department of Mechanical Engineering. For three years the team, with the support of a grant from the U.S. Department of Energy, worked to develop the first-of-its-kind software.

In a virtual-presence session, both the expert and the person at the remote site use monitors or visual displays to work in a “shared environment.” In the case of surgeons working through a procedure together, both sets of the participants’ hands appear in the display, giving the expert the ability to literally point the local physician in the best direction.

“Much of what is needed for a connection — Internet access, monitors and Web cameras — will be present and available at wherever it’s needed,” Guthrie says. “What the virtual technology provides is a way to bring it all together to allow the remote presence of an expert when and where needed.”

“We have designed a technology that is useful across industries and disciplines,” says Alan Shih, Ph.D., a research professor of mechanical engineering. “The Virtual Interactive Presence gives operators a chance to access needed experts in real time so that medical professionals can assist in performing life-saving procedures, soldiers can be safely dismantling bombs in a war zone or mechanics can more quickly repair airplane systems when it’s crucial.”

Now the Virtual Interactive Presence is ready for its public debut. This past summer, Birmingham-based technology company VIPAAR LLC, exclusively licensed the technology from the UAB Research Foundation to develop and commercialize it.
The University of Alabama System Board of Trustees established the Sir David Cox Endowed Professorship in Biostatistics in the UAB Department of Biostatistics in the School of Public Health and the Jay M. McDonald, M.D. Endowed Professorship in Bone Pathology in the UAB Department of Pathology at its meeting Sept. 17.

The endowment in biostatistics will provide for the recruitment and retention of a faculty member who can push forward new ideas in the field. The endowment in bone pathology will provide for the recruitment and retention of a renowned faculty member with expertise in bone pathology who can contribute to and further the department’s efforts. The endowment is named in honor of McDonald, who served as department chair from 1990 to 2008.

McPherson appointed Paul Mellon Visiting Senior Fellow

Heather McPherson, Ph.D., professor in the Department of Art and Art History, has been appointed a Paul Mellon Visiting Senior Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., for fall 2010. Her project, “The Artist’s Studio and the Image of the Artist in Nineteenth-Century France,” seeks “to explore the evolving image of the artist through the lens of artists’ portraits and the artist’s studio, which became a central theme in art and literature stretching from Balzac to Proust and from Géricault to Picasso.”

Drafting on a broad array of paintings, prints and photographs, McPherson will work closely with the UAB Health System Chief Quality and Safety Officer for UAB Hospital. Taylor will work with the ASC hospitality coordinator to ensure all facets of an artists’ visit to UAB meet the highest standards. He will also work with the ASC contracts between the artist’s agency representing ASC performers and UAB. He’s been plenty busy. He’s recorded 14 albums in that time and toured almost every major city in the United States. At age 33 and with a degree in hand, Essix left Boston in 1993 and headed home. He couldn’t have been happier. "I was good with that. Everything happens in its proper time." It was at Berkley where he had what he calls his last real job. He was a studio manager in the music production and engineering department as a work-study student. At age 33 and with a degree in hand, Essix left Boston in 1993 and headed home. He couldn’t have been happier. "I was good with that. Everything happens in its proper time."

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The UAB Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center presents

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