

MASS

RENOVATING THE AMERICAN DREAM

- > TURKISH TO THAI,
VIA AI
- > ICE CREAM
OF THE CROP





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VOLUME **28** NO. **1** FALL **2023**

From scaling mountain peaks to spelunking through caves, the UMass Outing Club is ready for anything. Founded in 1922, the organization recently celebrated a century of embracing the best outdoor fun New England has to offer—and introducing others to the great outdoors, too. Each excursion starts and ends here, at the gear locker. Jack Kelley '25 models some of the wide variety of gear available to members, from headlamps and microspikes to life jackets, backpacks, and tents. Members can try new activities without incurring the cost of buying specialized equipment, making it easy to discover new delights. The gear locker also doubles as the go-to hang spot for the club—walk by on a nice day and you'll likely find the doors flung open, with the den-like space full of members planning their next outing.

—Ari Jewell

Photo: John Solem

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UMass alumni help envision the future of shelter.
Story on page 32.

Illustration: Thom Dudley



UMass parents share a taste of home:
umass.edu/magazine/extra



WED
11:22AM>
SUNFLOWER FIELD
LAURENITIS FARM,
SUNDERLAND

Sunflowers provide a ray of hope for fighting off *Crithidia bombi*, a widespread bee pathogen, though scientists haven’t understood exactly why. But a recent paper concludes that the spiny structure of sunflower pollen is responsible.

Lead author Laura Figueroa, assistant professor of environmental conservation, separated sunflower pollen’s spiny outer shell from the chemical metabolites in its core, feeding the two to different groups of bees. As part of the study, researchers (including the student pictured) traveled to field sites to weigh observational bumblebee colonies, collect pollen from returning worker bees, and assess the bloom status of the sunflower crop.

The result? “We discovered that the bees that ate the spiny sunflower pollen shells suffered 87% lower infections from *C. bombi*,” Figueroa says.

—Heather Kamins



Photo: Sarah Harper



▲ Seth Lawrence-Slavas '17, '19MA, CEO of Wright Builders, walks us through the tenets of green building for the cover story.

Photo: Lisa Beth Anderson

CLOSE TO HOME

At the root of the word

“alumni” is the Latin word *alere*, meaning “to nourish.” As alumni, we’re continually nourished by the time we spent at our *alma mater*—which, it turns out, means “nourishing mother.”

At UMass, we take in knowledge, but we also test recipes for new ideas and pass along that powerful sustenance to others. It’s not always picture-perfect, but this process of thoughtfully nourishing the mind is the first step in transforming the world.

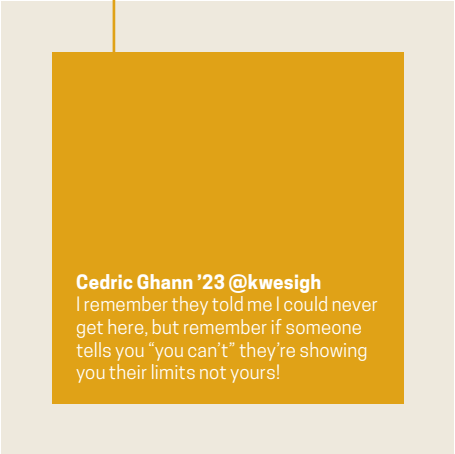
Our current housing crisis is a great example of a stubborn, multifaceted problem that the UMass community is tackling with persistence and dedication. Everyone needs a home, and in this issue we learn more about the challenges to fulfilling that basic

need. In the process of reporting this story, we saw UMass community members across the country mixing and serving up solutions on multiple fronts.

While it doesn’t surprise us to see UMass grads and researchers digging into some of the gnarliest problems of our time, it *does* inspire a swell of pride and optimism for our alumni and our alma mater. And some ideas about finally putting to use that space over the garage ...

We hope this issue builds upon, and maybe even renovates, your understanding of *home*.

Happy reading,
Candice Pinault Novak, Editor
Lori Shine '04MFA,
Managing Editor



Cedric Ghann '23 @kwesigh
I remember they told me I could never get here, but remember if someone tells you “you can’t” they’re showing you their limits not yours!

UMass Fashion Organization (UFO)
@umassfashionorg
“Through The Aura” Section Five |
“Breaking Away: From Fantasy To Reality” Creative Director: @darwinour
Lighting: @rianna.jakson
[...] Pieces personify the freedom that one feels upon reaching this stage, and clothing is loose and bohemian. This is the final stage of grief, and the lesson is that of acceptance and the feeling of having transformed into something new.



Faith Lawless '21
@lawlessconcerts
Let's Be Friends Music Festival
UMass Amherst 5/17/2023
[...] UMass is my alma mater and it brings me so much joy to see the current students there putting on such a phenomenal event.
[...] It's a great way to showcase all the excellent talent in the student body that will be part of the next wave of musicians. I've never been prouder to be a UMass alum.

