**AMC21 plan will enable UAB to create strong future**

America is at best with questions about the future of its economy and health care as in any other time in recent history. Yet leaders of one of the largest, most sophisticated academic medical centers in the country are bullish on the future — especially UAB's.

During the past year, School of Medicine Dean Ray Watts, M.D., and Health System CEO Will Ferniany, Ph.D., have led the development of AMC21 — a plan to make UAB the preferred academic medical center of the 21st century and ensure that Alabamians have access to the world’s best care.

“UAB is internationally recognized for its intensive collaborative culture that has — for more than four decades — produced continual breakthroughs in education, health care, research and service,” said Carol Garrison, UAB president and chair of the board of the UAB Health System. “Now that collaborative process continues, as the strategic plan is refined to forge an even brighter future for UAB, for Birmingham, and for the state of Alabama.”

Watts and Ferniany say UAB will focus on scientific discovery to develop new diagnostics, treatments and cures and deliver outstanding health care while educating and training the best health-care professionals and scientists — “with the patient at the center of all we do.”

UAB will build on its strengths, strengthen areas that need support and commit the collective resources of the School of Medicine, UAB Health System and the University of Alabama Health Services Foundation to excellence in each area of its mission. Aligning the research, educational and clinical initiatives will enable them to draw strength from one another, Watts says.

“This is a very thoughtful plan for how to take advantage of technological and scientific advances in the 21st century and apply them to ensure that Alabamians have access to the very best care in the world,” Watts says.

UAB will expand its leading research programs in cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and obesity, immunology and transplantation, infectious disease, global health and vaccines and neuroscience. There also will be a push to discover new therapies and use personalized medicine.

UAB currently has enough lab space to hire up to 30 new faculty under the plan, and a planned $100 million building similar to the Shelby Biomedical Research Center will enable UAB to recruit as many as 50 additional biomedical researchers to join the 265 now conducting research for the School of Medicine. That could create as many as 360 high-tech jobs that would have the potential to generate $30 million annually in grant funding and pour $75 million into the local economy.

Funds for pilot programs and multi-investigator pilot projects have been established, and UAB has invested in additional drug-discovery and research-acceleration funds accessible to all faculty. Watts says.

**Becoming preferred**

UAB Medicine’s ability to achieve its goals as an academic institution is this: If you decide to embrace what that is all about and that culture, that’s an advantage for you,” McGee says. “You’ll be able to recruit young men who have the character — the want to — and it’s important for those kids to get their college degree. That’s the way you produce wins on the football field. You recruit the right personnel — the right kids.

“I embrace the academic standards here,” McGee says. “It works to our advantage. It’s going to give me the ability to sit in a home with parents and talk with them about placing their young man in a locker room full of kids with character who understand the importance of education.”

McGee was introduced as the Blazers new head coach by Athletics Director Brian Mackin at a news conference Dec. 5 in Bartow Arena. He replaces Neil Callaway. McGee, the first black Division I head coach in the state of Alabama, leaves his post as offensive coordinator at the University of Arkansas.

Through UAB's Child Life Program, Blair Couvillion (left) and Jane Love provide children and their families two things — comfort in times of need, and positive, even cherished, memories in times of turmoil.

**New head Football coach stresses academic excellence**

Garrett McGee has had many stops during the past 15 years as a football coach, and he has learned things each step along the way that have prepared him for this moment — when he was named the fourth head coach in UAB Football history.

That includes McGee's four-year stint at academic-rich Northwestern University coaching under the late Randy Walker. It was there McGee learned the advantages that a school with high academic qualities possesses.

“What Coach Walker told us about an academic institution is this: If you decide to embrace what that is all about and that culture, that’s an advantage for you,” McGee says. “You’ll be able to recruit young men who have the character — the want to — and it’s important for those kids to get their college degree. That’s the way you produce wins on the football field. You recruit the right personnel — the right kids.

“I embrace the academic standards here,” McGee says. “It works to our advantage. It’s going to give me the ability to sit in a home with parents and talk with them about placing their young man in a locker room full of kids with character who understand the importance of education.”
The UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center will present its annual report to the community at 6 p.m. Monday, Dec. 12 in UAB’s Alys Stephens Center. Director Edward Partridge, M.D., will provide an update on the latest advancements in cancer research and future plans, and faculty will speak about groundbreaking pancreatic cancer research. Speak to the scientists and physicians conducting cutting-edge research during the reception afterward.

