Seniors teach med students the finer points of elder care

Lorain Devito is an expert on the elderly. She knows their tendencies, their likes and their dislikes. She knows how strong their will can be. She also knows their fears. Devito knows these things because she, too, is elderly. Devito is a resident at Episcopal Place, a Section 202 supportive-housing program that provides seniors and disabled adults with restricted income safe and affordable housing and access to related services in a home-like environment.

She’s a very busy lady. Devito, a diabetic, swims regularly and helps interview potential Episcopal Place residents. She also volunteers for two programs in the School of Medicine — the Senior Mentor Program and the History of Medicine Program — and she meets with medical students to discuss health care.

“I look at this as an opportunity to give back and an opportunity to help the physicians of tomorrow better understand geriatrics,” Devito says. Both programs have been a part of the School of Medicine and the Division of Gerontology, Geriatrics and Palliative Care for several years as she recently received a job with a $2 million grant from the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation and a $1 million grant from the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

“I will be great to have members of the UAB team among those numbers,” says Pamela Burks, Ed.D., executive director of human resources. “It will be great to have members of the UAB team among those numbers.” Employees scheduled to work Jan. 18 who would like to volunteer will need to use vacation time to participate. A Volunteer-in-Kind program will be provided for hospital employees and staff who will be working and unable to participate. Employees may bring clothing or personal items to the Administration Building that day to contribute.

UAB employees can form teams or volunteer individually. Register to participate at www.hrm.uab.edu/main/ubdos/; all projects are posted there with details about the day’s activities. E-mail confirmation will be sent to registrants with project information, and an e-mail reminder will be sent two days before the event.

Volunteers will arrive at pre-determined project sites across the Birmingham area at designated times. All work will be completed that day, and Hands On Birmingham project coordinators will direct efforts at the project sites.

Direct questions about the UAB Day of Service to Burks at pburks@uab.edu.

All are invited to participate in UAB Day of Service

Faculty and staff have an opportunity to support UAB’s longstanding mission to better its community during a UAB Day of Service in the coming year. The special day of service, known as Hands On Birmingham King Day of Service, is scheduled for Monday, Jan. 18, 2010 — Martin Luther King Day.

The Hands On Birmingham organization encourages volunteerism in Birmingham through employer-sponsored, group and individual volunteer projects. UAB will join local employers, including Alabama Power and Wachovia, to provide an opportunity for employees to participate in one of the many volunteer opportunities Hands On Birmingham offers.

“Hands On Birmingham anticipates that thousands of volunteers will come together on this day in support of the community in which we live and work,” says Pamela Burks, Ed.D., executive director of human resources. “It will be great to have members of the UAB team among those numbers.”

Nagy drives at full speed to find a cure for cancer

Tim Nagy, vice chair for research in the Department of Nutrition Sciences, recently competed in the driver-pledge competition “Accelerating a Cancer Cure,” which raised $4,790 for the Comprehensive Cancer Center.

“Both programs were part of the original grant proposal and are receiving much-needed funding,” says Angela Rothrock, Ph.D., assistant professor in gerontology, geriatrics and palliative care and associate director for the day-to-day operations of the UAB Reynolds Program. “The grant will enable us to change the programs — particularly the Senior Mentor Program — in positive ways. It’s certainly reinvigorated the programs and helped us increase the diversity of our seniors.”

Nagy competed in the driver-pledge competition “Accelerating a Cancer Cure” last year and is now offering to drive again in order to raise money for the Comprehensive Cancer Center. Nagy is one of the founders of “Accelerating a Cancer Cure.”

Tim Nagy, Ph.D., fights cancer wearing two uniforms. The first is his lab coat, which he wears as a UAB Comprehensive Cancer scientist and vice chair for research in the UAB Department of Nutrition Sciences. The second uniform includes a helmet.

That’s because Nagy races sports cars — often to raise more research funds for the Cancer Center. Nagy is one of the founders of “Accelerating a Cancer Cure.”

Nagy drives at full speed to find a cure for cancer

The grant will enable us to change the programs — particularly the Senior Mentor Program — in positive ways. It’s certainly reinvigorated the programs and helped us increase the diversity of our seniors.”

From left to right: Episcopal Place residents Amelia Bryan and School of Medicine students Morgan Wilbanks and Liz Staley talk with Episcopal Place resident Lorain Devito (foreground) at their recent meeting as part of the Senior Mentor Program. The program pairs first-year medical students with Birmingham-area seniors. The students interview the seniors at least six times in a two-year period to sharpen their interviewing skills and better learn how to care for geriatric patients.