Keith Toffling '05, '11MS
@ktphotoco
Congratulations to the class of 2023!
Go UMass! 🎓🇺🇸



UMass Libraries
@umassamherstlibraries
Congratulations again to Joanne Keller, who now shares a name with our female falcon chick 83/CD! The community overwhelmingly voted to name the chick after their favorite Omelet Lady. Here she is in the library courtyard with her husband, Doug, and some falcon swag!

UMASS MAGAZINE FALL 2023
VOLUME 28 • NO. 1

Editor
Candice Pinault Novak

Managing Editor
Lori Shine '04MFA

Staff
Alexis Ali, writing
Ari Jewell, editorial and production assistance, writing
Heather Kamins, writing

Contributors
Lisa Beth Anderson, photography
BRIGADE, design
Sommer Browning, writing
Molly Dorozenski '04MFA, writing
Tom Hoogendyk, web production
Lil Knight '97, '03MEd, copy editing
Su-Yee Lin '12MFA, proofreading
Steve Neumann, writing
Sally Parker, writing
Naomi Shulman, writing
John Solem, photography
Nicole Estvanik Taylor, writing
Elizabeth Thurmond, copy editing

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Chancellor
Javier Reyes

Vice Chancellor for University Relations
John Kennedy '86

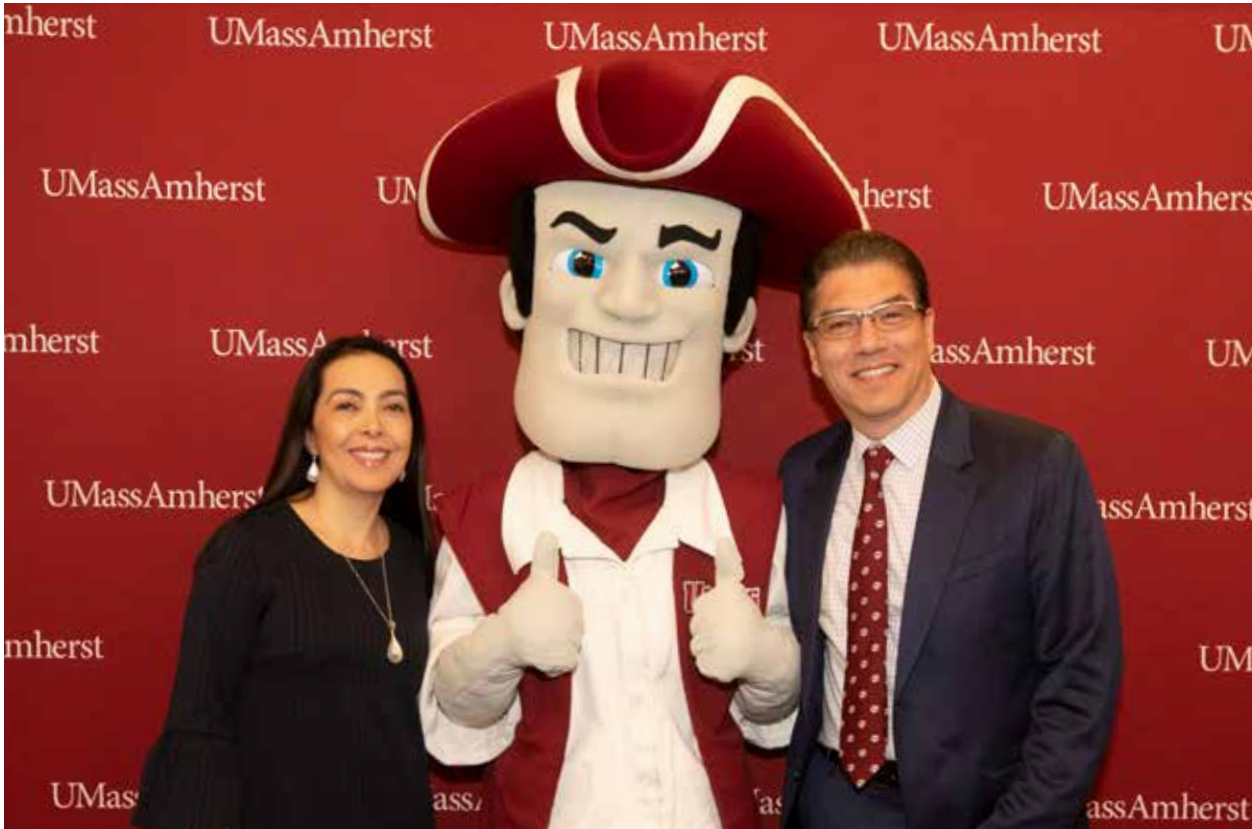
UMass Magazine
UMass Amherst University Relations
101 University Drive, Suite C5
Amherst, MA 01002
magazine@umass.edu
umass.edu/magazine