Large groups are encouraged to RSVP to ensure seating. Direct inquiries to Miranda Wesley at 934-0034 or miranda.wesley@ccc.uab.edu.

The UAB/Red Cross drive will be on the second floor of its annual report to the community at 6 p.m. Monday, Dec. 12 in UAB’s Alys Stephens Center. Director Edward Partridge, M.D., will provide an update on the latest advancements in cancer research and future plans, and faculty will speak about groundbreaking pancreatic cancer research. Speak to the scientists and physicians conducting cutting-edge research during the reception afterward.

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Plan ahead to participate in annual day of service in 2012

Universities play a central and meaningful role in solving community problems and providing the human capital — or people power — needed to address needs in their community.

UAB again will partner with the non-profit Hands On Birmingham, and faculty, staff and students can support the university’s outreach on Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service on Jan. 16, 2012.

“This is a tremendous opportunity for UAB faculty, staff and students to volunteer their time to give back to the community in a variety of ways,” says Marie Baisden, director of The Resource Center/Employee Assistance Program at UAB and coordinator of the project. “Whether it’s for two hours, four hours or the entire day, the time our employees can give will greatly benefit the community in which we work and live.”

Multiple service opportunities will be available. Participating organizations include Birmingham AIDS Outreach, Community Kitchens of Woodlawn, Habitat for Humanity, Ronald McDonald House, Christian Service Mission of Ruffner Mountain and Hope Lodge.

“We’re going to be adding more projects,” says Melissa Firestone, coordinator of events for Hands On Birmingham. “For example, we’re going to try and identify a couple of disaster-related projects to help those affected by the April tornadoes. We hope to have 35 to 40 projects for volunteers to consider.”

If you wish to volunteer as an individual, visit www.handsonbirmingham.org and click on the special events icon or opportunity calendar on the home page to see a list of participating organizations. If you wish to volunteer as an office or a group, e-mail Firestone at Melissa@handsonbirmingham.org. The majority of the projects will take place Monday, Jan. 16, but there will be a few Saturday options available.

Participants are encouraged to sign up for a project by Jan. 9, but you can register to help up until just a few days before the event.

UAB has been among the largest providers of volunteers each of the past two years, Firestone says.

“We usually have anywhere from 1,500 to 2,000 vol-uners who come to honor the legacy of Dr. King,” Firestone says. “Of those volunteers, we’ve had maybe 400 to 500 UAB people attend — employees and students. "UAB plays a big role in our day of service, as they do for every day of service we have. We love working with UAB. We love the partnership, and we hope it continues to build.”

The Hands On Birmingham organization encourages volunteerism in Birmingham through employer-sponsored, group and individual volunteer projects. The MLK Day of Service is a nationwide event, and participation in Birmingham consistently is among the greatest in the country.

UAB’s AMC21 plan aims to make UAB the preferred academic medical center of the 21st century. UAB will focus its efforts on scientific discovery to develop new diagnostics, treatments and cures and deliver outstanding health care while educating and training the best health-care professionals and scientists.

“We want to be the place where the faculty and staff want to come to work and patients want to come for their care. And we’re going to get there by being innovative,” Ferniany says. “Our quality goal is to be in the top 10 percent of the other academic medical centers in the country.”

All of this can be achieved through the tighter integration between UAB, UAB Health System and the UAB Health Services Foundation.

“One of the things that’s powerful about this plan is that it represents the best alignment we have ever had across the entire academic medical center,” Watts adds. “We’re in a period of unprecedented uncertainty about the future of health care, and we have thoughtfully assessed the changing environment and built a plan that will provide us with the flexibility to adjust as needed.

“With AMC21, we are going to help determine and create the future instead of letting events create the future and react to it,” Watts says.

“This is the most exciting time I’ve ever encountered in my eight years at UAB,” he says. “We have tremendous opportunities for advancement and growth and to improve health and wellness through science.”

AMC21 aligns with the goals established in UAB’s Strategic Plan. For more information on these plans, visit uabmedicine.org/amc21 and www.uab.edu/plan.