See ELDERR CARE p6 

See NAGY p6
Enjoy the Campus Recreation Center for free this holiday

The UAB Campus Recreation Center will offer a free trial from Saturday, Dec. 26 through Thursday, Dec. 31. All faculty, staff and alumni without a current membership will be able to enjoy all the amenities of one of the top recreation facilities in the country. Faculty and staff must present a current UAB ID, and alumni must be active members of the National Alumni Society and present their NAS card upon entering.

Take advantage of this free gift to you and start the new year off on a healthy note. The CRCT’s holiday hours are: 5:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Dec. 24; closed Dec. 25; normal operating hours Dec. 26-30; closed Jan. 1, 2010; normal operating hours Jan. 2-4, 2010.

For normal operating hours and additional CRCT information, visit www.uab.edu/campusreccenter.

Christmas toy drive will end Dec. 17

For 28 years the Hospital Maintenance Department has ensured that children in UAB Hospital experience the joys of the holiday at a party with Santa and gifts. This year’s Christmas Toy Fund celebration is scheduled for Thursday, Dec. 17 on the second floor of the North Pavilion Atrium. Faculty, staff and students are invited. Donations for the purchase of toys and supplies are being accepted. Send a check payable to the UAB Maintenance Pediatric Toy Fund, 619 19th St. South, Room 8016, Birmingham, AL 35294.

Toys for Tots drive now under way

The 16th annual UAB Holiday Toys for Tots Drive is under way, and members of the UAB community are invited. Donations for the purchase of toys and supplies are being accepted. Send a check payable to the UAB Women’s Center or fax them to 934-5833. Direct any questions to 934-6946.

For more information, visit www.uab.edu/toys or e-mail Heather White at heatherwhite@uab.edu or call 975-0260.

Nominate the outstanding woman you know by Jan. 7

Nominate a student, faculty, administrator, staff member or outstanding woman in the community for the Outstanding Women Awards presented annually by the UAB Women’s Center and UAB Women’s Studies. Nominations forms are available at the UAB Women’s Center in the Holley-Moore Building Room 150 and are due by 5 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 7, 2010. Return the forms to the UAB Women’s Center or fax them to 934-5833. Direct any questions to 934-6946.

A reception for the honorees will be at 4:30 p.m. Thursday, March 4, 2010, in the UAB Hill University Center Great Hall.

UAB Reporter prints last paper of the year

This issue will be the last printed issue of the year for the Reporter. Our next print paper will be Jan. 11, 2010. If you or your department have news to share with the campus, The eReporter can help. The eReporter will publish Dec. 18 and Dec. 22. Deadline for submission is 10 a.m. the previous day. For more information, e-mail reporter@uab.edu.

Campaign for the UAB School of Nursing’s 2010 Annual Fund has ensured that children in UAB Hospital experience the joys of the holiday at a party with Santa and gifts. This year’s Christmas Toy Fund celebration is scheduled for Thursday, Dec. 17 on the second floor of the North Pavilion Atrium. Faculty, staff and students are invited. Donations for the purchase of toys and supplies are being accepted. Send a check payable to the UAB Maintenance Pediatric Toy Fund, 619 19th St. South, Room 8016, Birmingham, AL 35294.

Toys for Tots drive now under way

The 16th annual UAB Holiday Toys for Tots Drive is under way, and members of the UAB community are encouraged to bring new, unwrapped toys suitable for children between the ages of infant and 12 years through Dec. 18.

Place toys in the designated collection boxes or bring them to the UAB Administration Building lobby by noon Dec. 18. Boxes are located in buildings throughout campus, including Bell Gym, Campbell Hall, CH19, Cashworth Hall, FAB, Faculty Office Tower, Kaul Building, Heritage Hall, Hoon, Lister Hill and Sterne libraries, School of Nursing, Public Health, RSB, Sparks Center, UAB Police Department and Volker Hall.

The gift is in the giving UAB Chief Nursing Officer Velinda Block looks on as Salvation Army Brigadier Luther Smith thanks all of the UAB employees who donated toys to this year’s Salvation Army Angel Tree Program. Hundreds of toys were collected and presented to Smith and the Salvation Army at the hospital’s holiday celebration Dec. 9.

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Caring for those who are very sick, dying or emotionally spent or broken from a traumatic event is never simple, but it is part of daily life for those involved in any ministry.

Malcolm Marler, D. Min., the new director of the Department of Pastoral Care, has spent his adult life counseling and comforting individuals and families, including in his previous position as director of the UAB Support Team Network and chaplain at The 1917 Clinic. Marler now has the opportunity to enhance 40 years of pastoral care at UAB as the fourth director of the department, which was started by Ken Bohannon in 1969.