Address Changes
Records Office
(413) 545-4721
updates@uma-foundation.org

UMass Magazine is published twice per year by the commonwealth’s flagship campus, the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

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Meet the Chancellor: Javier Reyes

> HEATHER KAMINS

Over the summer, at the end of Kumble Subbaswamy’s 11-year tenure, Javier Reyes took on the role of chancellor of UMass Amherst. “My wife, Maritza, and I are excited about making Massachusetts our home and doing our part to elevate UMass Amherst toward the top 20 public universities in the United States,” says Reyes, age 48. The new chancellor comes to campus with a strong track record of leadership. He began his career in higher education as a faculty member in the economics department at the University of Arkansas. He later became vice provost for online and distance education and associate dean for undergraduate studies and executive education at Arkansas’s Sam

M. Walton College of Business, and has also served as Milan Puskar Dean of the John Chambers College of Business and Economics at West Virginia University. Prior to joining UMass, he served as interim chancellor of the University of Illinois Chicago, Chicago’s largest university campus. Former Chancellor Subbaswamy says that Reyes’s “prior experience at two land-grant flagships, his record of assembling and leading collaborative teams, his temperament, and his friendly personality all bode well for the continuation of UMass Amherst’s progress and impact into the future.” Gov. Maura Healey calls him “an innovative and dynamic leader who will harness the full potential of UMass Amherst,” and says, “I’m confident that he will inspire students and faculty alike to continue growing the school’s excellence in education and research.”

Get to know the new chancellor:

- Birthplace**
Mexico City, Mexico
- Education**
Bachelor’s degree in economics from the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, Campus Estado de Mexico; PhD in economics from Texas A&M University
- Previous job**
Interim chancellor, University of Illinois Chicago
- Biggest barrier broken**
First Hispanic chancellor of UMass Amherst



- Expertise**
An expert in distance education and global economic matters, Reyes has published articles in many leading economics and business journals
- Family**
Wife, Maritza, and two college-age sons, Javi and Diego
- Favorite sports team**
Dallas Cowboys
- Favorite *Star Wars* characters**
Yoda and Darth Vader
- Favorite books on leadership**
The Speed of Trust by Stephen M. R. Covey and *It’s Your Ship* by D. Michael Abrashoff

Help with Reyes’s first-semester orientation

With such a beautiful and expansive university campus and a charming downtown to boot, we know Amherst is crammed with delights. What are your favorites? A secret spot to relax, a favorite food, a cherished view? **Share your recommendations for Chancellor Reyes as he settles in**—email us at magazine@umass.edu. P.S. Have you espied the view from a certain mystery balcony yet? See p. 15.



SUSTAINING CURIOSITY

IN AN AGE WHEN WE CAN ACCESS INFINITE INFORMATION WITH THE SWIPE OF A THUMB, CRITICAL THINKING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER.

BY NAOMI SHULMAN

PHOTOS BY LISA BETH ANDERSON



—
ABOVE: HONORS 201 STUDENTS IN CLASS;
RIGHT: LALEH PANAHI '25



I got up early on a crisp April morning and along with 15 or so students, I went to class. Okay, it was the first college class I'd attended in 30 years—but it all felt familiar. Technology may have changed a bit in that time, but the classroom felt much the same—fluorescent lighting, seating in the round, a whiteboard lying in wait. The main difference was that this time I was old enough to be the other students' mother. These students also seemed a lot more awake than I would have been for a 9 a.m. Monday morning class. Apparently showered and well rested, they arrived on time and quietly settled themselves. Only one student



LEFT: NIKHIL KHOND '25;
BELOW: TUNED IN TO BROWN-PÉREZ



looked the way I remember feeling in college. He was a little ruffled around the edges, with a Patriots winter hat pulled down over his ears and sitting slightly slumped in his seat.

Kathleen Brown-Pérez, an energetic assistant professor, briskly got things started. Today's discussion would focus on the disturbing facts and statistics laid out in *13th*, the 2016 documentary that tracks the evolution of slavery through the Jim Crow era to today's shocking levels of mass incarceration. In preparation for today's class, I had watched the film too, and now I found it difficult to keep from raising my hand. But I didn't, because I was not actually a college student—and even if I were, I probably wouldn't be in this

class. *This* class, Honors 201, was designed for members of the Commonwealth Honors College (CHC), and frankly, I wouldn't have made the cut. UMass Amherst generally is more selective than it was in my college days, and CHC is a whole other level: Only 14% of UMass students make it in. That's a high bar to jump when your peers' incoming GPAs are averaging 3.8–4.3.

Conversation began to whip around the room. You can't talk about mass incarceration without talking about politics, and Brown-Pérez pointed out that both Democrats and Republicans have run for office on being tough on crime. "Yeah, I guess I was surprised to see that it wasn't an entirely partisan issue," said Laleh Panahi '25. "It was very *bipartisan*."