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Asperger syndrome (AS) is a developmental disorder that is characterized by limited interests or an unusual preoccupation with a particular subject to the exclusion of other activities. The incidence of AS is not well established, but experts in population studies conservatively estimate that two out of every 10,000 children have the disorder. Boys are three to four times more likely than girls to have AS.

Studies of children with AS suggest that their problems with socialization and communication continue into adulthood. Some of these children develop additional psychiatric symptoms and disorders in adolescence and adulthood.

John Harris doesn’t mind public speaking. Yes, he admits to being a little nervous at first each time he does it, but he feels he has a duty to do so. In fact, he considers it “a goodwill mission.” Harris also doesn’t like sitting in the classroom for the first 20 minutes listening to his mom Karen Harris tell their life story — how Asperger’s syndrome has affected every moment of their life since he came into the world 28 years ago. So he sits outside the classroom of Rajesh Kana, Ph.D., assistant professor of psychology, and waits for her to finish.

The Harrises were invited by Kana to speak to his Autism: Brain and Cognition (PY354) class — an undergraduate psychology course that gives students a comprehensive overview of autism from cognitive, behavioral and neuroscience perspectives. Kana’s students are listening to a parent and child talk about Asperger’s, a syndrome on the autism spectrum disorder characterized by significant difficulties in social interaction alongside restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior and interests. Classmate Andrew Rozsa and his father had spoken to them the week prior about the UAB senior’s life-long battle with Asperger’s.

This is the third year the Harrises have spoken to Kana’s class; Karen first did it as a student in 2009.

“I think it’s important for people to see what a family has to go through,” Harris says of her reason for speaking. “Maybe seeing it from the parent’s point of view the students will be more patient when they are in the clinical setting or maybe it will trigger something for them later in a research setting.”

This part of the class is the highlight for Kana. His students have spent the previous weeks learning about autism, its characteristics and behaviors. They’ve examined cognitive levels, ways in which behaviors are triggered by thought processes and the brain mechanisms driving them.

But Kana says the visits from parents and their children bring the lessons to life.

“Asperger’s syndrome is a new psychiatric disorder in its own right; it’s not a form of autism or autism spectrum disorder,” Kana says. “It’s a bit of a cross between the two.”

Harris tells the class about his early childhood and the bullying he was subjected to daily in middle school, the pace of his speech quickens again — and his agitation becomes clear.

“He still has nightmares about middle school.” Harris says of his son. He refers to his middle-school days often during a 40-minute question-and-answer session with Kana’s class, many times unprompted.

“I made a lot of good grades in school,” Harris says answering a question about his school years. “I had a lot of good friends, especially the smart and nice people. But I was singled out by all the bullies, jerks and dumb jocks. And middle school was three years of straight-up torture and unending misery because of those creeps. And the teachers never seemed to notice or the bullies would always do it when the teachers weren’t looking. And they never really got in any trouble for it.”

His mom, sitting to the side of the class and away from John, reminded the students about a key autistic characteristic that explains the reason his son threw tantrums in school when it seemed he was unprovoked.

“You might not think because a person has Asperger’s or autism that they’re really singled out and bullied, but they make easy targets,” Harris says. “So when they get mad and throw a tantrum, this might be why. An hour ago they might have been picked on or bullied, and they’ve spent that past hour focusing on it before it finally comes out in the form of anger and frustration.”

The story was eye-opening for the students. They were intrigued by the difficulty Karen Harris had obtaining a diagnosis for John: They went through eight doctors before they were finally told he had Asperger’s at age 9. At one point prior to that, they were told he was retarded.

“This was at age 5, and he was reading encyclopedias,” Harris says. “At 2 he could say the ABCs and count to 100. I didn’t know what was wrong, but I didn’t believe anything they said.”

The students in Kana’s class also were surprised to learn John has lived on his own for the past six years, and he is a college graduate with a bachelor’s of science degree in biology, a certified scuba diver and an intern with the Birmingham Zoo doing what he loves best — being around animals. He hopes that the internship will lead to a job with the zoo.

Rozsa found Harris’ story to be fascinating and different in many ways from his own despite their same diagnosis.