“It’s an awesome responsibility. It’s something I’m very grateful to have the opportunity to do — to work with a pastoral care team and provide emotional and spiritual support for people every single day,” Marler says.

“Even though it’s routine care for those of us who work in this field, it’s not routine to the families who are experiencing it. It’s a good reminder that what we do really does make a difference.”

Marler was the one needing support recently when his son was taken to UAB Hospital via Lifesaver helicopter after a car crash near their home on Smith Lake.

“We were just like every other family here on Thanksgiving week,” Marler says. “Fortunately, our son was able to come home after a few days, and we’re thankful for that. But I was able to watch UAB nurses and surgeons and critical-care units and see what they do and how they can make such a difference. And I got to see pastoral care from the other side.

“Even though it’s routine care for those of us who work in this field, it’s not routine to the families who are experiencing it,” he says. “It’s a good reminder that what we do really does make a difference.”

The pastoral care program is integral to patient care, visitor and staff relations, and Anthony Patterson, UAB Hospital associate vice president, says Marler will be a strong and innovative leader.

“Malcolm is known for identifying people’s needs and building programs that address issues, including access to care, overcoming stigma of disease and community building,” Patterson says. There are seven full-time chaplains on staff at UAB Hospital, plus the director. At least one chaplain is in the hospital or on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Hospital caregivers are encouraged to contact a chaplain by paging the chaplain on call at 934-3411, or by calling the Department of Pastoral Care at 934-4254 when:

- A patient needs emotional, psychological, or spiritual support and help
- A patient or family member is struggling with issues of grief and loss
- A patient requests a better understanding of his/her relationship with God
- A patient desires prayer or spiritual counseling
- A patient’s family needs support and counsel
- Discouragement, depression, or anxiety threaten a patient’s healing
- Staff desires emotional and/or spiritual support and counsel
- Death seems imminent or has occurred

Aiding employees

Chaplains often are called to assist the family and friends of patients in UAB Hospital, but Marler hopes more employees will use their services.

Faye Williams, the nurse manager in oncology, was approached by a staff member recently who wanted to have a local hospice company and the Department of Pastoral Care teach a continuing-education class specific to bereavement and the care of self.

Two classes were held during a two-week period.

“Afterward, my staff told me this was needed and they were glad we did this,” Williams says. “They were able to cry, to talk about patients they had formed very close relationships with and lost and how that affected their lives. It was good for me. I was able to share some of my own experiences. I had another nurse send me an e-mail telling me how informative and comforting it was to have that type of offering and to know the pastoral department was here for employees as well as for the patients.”

Marler has visited many nurse managers since his appointment to gauge their thoughts on the ways in which pastoral care better can serve employees. In their meeting, Williams told Marler that many caregivers in the hospital often don’t have the time to grieve, to decompress and really discuss the happenings around a particular death or even a group of deaths, Williams says.

“Many times you don’t know what to say or do, but the more we receive it, the more we’re able to reach back, grab those memories and share them with our patients and families.”

“Many times you don’t know what to say or do, but the more we receive it, the more we’re able to reach back, grab those memories and share them with our patients and families.”

“We want to do what was done to make that back to the forefront and make sure we’re providing it to the staff and our patients, and Malcolm was extremely gracious and understanding. My staff was overwhelmed with his openness, honesty and willingness to provide care for us.”

The more our employees can be comforted during difficult times, the more we can provide comfort to our patients and families. Many times you don’t know what to say or do, but the more we receive it, the more we’re able to reach back, grab those memories and share them with our patients and families.”

Marler says his department offers psychological, social and spiritual grand rounds quarterly to support employees as they offer support.

“It’s a way to educate,” Marler says. “I think what we all have to realize is that all of us can offer emotional or spiritual support at various times in our work. That makes us a more compassionate place for patients and families and improves the patient experience.”

December 14, 2009 UAB Reporter 3
Students learn the nuances of business from topCEOs

UAB business school students were among thousands of students around the country studying the business world intently when it crumbled in September 2008. But UAB’s students had an advantage that many of those other business students didn’t have. They had a bird’s-eye view inside the collapse.

Several students, along with assistant professors Edward Friend III and Steve Yoder, were sitting in the office of Protective Life Corp. CEO Johnny Johns shortly after Lehman Brothers went bankrupt with losses of $365 billion to its bond insurers. Some $785 million of Lehman funds were erased, money-market investors suffered a massive loss and panic ensued. Regulators were meeting in New York to discuss the fate of American International Group, and Johns was the play-by-play announcer for the students.

“He was telling us what was going on and how it affected Protective Life and the entire market,” Friend says. “He said if AIG fails, here are the consequences. If it survives, here is what I think is going to happen.