Brown-Pérez pushed a little further: Why does the 13th Amendment, an amendment about emancipation, mention imprisonment at all? "It's a back door," pointed out Cassandra Gordon '26. Brown-Pérez agreed; the amendment created an out for an economy that has historically depended heavily on unpaid labor, and to a great extent, still does. As the documentary *13th* points out, corporate entities increasingly work in concert with Congress to create laws that help funnel more unpaid laborers into the system, usually without cases even going to trial.

"That's not what the legislation is supposed to be," challenged another student.

And then Nikhil Khond '25 piped up, "We've got to

educate the populace. We have to make sure everyone knows what's happening." Khond was the one I assumed might not pay attention, the scruffy one in the Patriots hat. I stood corrected: Everyone here was fully engaged. The class was living up to its mission: gathering up some of the country's best and brightest students and sitting them down together to think. I felt like I was watching the wheels in their heads turn in real time.

Seeing through cultural narratives to the true crux of the matter is exactly why Honors 201 exists: to change the *way* we think altogether. But the class hasn't always been such a pedagogical hit. More than a decade or so ago, this course was called Dean's Book, and it was one of the lowest-rated in the catalog. Brown-Pérez remembers what the course was like then, and she admits that she actually kind of hated teaching it, so the class began to morph. It's still organized around books—the syllabus starts with Socrates and Plato and then snakes its way through centuries of great thinkers including W. E. B. Du Bois, James Baldwin, Rachel Carson, Howard Zinn, and Isabel Wilkerson. Senior lecturer Connolly Ryan '90, '01MFA, who teaches another section of Honors 201, dubs

the material for the course: "Books that Opened Cans of Whoop-ass." Books hold the content, but the larger point of Honors 201 isn't simply reading those books;

CRITICAL READING

A TASTE OF THE ASSIGNED READINGS AND VIEWINGS FROM THE COURSE SYLLABUS FOR HONORS 201: IDEAS THAT CHANGE THE WORLD

UNIT 1

Modes of Inquiry—read *Allegory of the Cave* by Plato (380 BCE).



UNIT 2

Social Thought and Civic Action—watch *13th* (2016).



UNIT 3

Revolutionary Changes in Science and Technology—read *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson (1962).



UNIT 4

The Power of the Arts—watch *12 Angry Men* (1957).



it's putting them in context, helping students connect the dots. And even more than that, the professors of this course want to model for their students something more

important than ever: critical thinking.

Both Ryan and Brown-Pérez come into the classroom with particular lenses. Brown-Pérez's identity as an American Indian and her background in corporate law color the way she sees these issues, and she's upfront about it. "I don't hold a monopoly on truth," she says. "My goal isn't so much about the topics that we cover in class, but how they can take the skills they learn in class and apply them going forward. I want to make sure I give them a set of academic tools—how to look things up, how to write a paper. I want students to know about various issues historically." Yet another stark difference from my own college days is that there's a much wider array of knowledge resources out there—not all of it great. "Yes—there may be a glut of information out there, but they have to sift through it and figure out what's believable and what's not," Brown-Pérez says. She pauses. "And then I want them to ask, 'What *else* was going on? Why would that happen *then*?'"

Ryan, too, emphasizes to students that while he has his own perspective, they're welcome to their own. In fact, they're encouraged to develop

one—and then maybe even change their minds. "I tell them that I'm ideologically ambidextrous," he says. Ryan's first assignment tasks students with identifying a modern-day Socrates, someone bringing challenging ideas into the public square. "They might pick Malala [Yousafzai] or Howard Stern [...] as long as they are artfully persuasive in their arguments. They can take any position they want as long as they're willing to listen to the exchange of ideas. I think they feel pretty safe taking risks."

This seems to be bearing out. "I don't think people are afraid to share their opinions here. That's not always true in other classes. They're more hesitant," says Khond, a chemical engineering major. While his engineering classes might not always flex his critical-thinking chops in quite the same way, he knows he's going to need these skills all his life. "You always have to synthesize whatever you're learning and then integrate it into your own life experience. Not everything is as simple as it may seem—you have to dig a little deeper, cross-check sources, understand people's biases—understand your *own* biases," he says. "This is important for everyday life."



—
TOP: CASSANDRA
GORDON '26;
BELOW: STUDENTS
CIRCLE UP FOR
DISCUSSION

Josh Yang '26, a computer science major, backs this up. "Whether it's Plato's writing or Martin Luther King Jr.'s Letter from Birmingham Jail, we're reading these primary sources and coming to our own conclusions. That's the exercise of critical thinking. Here are these documents from history; now, what do you make of them?"