“It just shows there are many, many different levels on the autism spectrum,” says Rozsa, a senior majoring in psychology. “It’s not on a line. It’s more 4-D, because the spectrum is constantly changing. How you treat someone really depends on the person. You can’t look at it as a cookie-cutter. What is done for one individual wouldn’t necessarily work for another. Obviously certain things worked for John that wouldn’t have worked for me, and things that worked for me probably wouldn’t have worked for John.”

Kana says it is important for his students to see that even though Rozsa and Harris have the same diagnosis, their behaviors aren’t the same.

“The mechanism driving them internally may be the same, but the way it manifests and as a disorder, the symptoms are different,” Kana says. “I hope the lesson the students take from this is that you cannot plan help for an autistic child without meeting the child first. You can’t use a cookie-cutter approach. You have to see the person, spend time with them, discover their preferences, problems and sensitivities and then devise a plan that fits that individual. When you move to the next person, it’s completely different.”

The goal of Kana’s course is to introduce students to autism and hopefully generate a genuine interest in them becoming a clinician or engaging in research on developmental disorders. Rozsa plans to be a clinical therapist focusing on behavioral analysis for developmental disorders. Sophomore Kayla Rechich of Millbrook also has decided she will work with autistic children in some capacity.
Karen Allen experienced firsthand the significance of her cancer research when she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2003. Allen, a UAB graduate and a clinical trials administrator at the Comprehensive Cancer Center, has authored numerous articles for medical journals on the disease. But it was her own walk with cancer that inspired her to write the book *Confronting Cancer with Faith*.

It was the first and is the only book Allen has written. She says she wrote it to give encouragement, comfort and hope to cancer patients and their loved ones.

Eight years after her initial diagnosis, Allen is encouraging men and women battling the disease to incorporate their cancer experience into an unforgettable time of spiritual renewal.

“I can’t always choose what happens to us, but we can choose how we will respond,” Allen says. Allen recently spoke to *UAB Reporter* about her trials, her inspiration and the obstacles she had to overcome in writing her first book.

**Q. How would you describe your own battle with cancer from the perspective of someone who is involved in researching the disease every day?**

A. It was tough transitioning from being an employee in the Cancer Center to being a patient, but it enabled me to develop a deeper understanding from both ends of the spectrum. The research always has been significant but it became personal with a sense of urgency. Visualizing my name as a clinical trial participant reminds me of how my job impacts lives.

**Q. What were your first thoughts after your diagnosis?**

A. My first thought was, ‘Is this for real? I’m too healthy!’ Even though it was shocking, I felt in some ways I had been prepared for the diagnosis. My thoughts turned more to my loved ones rather than to myself in hopes they could accept all aspects of the journey, whatever the outcome.

**Q. Was it difficult for you initially to face cancer?**

A. Not at all since I knew that was where my strength would be found. Of course there was some amount of fear, but I chose to turn the experience into something advantageous, resulting in an incredible journey of faith. My book describes how others can do the same.

**Q. Is your book only for those with breast cancer?**

A. Absolutely not. My book is relevant to all types of cancer for both genders; that’s why the front cover has a lavender ribbon and not a pink ribbon.

**Q. How has your cancer experience changed you?**

A. I live each day with a more eternal perspective. A new purpose has been unveiled to me; to bring comfort and reassurance to those in crisis, especially cancer. I’ve learned there can be spiritual benefits through suffering. And like most survivors, I am more aware of each moment of life, not taking things for granted — like eyelashes and hair.

**Q. How did you approach writing a book?**

A. With ignorance and trepidation showered with a massive dose of determination. Most people start small and advance to larger projects, but I didn’t follow that unspoken rule. I plunged in headfirst and saw the backstroke. I have since written several non-medical articles published in magazines and newspapers.

**Q. What tips would you give someone who wants to write a book, but feels intimidated?**

A. I laugh when people ask me about publishing a book, saying that if I knew then what I know now, I might not have pursued it. Evaluate your purpose and level of commitment. Don’t fool yourself into thinking that writing the book is the hardest part. Attend a writer’s conference and/or writing class for insight and connections, find a mentor and execute all endeavors with professionalism.