“To be able to talk to executives living through the economic change as it happened, right from their point of view — what was happening to our economy and our world in real time was a tremendous experience — one students rarely have.”

“The framework of the course is exceptional. It requires each student to learn an entirely new industry each week so they can have intelligent discourse with a CEO. And you’re required to present an analysis of the company to the CEO and talk about how wonderful their company is and also outline the weaknesses within it.

That takes courage.”

The experience was made possible through the innovative business course “A Conversation with CEOs.” The course, offered each fall, is taught by Friend and Yoder and is for master of business administration students, honors students and other high-achieving students. Students learn the complexities of setting a strategy for businesses by engaging CEOs from Regions, HealthSouth, BioCryst, Exergen, Hibbett Sporting Goods, Medical Properties Trust and other companies.

“The CEOs vary their presentations, but for the most part, they give the same presentations they give to analysts on Wall Street,” Friend says. “Sometimes they host us at their place of business. This year we went to Regions and visited with CEO Dowd Ritter and his senior staff, and they gave a reception for our students. We went to HealthSouth and visited with Ivy Grinnin, who is its CEO. We visited with Johnny Johns again. For many of our students, it was the first occasion they’ve had to be in a corporate headquarters, much less be around the CEO of a major corporation.”

The course meets once a week for three hours. Each student must complete an analysis of the week’s featured company prior to class. A team of students is selected to present an in-depth, 20-minute PowerPoint analysis of the featured company each week at the beginning of class. The visiting CEO typically will respond to the students’ work before a lengthy question-and-answer session.

Students say the experience is invaluable.

“The framework of the course is exceptional,” says senior Josh Carpenter, an analytical, and economics major from Florence. “It requires each student to learn an entirely new industry each week so they can have intelligent discourse with a CEO. And you’re required to present an analysis of the company to the CEO and talk about how wonderful their company is and also outline the weaknesses within it.

That takes courage, and I think it’s been an unforgettable experience for us to get in front of their respective CEO and do that.”

Jon Stonehouse, CEO of BioCryst Pharmaceuticals, spoke to UAB business students for a second consecutive year this fall. He says he enjoys the interaction with the students and the opportunity to hear them critique his company.

“It’s a great new angle to hear their perspective; they really do their home-work.” Stonehouse says. “I was extremely impressed by the amount of research and analysis they did and the fairly broad thinking they had about the current situation and where to go from there.”

A conversation with 20

Friend estimates 30 CEOs from publicly traded companies have spoken to UAB students since the inception of the course five years ago.

The course began after a conversation then-business school Dean Bob Holmes had with then-SouthTrust Bank President Julian Banton and Friend. “We were talking about how to capitalize on the resources we have here in this large, urban area for our students,” Friend says. “I had some thoughts about a leadership course I shared, and Julian told us about a guest lecturership program at Virginia Commonwealth University. Bob took those ideas and fashioned our course.”

Students read and learn theories from texts written by Harvard Professor Michael Porter, who is considered the foremost authority on business strategy. They also read selected texts and receive instruction in legal research at Sterne Library. They discuss macroeconomics and learn to develop a market analysis.

The course always ends with an ethics presentation.

“We’ve had law enforcement professionals, former CEOs and business people who are convicted felons talk to our students about ethics, and it always turns out to be a fascinating session,” Friend says.

Community outreach

Stonehouse spoke to the students in November about BioCryst, a UAB-founded company with 79 employees in Alabama and North Carolina.

BioCryst was in the news this fall when the Food & Drug Administration (FDA) issued an emergency-use authorization for the company to ship 10,000 courses of treatment for the investigational anti-viral drug intravenous Peramivir.

The drug is used in certain adult and pediatric patients with confirmed or suspected H1N1 influenza infection that are admitted to a hospital.

Stonehouse, who sits on the Health Sector Advisory Committee Board at the Fuqua School of Business at Duke University, says one of the things he hoped to impart to the students is the need to be involved in community endeavors, including speaking to students.

“I’ve been fortunate in my career to have had some great teachers teach me about business and the professional world,” Stonehouse says.

“I’m a life-long learner. Whatever little bit of knowledge I can pass on to someone else is very important. But I get a lot back from these students,” he says. “I think I enjoy it as much or maybe more than they do — the energy, the enthusiasm and the ideas they have. Sometimes when you get so focused on your business you forget about those who are in the early, early stages of their professional life. It’s great to see. It’s been energizing for me.”

Carpenter says Friend and Yoder also are role models for community servants.

Friend chairs the Community Foundation board, a public charity dedicated to connecting people and resources with community needs and opportunities to enhance lives. Yoder has held many civic leadership roles, and Carpenter has worked with him on several community projects.