While Ryan and Brown-Pérez do have slightly different syllabi, all sections of Honors 201 start with Socrates for exactly the reason Yang hints at: It's a classic exercise in critical thinking. "The beauty of Socrates is he's all about putting emotions on the side and tackling conversations through logic and what Plato called the 'music of ideas,'" says Ryan. "It's almost like jazz—taking a ready-made phrase or generic argument, and then just destroying it and putting it back together again in order to improve it." Like me, Ryan was himself a college student about 30 years ago—in fact, he was a student here at UMass. Now, as a professor, he meets with colleagues once or twice a semester to compare notes, talk about what works and doesn't work in the classroom, tinker with the syllabi, and bandy about ideas. "It's the kind of course I'd always wanted to take,

“YOU REALIZE
THERE'S SO
MUCH MORE
YOU DIDN'T
EVEN KNOW
YOU DIDN'T
KNOW”

and now I get to teach it, which is pretty sweet," he admits.

Honors 201 has another name: Ideas that Change the World. It's a lofty title, but it fits. "That's the spirit of the class," Ryan says. "The more you figure out about your own truth and reality, the more you realize there's so much more you didn't even know you didn't know. It creates a lifelong search and a sustained curiosity. I think in the end that's the ultimate antidote to despair or apathy."

Maybe it comes down to this: preparing students to realize that they themselves might actually generate their

own such powerful ideas someday. That's how Gordon, a future forensic scientist, sees it. "I thought this class would be a gen ed. But it ended up being a lot more about our society and our culture, and the way that we might go about changing it," she says. "It's a pretty cool class."



Want to study up? See a full syllabus: umass.edu/magazine/honors201

GRAND OPENINGS

New places and spaces to enhance education, experimentation, and culture are emerging all over campus. To name a few:

- Last fall, the university broke ground on a building for the **Manning College of Information and Computer Sciences**, which will create approximately 90,000 square feet of new space, serving as a hub for learning, innovation, and community.
- The **Sustainable Engineering Laboratories**, an 80,000-square-foot facility in the College of Engineering that will provide immersive labs and learning spaces for novel energy technologies, celebrated its groundbreaking as well.
- The **UMass Amherst Transportation Center's** state-of-the-art aviation research and training center officially opened at Westover Municipal Airport in Chicopee.
- An expansion to the **UMass Cranberry Station** in East Wareham opened in the spring, which will help the cranberry industry meet competitive challenges, attract talented scientists and students, and provide research-based data.
- The **Paros Center for Atmospheric Research**, focused on cutting-edge climate research and hazard mitigation, has been funded as part of a \$10 million gift from Jerome Paros '60 and Linda Paros to the College of Engineering.

- The athletic training facility formerly known as "the Cage" is being renovated, creating an indoor performance center for the men's and women's cross country and track and field teams, thanks to a \$2 million lead gift from Jim Hunt '77 and Ellen Hunt '77, '93MS. With this gift, the facility is being named the **Jim and Ellen Hunt Indoor Performance Center** in their honor.
- The new **Newman Catholic Center** recently opened on campus and includes a chapel, a research center, gathering spaces, a café, administrative offices, and a memorial garden.

—Heather Kamins



More on these and other projects:
umass.edu/magazine/opening



Photo: Lisa Beth Anderson

GREENLIGHTING DONOR KIDNEYS WITH PRECISION

Nearly 90,000 people in the United States are waiting for a kidney—83% of the total number of those waiting for any organ transplant. Demand is high, but the supply remains stubbornly low. That's where Yu Chen comes in.

Chen, a professor in the College of Engineering, is developing a groundbreaking imaging device to more accurately assess the viability of donor kidneys. A 2021 study showed that the current process of conducting biopsies on potential donor kidneys is causing many that are actually functional to be discarded.

"We are developing a new generation of portable, handheld optical coherence tomography

(OCT) scanning device," Chen says. "It's kind of like an ultrasound probe, except we are using light instead of sound to achieve a higher resolution to visualize fine structures of kidneys. Based on that, we are able to predict the kidney's post-transplant renal function." This new way of 'seeing' the viability of the organ post-transplant could ultimately save thousands of kidneys—and lives.

The breakthrough was made possible with collaboration across campuses, including a strategic partnership between UMass Amherst and UMass Chan Medical School, and outside resources and researchers like

robotics expert Haichong Zhang of Worcester Polytechnic Institute. "UMass has provided a great collaborative platform," Chen says. "I was also fortunate to collaborate with Xian Du [UMass Amherst assistant professor of mechanical and industrial engineering] to refine the tracking technology for our OCT system."

UMass and Worcester Polytechnic Institute have filed a joint patent and established a startup company that will apply for small-business funding to further commercialize the OCT technology in the future.

—Steve Neumann

HIDDEN GEM

Can you guess where on campus this balcony can be found? Tucked behind leafy trees, just off the beaten path, this is a perch to find if you're looking for a bird's-eye view of campus. Or maybe you want to muse in a rocking chair ponderously, thinking of the students of yore. In fact, before this building housed offices, it was home to the only dining hall on campus, and was also briefly a women's dormitory.