**Q. Where is Confronting Cancer with Faith available for purchase?**


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**CAMPUS NEWS**

Karen Allen has worked in cancer research at the Comprehensive Cancer Center for years, but she was taken aback in 2003 when she was diagnosed with the disease herself. Allen’s battle with breast cancer inspired her to write the book *Confronting Cancer with Faith*. She wrote the book to give encouragement, comfort and hope to cancer patients and their loved ones.

**UAB hailed as fit-friendly, innovative, healthy employer**

Innovative and cutting-edge are words often used to describe departments at UAB. Add UAB’s Employee Wellness Program to the growing list.

The American Heart Association (AHA) recently recognized the Wellness Program with its gold-level Fit Friendly Company and Worksite Innovation awards for 2011. And the *Birmingham Business Journal* ranked UAB’s second in its list of Healthiest Employers in the 500-plus-employee category for its emphasis on health and wellness in the workplace.

UAB has been recognized by the AHA for several years in a row, but this is the first time it has received the innovation award, an achievement attributable to the Farm Stand initiative that provides employees an opportunity to purchase fresh foods five days a week.

“We’re excited to be recognized by the American Heart Association,” says Lauren Whit, Ph.D., UAB Wellness Program coordinator. The Fit Friendly Company Award recognizes UAB for offering employees physical activity support, increasing healthy eating options at work, promoting a wellness culture and implementing at least six physical activities, two nutrition activities and one culture activity.

“...To receive this award again shows the commitment UAB has made to its employees and their well-being,” Whit says. “And to be selected for the Worksite Innovation Award shows where we want to go. UAB strives to be innovative in every service line and academic program we offer, and I don’t want the Wellness Program to be any different. We want to be innovative, cutting-edge and build a program that will invest in the health and well-being of our employees.”

Whit says the development and implementation of the strategic wellness plan was a major factor in UAB’s selection for the *Birmingham Business Journal* award.

“We’re glad it is capturing attention,” Whit says. “It’s an ambitious plan, and I hope it shows we value our employees. They excel for so many of our patients, students and the community, and it’s great to build a program that invests in their health.”

More opportunities will be available to employees in 2012, and popular programs will continue. That includes The Farm Stand, which will continue to operate at its regular campus locations through Dec. 16 and will return again in the spring. Online ordering and delivery will be available to some locations during the winter months; learn more at www.uab.edu/wellness.

The tobacco-cessation program will return in January. Scale Back Alabama weigh-ins begin the week of Jan. 23, 2012, and EatRight’s weight-management classes will resume around the same time.

Whit also says more effort will be made to highlight programs available to UAB employees.

“Our strategic mission statement is to cultivate, innovate and collaborate with partners across campus,” Whit says. “One priority is to be able to direct employees to campus resources available to them and their families and build a bridge between the resources we have and employees who need help.

“It’s wonderful to have the opportunity to collaborate with experts and knowledgeable physicians to find solutions to our everyday health issues,” she says.
AUB has broken ground on the new Abroms-Engel Institute for the Visual Arts. The institute will house the College of Arts and Science’s Department of Art and Art History and will feature leading-edge galleries and studio, office and storage space for the department as it continues to grow. The facility is named for lead donors (from left) Hal and Judy Abroms and Marvin and Ruth Engel, who helped break ground along with President Carol Garrison, CAIS Dean Thomas D’Lorenzo, Vice President of University Development Shirley Salloway Kahn and Professor Bert Brouwer.

Ground was broken for the new Abroms-Engel Institute for the Visual Arts in a ceremony Nov. 18. The IVA will house much of the College of Arts and Science’s Department of Art and Art History and will feature leading-edge galleries and studio, office and storage space for the department as it continues to grow. The facility is named for lead donors (from left) Hal and Judy Abroms and Marvin and Ruth Engel, who helped break ground along with President Carol Garrison, CAIS Dean Thomas D’Lorenzo, Vice President of University Development Shirley Salloway Kahn and Professor Bert Brouwer.

Unfamiliar with the word “Child Life,” the boy felt safest when he was tucked into a wagon, and Love and Couvillion encouraged the family to take a wagon they had home with them. The family promised they would bring it back despite Love telling them to keep it. “They brought back the wagon with a story,” Love says. “Some of the last few days their son lived, they pulled him around in that wagon in the neighborhood that he could say good-bye to all of the children.”