“They really feel a duty to the community and see themselves as citizens who have responsibilities to give back,” Carpenter says. “And either implicitly or explicitly that message has been relayed to us resoundingly through the CEOs. If and when you do get to where they are in their careers, there is a whole lot more to do than just run a business.”

Stonehouse says the course provides a great opportunity for students to learn from their own professors and the visiting CEOs.

“Eddie Friend and Steve Yoder have done a great job of putting together a pretty interesting program,” Stonehouse says. “It’s very well taught and highly interactive. It’s just a tremendous learning opportunity for them.”

Visit the UAB School of Business online at www.uab.edu/business for more information on “A Conversation with CEOs.”
Dancing doctor delivers on the floor, nights and weekends

By day, Debra Kimberlin, M.D., helps high-risk obstetric patients at UAB navigate the difficult steps of challenging pregnancies. Most nights and weekends, she can be found moving smoothly through the steps of very different challenges — Waltzes, foxtrot and tangos.

Kimberlin says she fell in love with ballroom dancing the moment she tried it. She entered her first competition just six weeks after her first lesson. “I’ll never forget going to that first competition and seeing the beauty of the sport,” she says. “I was hooked.”

UAB Magazine recently requested a spot on Kimberlin’s dance card to talk about the ins and outs of becoming an award-winning dancer on a doctor’s schedule.

Do you think it’s important to have a creative outlet with your type of work? Do medicine and dance complement each other?

I think being a physician helps me dancing because both require patience and dedication. You can spend years working on some of the very basic steps, and even the professionals continue to work on these basic steps to improve their technique.

What’s your favorite style of dance?

I compete in both American rhythm and American smooth. I love the music and the elaborate gowns, "I say.

Kimberlin says she’s danced in reserve. In fact, extra body fat is an endocrine tissue that produces hormones.

She’s also an accomplished ballroom dancer and competitor. "I love the music and the elaborate gowns," she says.

Kimberlin: You can spend years working on some of the very basic steps, and even the professionals continue to work on these basic steps to improve their technique.

How many competitions have you been in?

Kimberlin: I don’t know exactly. A lot. I competed in Nashville in July, in Cleveland in September and in Atlanta in October.

In November I danced at the Ohio Star Ball, which is where the PBS special The American Ballroom Dance Challenge is filmed each year. It is an enormous competition — one of the largest in the world — and I was particularly excited to compete there. In December, I will compete in Las Vegas.

What is a typical week for you?

I work full time in the Division of Maternal-Fetal Medicine and Reproductive Genetics. In addition, I dance two to three days per week. Each lesson is one hour long, and I generally take several lessons at a time. I train at Dance World in Nashville. Occasionally, I drive to Nashville on Friday afternoon after I finish my ultrasound clinic. I usually dance three hours Friday night and five hours on Saturday. I drive back here Saturday evening.

Dance World is one of the top studios in the country; a number of U.S. champions teach there, and they get some of the top coaches from around the world to work with us.

I practice at home most days as well. I have a dance studio in my basement now with a television monitor for viewing instructional videos and video clips from my lessons of the steps or figures that I need to practice. I have even redone my house to accommodate this hobby.

What do you think about all the dance reality shows that are popular now?

Before I started dancing with my current instructors, I danced very briefly withFabian Sanchez, who owns the Fred Astaire Dance Studio in Hoover. Fabian was one of the professional dancers on Dancing with the Stars in its sixth season. I think that show has done some great things for ballroom dancing; it certainly increased the visibility and public awareness of the sport.

On the flip side, people who watch those fancy routines don’t realize that until you get to the highest amateur level or to the professional level, most routines don’t have all of those tricks. I am always somewhat fearful that someone who comes to watch me dance will be disappointed because my routines are not as flashy as those on television.

What’s the biggest challenge of starting a hobby like this after establishing a career?

When you’ve reached a certain level of accomplishment in your career, starting over as a beginner with a difficult hobby can be frustrating and intimidating, but it’s a great life lesson. I try not to be too hard on myself and to enjoy the process; the most important thing to remember is that we should always continue to learn and push ourselves to step out of our comfort zones.

Visit UAB Magazine at www.uab.edu/uabmagazine

NAGY

Continued from page 1

Four drivers, including Nagy, raised $4,790 from the event.

The hormone link

Off the track, Nagy is driven to find answers about the connections between obesity and cancer. He joined UAB’s faculty 15 years ago after earning biology degrees in Pennsylvania and Utah and completing postdoctoral work — focusing on endocrinology at Delaware and energy metabolism and body composition at UAB. Today he is the vice chair for research in the Department of Nutrition Sciences and investigates the reasons obese individuals are more likely to die from cancer than their leaner counterparts.