—Ari Jewell

Can't handle not knowing? Check your guesses: umass.edu/magazine/gems



The miracle technique that finally gets adults to the deep end

> SALLY PARKER

I stood in a hotel pool in Sarasota, Florida, about to put my face in the water. I was taking the first step in overcoming a lifelong fear of being in water over my head. I hated the roar of it rushing into my ears and then, that silence—it felt like being buried alive.

It was day one of a five-day intensive beginner course with Miracle Swimming. Since 1983, founder Mary Ellen “Melon” Dash ’76 has preached a more compassionate, practical, and, above all, *fun* way for fearful adults like me to relax in the water. Over the next five days, I went from blinking back tears of fear to

playing underwater games. This was both surprising and liberating, after a lifetime of poolside terror.

As a traditional water safety instructor, Dash noticed many students in her beginner classes were so gripped with fear they couldn’t move past standing in the pool, no matter how she tried to help. For the first time, she questioned the methods she had learned in her training.

“It’s not their fault. It’s mine,” she recalls thinking at the time. “They want to learn. I’m not meeting them where they are.” So, she launched Miracle Swimming.

For Dash, who has been in the water all her life, it must have taken a huge act of imagination and empathy to address the panic she saw in her students. Dash captained the swim team at UMass, setting New England records while she worked toward her degree in exercise physiology and nutrition.

Miracle Swimming, the method that Dash developed, is based on what she calls The Five Circles, or stages of fear—ease, cold feet, fluttery tummy, heart in your mouth, and panic—a learning model that puts mental and spiritual presence, not physical action,

at the center. Staying in the first circle allows a sense of play and curiosity conducive to learning. There’s no rush.

Dash has taught hundreds of people to swim using this method. While most conventional lessons emphasize the ability to take strokes, those won’t help if the swimmer is in a panic.

She shifts the goal of lessons in a fundamental way—students should stay confident and in control in deep water—sometimes unexpectedly and for an indefinite period of time.

“If people can do strokes for 25 yards and they pass a test but they can’t stop and rest in the middle, they cannot *swim*,” she says. The real question is, “Can you rest peacefully unassisted for 15 minutes in deep water, far away from the walls?”

Surveys show about half of American adults can’t swim. Dash believes the number is even higher and would like to see her method adopted more widely to help those struggling with an

ABOUT HALF OF AMERICAN ADULTS CAN’T SWIM. DASH IS CHANGING THAT, ONE SWIMMER AT A TIME.

ability everyone should have a chance to attain. To that end, she recently released a new edition of her book, *Conquer Your Fear of Water: A Revolutionary Way to Learn to Swim Without Ever Feeling Afraid*.

Students come to Sarasota from around the country, many with big goals: to share a partner’s love of sailing or to end a legacy of non-swimmers in the family. Even to end the racist legacy of pool segregation that still stunts the rates of Black swimmers throughout the country. Classes range from “SloMo”—relaxing in very shallow water—to ocean swimming and jumping off a boat.

By the end of Dash’s beginner course, my classmates were jumping into the deep end. I confess that I’m not quite there yet. But with no-pressure guidance from Dash and her assistants, I’ve rewired my brain to hear that underwater silence differently. I’m on my way.



Dash talks us through “how the water works”: umass.edu/magazine/dash

Упражнения к диалогам

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LITERARY DEVICE

Come to LitMT for the machine-translated novels—stay for the opportunity to help improve them

> NICOLE ESTVANIK TAYLOR

Think for a moment about what sets literature apart from other writing: imagination, idiom, style, subtext. These same qualities make it difficult for computers to translate literature intelligibly, let alone faithfully. A new machine translation platform called LitMT, on the verge of launching at litmt.org, invites the public to help UMass researchers tackle this challenge. The site hosts nearly 100 books translated by artificial intelligence (AI) into over 20 languages, including English, Chinese, Hindi, Spanish, French, Modern Standard Arabic, Bengali, Russian, Portuguese, Urdu, Indonesian, German, Japanese,