Throughout UAB’s Child Life Program, Love and Couvillion provide children and their families two things — comfort in times of need and positive, even cherished, memories in times of turmoil.

The program, founded in 1975 by pediatric cardiologist Lionel (Mac) Bargeron, M.D., has been creating special bonds and memories with families since its inception. Bargeron believed this type of therapy was important for families.

Love has been a part of the program for almost 26 years. One reason he has been able to provide high-touch care is because of the support of UAB Hospital Maintenance, which raises money to provide gifts for the children in the program to be given out during the Christmas holidays and all year long.

This is the 30th year Hospital Maintenance has held its annual fundraiser for the program; it also will host the annual Christmas Toy Fund celebration at 11 a.m. Tuesday, Dec. 20 in the West Pavilion atrium. The event is open to all UAB employees.

“Children also are here because of congenital heart defects. Children also are here waiting for heart, liver and kidney transplants. Doctors and nurses from other areas of the hospital also call and ask for their services. The nature of the diseases these children are battling leads to some tough and sometimes scary moments for patients and their families.

Child Life specialists take time with the patients and their family members to explain procedures. There are dolls on the floor that Couvillion can use to help explain things to a young child, a parent or even a concerned sibling so they know what to expect.

Providing families a caring touch is Child Life’s specialty. Love and Couvillion have degrees in human development and family studies. They’ve watched children die and dying and support families in the hospital during that time with palliative care, and they also had to pass a certification exam. Yet Love and Couvillion say their success is rooted in relationships with nurses, nurse practitioners and doctors.

“We have a really good team around us,” Couvillion says. “Everyone is pulling in the same direction and really trying to do the best they can for these children and their families.”

Cementing relationships

Connecting with families can happen in an instant — often in the worst of circumstances — and it makes memories that affect all involved for a lifetime. And it sometimes leads to more stories.

For instance, a social worker called Love just two weeks ago and told her, “You’re not going to believe who is here.” When she told Love the name of the family, memories from two years ago came flooding back. In 2009, the family came in for a procedure on their 8-week-old baby boy, and the child coded and died from complications brought on by a heart defect. Love and Couvillion were called when it was evident the baby was not going to make it. Love went with the doctor when he told the family things didn’t look good, and she stayed with them all day — even as the family gave their son his last bath, took photos of him and picked him up from the morgue.

Couvillion, meanwhile, had taken the family’s 5-year-old daughter with her to the Child Life Rooms. The two of them bonded instantly. They played games, ate snacks, played with Barbies — even watched a movie together. It was a little bit of normalcy.

Two weeks ago, the family had returned to UAB Hospital, which prompted the social worker’s call to Love. The mom went into labor the day before she was scheduled to have a C-section here and was rushed to UAB from South Alabama. The mom had been told she would need to have her C-section at UAB because the baby she was carrying had the same heart defect that led to the death of her son two years earlier.

The mom delivered the baby girl without complications, and the ensuing echocardiogram astonished everyone — there was nothing wrong with the baby’s heart. She was 100 percent healthy.

Love visited with the family in the hospital, and they were grateful she stopped by. In fact, the oldest daughter — now 7 — walked with Love back to the Child Life unit with a couple of her friends just to visit.

Upon entering the unit, the little girl told Love, “My baby was in a room over here close by,” remembering her baby brother.

“I even got some things for her to play with and she looked around and asked, ‘Where are the Barbies?’” Love says. “She remembered that day two years ago. It just reinforced that day that with her and Blair was so important. It would not have been the kind of memory that it was for her if she had had to stay in that room with her parents for hours. She could not have come back here and had such a fond memory.”

Love shares that family’s story often because of the impact it had on everyone, including Couvillion, who was 22 weeks pregnant at the time.

“We can say how we would be in a situation, but the reality is, we really don’t know,” Love says. “When families have allowed us to stand with them during a terrible time, it’s just our presence that helps. There’s nothing we can say to make them feel better, it’s just being there and standing with them. It’s a privilege and a humbling experience for Blair and me when we can stand by a family during trying times.”
Davis provided Oracle, BrassRing help to all in need

Jo-Alice Davis is green and gold to her core. She’s been a UAB student. She met her husband when he was a student at UAB. And both of her children were born here.