“Many people thought an increase in food consumption confers this risk,” Nagy says. “That’s certainly possible, but our research so far suggests that elevated risk is actually caused by body fat. Scientists longer think of body fat as tissue that just holds excess calories, holding energy in reserve. In fact, extra body fat is an endocrine tissue that produces hormones. As you increase the amount of fat, certain hormones are produced in excess, and other hormones are produced less. We think that

many of these hormones may play a role in the discrepancy in mortality rates.”

One of those hormones, leptin, is produced in very high amounts in obese individuals, and it fosters cancer-cell growth by allowing blood vessels to grow and feed tumors, Nagy says. Another hormone, adiponectin, decreases as obesity increases — and the lack of it may also encourage cancer.

Unlike leptin, adiponectin can inhibit cell growth by limiting the expansion of blood vessels. In other words, says Nagy, obesity may provide tumors with an environment where they can grow and flourish, while leanness starves them.

The studies could benefit patients in multiple ways, adds Nagy, who also directs UAB’s Division of Physiology & Metabolism.

“Understanding the hormones and other physiological factors involved in the weight-gain-weight-loss loop might help us devise methods to change them,” he says. “If we know a certain hormone is involved, drugs might be developed to limit production of that hormone.”

Hot wheels

“UAB is a terrific environment for conducting scientific work,” Nagy says. And he enjoys living in Birmingham. His wife Fran is a Potter who operates Clay Studio.

Then there’s the racing. Nagy says he got hooked a week ago or five years ago when he enrolled in a high-performance driver’s education course in Atlanta. Before long, he had his own racecar — a 1998 Porsche 924S — and had become a driving instructor himself.

“Then I wanted to do a little more, so I participated in time trials,” he says. “That was a lot of fun and paved the way for my entry into racing. Now I participate in club racing at places like Barber Motorsports or at Road Atlanta.”

Nagy does all of the maintenance and repair work on his Porsche himself. “I thought that if I could do science, then I could probably work on a car,” he says. “Now, my family lovingly refers to my garage as ‘man haven.’ ”

NAGY was the fastest driver in an Atlanta street race. He has raised money to send children to treatment programs.

“Now, my family lovingly refers to my garage as ‘man haven.’ ”

December 14, 2009 UAB Reporter 5
Foster walks with a purpose for neurology department

Carol Rothrock

I an organization is looking for someone to promote the value of walking for one’s health, Randall Foster is your man.

Foster, the messenger for the Department of Neurology, walks an average five miles a day.

“That’s one of the reasons I like my job — I get to get out and get a lot of exercise,” Foster says. “On a really busy day I probably walk 10 miles. I’m 51 and people always ask me how I stay in shape. It’s because I walk several miles a day, five days a week.”

Foster walks with a purpose. He handles deliveries, packages, charts, grants, contracts — even spirometers when needed — walking from the Sparks Building to The Kirklin Clinic and other neurology offices throughout campus.

Foster has provided consistent, professional service to all members of neurology, and they rely on him daily to help keep the department running. He often is requested to make last-minute deliveries and move sensitive documents. Foster’s dependability, reliability, courteousness and consistent, timely work ethic make him an essential team member and UAB’s Employee of the Month for December.

“Randall is a major pillar in our structure,” says Karen Fields, administrative director of neurology. “He ensures that our charts arrive in clinic on time, that grants make it to central administration and that our human resources documents and other documents make it to the right places, avoiding timely and sometimes costly mistakes.”

Co-workers have plenty of stories of Foster’s willingness to do that which is needed when asked — even above and beyond his responsibilities.

“One particular instance that comes to mind is that of an NIH grant deadline in which we were down to the wire,” Fields says. “Randall stayed late going back and forth to the various entities that needed the deliverables.”

Co-workers say one reason Foster is so dependable is because of his attention to detail. They say his mailroom is neat and well organized. Mailboxes are updated with correct labels and bins are well marked for employees to place mail and other documents.

“Randall also keeps a written record of who requests the delivery, the destination of the delivery and the date and time of delivery,” Foster says. “This comes in very handy for him and for all of us when he is asked about the specifics of a document’s delivery.”

Foster has two other talents his co-workers have relied on through the years — his singing and his ability to bake cakes.

Foster sings in a bluegrass band at his church in Springfield each Sunday and has sung at co-workers’ weddings, parties, churches and funerals.

“I’ve been called here at work by people on campus I don’t even know and they’ll say, ‘We don’t have anybody to sing at this wedding or funeral and we heard about you. Can you come do it for us?’”