Turkish, Tamil, Vietnamese, Korean, Hausa, Swahili, Thai, Polish, Ukrainian, and Mongolian. Readers are encouraged to annotate text they find confusing or incoherent, from inconsistent gender pronouns to odd word choices and gaps in information. Informed by this human input, the researchers aim to build specialized machine translation (MT) technology that is capable of delivering the experience of literary works in languages in which they’ve never before appeared. LitMT comes from the lab of associate professor Mohit Iyyer, a member of the natural language processing group in the Manning College of Information and Computer Sciences. Iyyer has a particular interest in narrative and believes in the power of fiction to expand intercultural understanding. He admires human translators’ meticulous art—“those are always going to be the best translations”—but observes that there’s a scarcity of expertise and funding for such work, especially outside a handful of well-resourced languages. “I’m excited about speeding up this process and allowing more readers access to the content of the books,” he says. UMass postdoctoral researcher Marzena Karpinska, a linguist, joined the LitMT project eager to explore how AI can assist human translators. “A good MT system can create the initial draft,” she says. It can “suggest rewording, or help the human translator find a cultural equivalent.” Graduate student Katherine Thai ’23MS, ’26PhD, rounds out the LitMT team. Moira Inghilleri ’79, professor of comparative literature and director of translation and interpreting studies, has also advised on aspects of the work. All books on LitMT are in the public domain, yet global readership has eluded many of them for decades. These include the 1996 autobiography *My Life and After Fifty Years* by national poet of Tanzania Shaaban bin Robert and Víctor Català’s collection of Catalan short stories *The Mother Whale*. According to Iyyer, one factor exacerbating the intrinsic challenges of translating literature is that existing AI models tend to optimize for English. In languages that have a lower volume of digitized text, and between pairs of languages with relatively few human translations to reference, there’s insufficient data to even analyze what kinds of mistakes the machines are making. That’s where LitMT’s

commenting function comes in. While the average user can’t assess the accuracy of a translation, “based on the spans they highlight, we can tell quite a bit about errors in aggregate,” Iyyer says. His lab has hired freelance translators to provide more detailed evaluations and, in consultation with the UMass Translation Center, will seek UMass student translators to supplement crowdsourced feedback. Iyyer’s lab is developing its own AI models, but for now, most translations hosted on LitMT have been created using OpenAI’s GPT-3.5 and GPT-4. By identifying weaknesses in these state-of-the-art “large language models,” “we could build language-specific—or even language-pair-specific—open-source models that are trained not to make those errors,” Iyyer says. Though OpenAI is a commercial model, the team hopes to eventually provide an open-source alternative to these AI tools. Increasing translations to and from languages with few speakers, as well as to and from widely spoken languages that are underrepresented in the global arenas of technology and literature, is another guiding principle the LitMT team takes to heart. Despite the flaws in translations currently on LitMT—in some ways *because* of those flaws—Iyyer is excited to offer the platform to the public, including fellow researchers. “Our project is helping to bring more attention to the quality of these AIs in languages that have not been studied,” he says. “If the translation is bad, that should be a signal to the community that we should invest more energy into these languages. Otherwise, the technology becomes very powerful in English, and English-speaking citizens of the world benefit, whereas the rest of the world is left behind.”



Learn more about the LitMT project: umass.edu/magazine/litmt

Photos: Lisa Beth Anderson



LAUREN ANDERS BROWN '07 DOCUMENTS
LIFE WITHOUT DOCUMENTATION

BY HEATHER KAMINS

Award-winning independent filmmaker and photographer Lauren Anders Brown '07 knew what she wanted to spend her life working on even before college. She was interning in the film and photography field, but she wanted a core education as the foundation for her career. What she learned at UMass Amherst (including how not to be afraid of languages she didn't know) has helped her build a vibrant and acclaimed international career.

Brown has worked as a camera assistant and operator on more than a dozen television shows and feature films, including *Ugly Betty*, *Nurse Jackie*, and *Argo*, to name just a few. These days, she runs her own production company, collABorate: ideas and images, which has created short- and long-form video, photography, and multimedia projects covering a variety of health and human rights issues. Last year, Brown curated an exhibition for the United Nations. Her projects have taken her to over 40 countries around the world, where she has documented people in many low-resource settings, including conflict zones. In her own words, Brown believes in “the power of visual storytelling to amplify the stories of people who cannot tell them on their own.”

Her most recent project is *Forged*, a documentary film about how the dozen-years-long civil conflict in Syria has led to a loss of identity documentation, how that loss is being used to control the population, and how the Syrian people are trying to cope. The documentary focuses on the inhabitants of Idlib, a city in northwestern Syria, and highlights their resilience in the face of political conflict and natural disasters.

Brown, who has covered topics such as global disability rights, reproductive rights, and displacement, sees *Forged* as part of her larger goal of “activism”—bringing art and activism together to amplify neglected voices and perspectives. Here she shares images from her time working on *Forged*, along with behind-the-scenes stories of the people and places that were featured.



What is left of Idlib

Ali Al Ibrahim



Saleh, Marwa, and baby Yasmin
protest in northern Syria

Saleh and Marwa (last name withheld)

“The conflict in Syria came out of protests against the [Bashar al-Assad] regime, which demonstrated it would use any means necessary to silence the people. Many journalists were imprisoned or killed for reporting on the conflict. Their jobs and their names made them targets, and so they were often unable to seek identity documentation from the government out of fear of being targeted, forcing them to seek other pathways for documentation to travel.”