“I bleed green,” she says.

Davis also has been an exemplary employee for 26-plus years — working in research, recruiting new employees, providing compensation analyses and being the Oracle and BrassRing guru in her most recent position. As manager of Human Resources Administrative Systems, Davis is a respected colleague to the many whom she provided support — qualities that have made Davis November’s Employee of the Month.

As the Oracle and BrassRing specialist — systems she says others love to hate — Davis has fielded many a query from all parts of campus.

What do I do now? What does this mean? How did I get here? Where do I go? Can you help me, please? Why is this happening to me?

From conception to implementation, Davis has tested, documented, trained, and counseled countless employees regarding the appropriate and most effective use of the two systems.

“She has been and is — for all intents and purposes — the calm voice,” says Anita Clemson, director of Human Resources Compliance. “Whenever anyone across campus, including me or my staff, has questions about functionality or requests for clarification of programming intent or expectation, we call Jo-Alise. She is the person we trust to give us a methodical and experienced answer to all of our why’s.”

Clemson is one of many co-workers who refer to Davis’ calm demeanor in times of confusion as one of her greatest strengths. It’s something Davis has gladly accepted and embraced.

“I’m so glad people saw I was calm,” Davis says. “A lot of times people get so frustrated they don’t see the solution right in front of them or the little sign right over to the side that they have to click. And sometimes it’s just as simple as taking a deep breath, looking at the screen again and saying, ‘Let’s try this.’”

Davis also helps in other ways. As director of fiscal affairs for the College of Arts & Sciences, Terry Allen is essentially the workflow officer for 55 different newly created organizations within the college. Before the Workflow Approval Maintenance system was updated to its present user-friendly status, Allen had the laborious and time-consuming task of updating the workflow in the old and new organizations. Davis offered to go into Oracle from a programming standpoint and make numerous changes for Allen to help him out.

“She literally saved me weeks of time that I desperately needed for other projects with the inception of the College of Arts & Sciences,” Allen says. “Her pleasant and professional demeanor always made it a pleasure to discuss problems with her and to make requests of her. She accepted every request with a smile in her voice, and her expeditious results were incredible.”

Joan Davis, director of administrative and fiscal affairs in Development, Alumni and External Relations, says Davis’ technical, professional and personable skills are unmatched and a tremendous asset to the university.

“Jo-Alise is the one who can help when nobody else can,” Davis says. “She is the one who is still on campus when everyone else has gone home. She is as concerned about the person as the problem seeking help and she knows how to solve your problem. And even though she handles many challenges throughout the day, you feel like you have her complete attention when she is helping you. She has a way of lifting people up and seeing the positive side of any problem. She brings the joy back into work.”

Every hurdle she helped fellow employees jump with her patience, endurance, resolve and laughter will have to be cleared by others now. Jo-Alise retired at the end of November, ready for new challenges outside of her green and gold roots. But then you never know — you just may see her around.

“Many of the parts of my life have occurred here,” she says. “I told everyone at my reception that I’m going to have to re-invent myself. One of the roles I have yet to play is that of a volunteer; I’m looking forward to that.”

The Arkansas offense escalated to an unprecedented level after McGee became the Razorbacks’ offensive coordinator in 2008. The unit set 11 school single-season records in his first season, including total yards (6,273), passing yards (4,338) and passing touchdowns (36).

Arkansas had three offensive players selected in the 2011 NFL Draft. Quarterback Ryan Mallett was chosen by the New England Patriots, tight end D.J. Williams was taken by the Green Bay Packers and offensive tackle DeMarcus Love was picked by the Minnesota Vikings.

Before joining the staff at Arkansas, McGee spent four seasons (2004-07) at Northeastern University, for which he was the receivers and punt-return coach his first two seasons and the quarterback coach and offensive coordinator in 2006 and 2007.

Directing the Wildcats’ spread offense, McGee’s 2007 unit led the Big Ten and was No. 11 in the nation in passing (307.9 yards per game) and led the Big Ten and was No. 11 in the country in total offense (427.7 yards per game).

He and his wife Tiffany have two sons, Cameron, 1, and Grant, born in September.
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