Foster says, “My boss Karen Fields always has been really good about letting me do it and I enjoy it. If there’s one thing I’ve learned through the years, if there is something you’re called to do you should never turn it down unless you absolutely have to because you may never get asked again.”

And then there are the birthdays. The department celebrates employee birthdays one day each month and Foster often is asked to provide a cake for the gathering.

“They must like it,” he says. “I usually don’t get to take any home.”

If you know someone who should be Employee of the Month, nominate them; send letters of recommendation to Kelly Mayer at kmayer@uab.edu or visit www.uab.edu/otm.

Elder care

CONTINUED from page 1

Stan Massie, M.D., associate professor of general internal medicine, oversees the Senior Mentor Program for first-year medical students. Richard Sims, M.D., professor of geriatrics, is the co-director.

Rothrock says Massie and Sims were responsible for starting the program and have kept it going with little funding.

The course is a unique opportunity for first- and second-year medical students to be paired with a senior citizen living in the Greater Birmingham area.

Among the goals of the program:

• Provide students with an opportunity to develop a working relationship with a patient
• Expose students to community-dwelling elders
• Enable students to visit elders outside of UAB
• Provide opportunities for students to practice their interviewing skills
• Make students aware of some of the principles and challenges involved in care of the elderly

Two students are paired with an adult and visit their senior mentors approximately six to seven times in two years.

“There are specific things we want them to learn each visit,” Rothrock says. “One visit might be learning to do history-taking. One might be learning to do a cognitive assessment, a depression scale or a medication review. There are specific clinical skills we want them to learn. But we also want them to learn that all older adults are not sick and frail. There are older, healthy and vibrant adults in our community who they have a lot to learn from.”

Focus on geriatrics:

The Donald Reynolds Foundation grant is part of $380 million it gave to UAB and 39 other medical schools to focus student learning on better care for the elderly.

The grant requires internal medicine residents to spend one month in geriatrics training in settings that include acute care for the elderly, a long-term care facility, outpatient clinics and home-care visits. Other programs, including interactive, online training modules and special geriatric training for residents in internal, emergency, family and pediatric medicine, also are in development.

The Senior Mentor Program also will evolve into an interdisciplinary program.

“It won’t just be a medical student working with an older adult; it will also be a nurse, a social worker, a dental and a therapy-based-practice student working in teams,” Rothrock says. “The professionals in training will discuss how to work in an interdisciplinary team to best care for older adults.”

Training in geriatrics, the area of medicine that focuses on diagnosing and treating diseases and problems particular to older adults, is essential for future physicians.

The first Baby Boomers began turning 65 in 2011, which creates an additional sense of urgency. The Silver Tsunami, or wave of seniors seeking medical care, is expected to increase dramatically during the next decade.

“Given the changing demographics, we’d have to train far more physicians than we are able in order to have enough geriatricians,” Rothrock says. “So even if you’re not a geriatric specialist, you’re going to have to care for older adults. What we can create are geriatric-friendly physicians so that any physician coming out of training is attuned to geriatric needs and able to recognize that caring for older adults requires a different perspective on health care.

“If we don’t train health-care professionals as in general care to older adults, from basic communication skills to very technical clinical skills, they’re not likely to learn it,” Rothrock says. “In the average medical journal you’re learning about outcomes in a 40-year-old white man, and that’s not who’s going to be coming into their clinics.”

Mentors are the teacher

That’s why the mentorship program is so valuable to students. They get an opportunity to begin learning the way seniors live and think.

In fact, Rothrock makes it known when she is recruiting the seniors that they are to make sure they do one specific thing with the students — speak their mind.

“I tell these local residents, ‘You’re the teacher. If you don’t like the way they ask you questions, tell them,’” Rothrock says.
Bias skews obesity findings, study says

A new study by UAB School of Public Health researchers shows that obesity research may be misrepresented by scientists operating with particular biases on topics related to weight, nutrition and the food industry. The researchers refer to “white-hat bias,” a tendency to distort information about products such as sugar-sweetened beverages or practices like breastfeeding, regardless of the facts, when the distortions are perceived to serve good ends.

The findings, published in the International Journal of Obesity, reveal biases sufficient to mislead readers, says Professor David B. Allison, Ph.D., director of UAB’s Nutrition and Obesity Research Center and study co-author.

Other illnesses, body weight don’t explain racial disparities in colon cancer survival

A new study by UAB researchers shows that body-mass index and co-existing medical conditions do not explain the higher death rate among African-Americans compared to Caucasians who also have colon cancer. The study is published online Nov. 23 in Cancer, a journal of the American Cancer Society.

The finding indicates that although BMI and co-morbidity are independent predictors of poor survival for all patients, these factors do not explain the increased risk of death associated with African-Americans.

“Therefore, more research is needed to gain a fuller understanding of how race and ethnicity are involved in colon cancer survival following surgery,” says Upender Mamne, Ph.D., an associate professor in the UAB Department of Pathology and the lead study author.

ACS-IRG applications now being accepted

The UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center plans to fund up to three American Cancer Society (ACS-IRG) awards in 2010. These grants provide seed funding to junior faculty to facilitate successful competition for extramural funding programs at the national level. Applicants must either be U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents with a current UAB junior faculty appointment. Awards will be limited to a maximum of $40,000 per investigator for one year beginning April 1, 2010.

More information and guidelines are at www3.ccc.uab.edu/memberresources/fundingopportunities.html. Deadline for applications is 5 p.m. Friday, Feb. 19, 2010. Direct questions to Cheryl C. Lyles at clyles@uab.edu or call 975-0734.

JFDG applications now being accepted

The UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center plans to fund up to three Junior Faculty Development Grant awards in 2010. These grants provide seed funding to junior faculty to facilitate successful competition for extramural funding programs at the national level. Applicants must have current UAB junior faculty appointments. Awards will be limited to a maximum of $30,000 per investigator for a 12-month period beginning April 1, 2010.

More information and complete application guidelines are online at www3.ccc.uab.edu/memberresources/fundingopportunities.html. Deadline for applications is 5 p.m. Friday, Feb. 12, 2010. Direct questions to Cheryl C. Lyles at clyles@uab.edu or call 975-0734.

IRB informed consent training offered

The 2009-2010 IRB training and quiz on informed consent now is available for researchers who need to complete their mandatory, biennial training. The registration process differs for UAB personnel and authorized non-UAB personnel, and instructions are posted at www.uab.edu/irb/2009. A score of 80 percent or higher on the informed consent course quiz is required.

Direct questions about training to 934-3789 or irb@uab.edu; direct questions concerning the online course technology to Fredia Dillard at eteacher@uab.edu.

McDonald wins award for distinguished service in pathology

The director of the UAB Center for Metabolic Bone Disease has won the 2009 Ward Burdick Award for Distinguished Service to Clinical Pathology from the American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP).

Jay M. McDonald, M.D., a professor in the UAB Department of Pathology, is a leader in re-forming and maintaining national standards for clinical pathology training. McDonald helped author the current highest standards for laboratory testing of diabetes mellitus samples and has been an international leader in establishing clinical pathology as both a basic research and clinical discipline.

Minabere Ibelema wins top research journalism award

UAB Associate Professor Minabere Ibelema, Ph.D., has won the Sigma Delta Chi Award, one of journalism’s most prestigious prizes. Ibelema, who teaches news and feature writing in the UAB Department of Communication Studies, is being honored in the research category for his book The African Press, Civic Cynicism and Democracy, published by Palgrave Macmillan. In his book Ibelema argues that civic cynicism is a major obstacle for democracy in African nations and that the African press should intensify its critique of government leaders and the public’s attitude toward corruption. The Sigma Delta Chi Award, presented by the Society of Professional Journalists, recognizes the best in professional journalism in the categories of print, radio, television, newsletters, art and graphics, online and research.

Bjornsti to direct translational research for Cancer Center

Mary-Ann Bjornsti, Ph.D., chair of the Department of Pharmacology & Toxicology, has been appointed associate director for translational research at the UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center.

In her new role, Bjornsti is responsible for linking all the cancer center’s basic science and experimental therapeutics programs to a translational and interdisciplinary approach. She also will provide direction for UAB’s Specialized Program of Research Excellence teams funded by the National Cancer Institute.

A renowned researcher on the ways science can disrupt the replication process of cancer cells to benefit patients, Bjornsti is the program co-leader for UAB’s cancer cell-biology program. She holds the Newman H. Waters Chair of Clinical Pharmacology at UAB.

Quality of life for breast-cancer survivors is grant focus

Professors Patrick McNees, Ph.D., and Karen Meneses, Ph.D., received a three-year, $1.13 million grant from the National Institute of Nursing Research to determine the cost-effectiveness of a telephone-supported intervention for rural breast-cancer survivors.

The project was created to continue care after treatment for women living in rural areas who often lack access to health-care providers and services.

“No matter how much we extend lives through our medical breakthroughs, we must work daily to help them maintain their quality of life and enjoy their lives beyond diagnosis and learn from that,” Meneses says.

Meneses said this study of cost-effectiveness will enable researchers to maximize breast-cancer survivor’s quality of life with the lowest reasonable cost and the best outcomes and enable survivors to have competent, effective and informed care beyond cancer treatment.
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