Ali teaching in his school in Idlib

Still from the documentary *Forged*

“The other largest group living in the shadows in Syria are those who left their compulsory military duty. As they are unable to pass any checkpoints, they either have to take a risk by going around them or stay where they are, as teacher Ali has done. He’s struggling, though, to prove his educational background at the school where he teaches because he does not have a copy of his university degree and can’t cross a checkpoint to get a copy. His daughter is also undocumented and can’t attend the school where he teaches.”



Quona in Al Zaatari refugee camp, Jordan

Lauren Anders Brown

“When balancing out the stories we were capturing, I felt it was important to include a story of an elder who grew up in an era when documentation wasn’t something people required. I also wanted to capture the variation in living conditions Syrian refugees face, and so being able to access the Al Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan through my connections with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was crucial in meeting Quona. Like most refugees I have met, she welcomed me into her home with the standard overly sugary tea and was open and honest with any questions I had to ask. We spoke about what her life was like growing up and how quickly she had to flee. She no longer had her family book, which kept track of all her family members, past and present. It was left behind in Syria, along with all her belongings—as she described, she couldn’t even grab a teacup to flee with.”



Hidden in the world

Ali Al Ibrahim

“I could not have made this documentary without the world of my co-director, Ali Al Ibrahim, who captured this photo on one of his filming trips to the displaced areas in northern Syria. When we were both filming on opposite sides of the border, he in Syria and I in Jordan, the area had successive snowstorms that made our initial filming nearly impossible. Both of us came away from that first trip with little filmed, but a lot of groundwork was laid that led to us being able to each return independently to different locations to continue capturing the stories. One group of people that did not make it into the film was the undocumented children born to people in the terrorist groups ISIS and Al-Nusra. They had no hope of ever receiving an education or going further than the displaced camps.”

“

SHE
COULDN'T
EVEN GRAB
A TEACUP
TO FLEE
WITH ”





Haifa and undocumented baby Yousef

Lauren Anders Brown

“Haifa never expected to be a refugee. She had gone to visit her husband, who was working in Lebanon for a short trip when the border closed. She and her five children and husband all had to live in the small one-room apartment he rented in Beirut while he was working. It was about the size of my first dorm room in Butterfield at UMass and held seven people with an eighth on the way. I loved filming with Haifa, though. She let me join her along her pregnancy, and I felt it really made us feel the film in real time through her story. Later, the revolution in Beirut made for an unexpected turn of events while filming, since Haifa needed to register her baby but wasn’t able to within the expected window after Yousef’s birth.”



“
SHE HAD
GONE TO
VISIT HER
HUSBAND ...
WHEN THE
BORDER
CLOSED ”



Forged, an art installation

Aziz Al-Asmar

“As an extension of the documentary, we commissioned a mural to be painted in Idlib. Its purpose was to allow those most affected by the issue of identity in Idlib to reclaim their identity for themselves by interacting with the installation. The mural was installed by Aziz Al-Asmar, a locally renowned mural artist working across Idlib who uses the walls of buildings destroyed by the Assad regime and their Russian allies as his canvases. He is regularly joined by children when creating his artwork. Aziz uses his drawings to raise the spirits of those around him and inspire confidence in their cause. The mural was installed one week before the devastating earthquake hit northern Syria and Turkey, but it survived and is still standing.”



Saleh and Marwa leaving their home

Courtesy of Saleh and Marwa

“In order to escape the regime but without being able to cross international borders, Saleh and Marwa were forced to leave their home and move to Idlib, which is the last territory held by those opposed to the Assad regime—or ‘the system’ as it is often referred to in the documentary. Idlib has its own government and its own documentation system, but having a piece of paper from an unrecognized government does not mean it will be valid if they were to cross the border to Turkey. On principle, Saleh prefers the unverified document from the independent government to that of an official document from ‘the system.’”



Watch the full documentary:
umass.edu/magazine/forged



Spoiler alert—they did

> ARI JEWELL

When Gabrielle Gould moved to Amherst, she was disappointed to find that this otherwise vibrant town lacked a music venue. As the new executive director of the Amherst Business Improvement District (BID), she had a well-informed hunch that more live music would be great for the community, too.

And thus, a new Amherst destination was born: The Drake, a nonprofit music venue housed in the former High Horse Brewing building (or, depending on the age of your memories, where Amherst Brewing Company used to be). Now hosting shows four to six times a week featuring everything from Bach to jazz to synth-rock and spoken word poetry, it offers something for just about everyone.

Why “The Drake”? Gould took one look at the decades-old graffiti sprayed on the side of Amherst Coffee and declared it wonderful marketing. “SAVE THE DRAKE,” it still reads. “FOR WILLY, FOR HUMANITY.” (More on that in a second.)

Serving guests from the early 1900s to 1985, the *original* Drake resided on Amity Street, in the building that now houses the Perry apartments. According to a 1998 article in this very magazine, The Drake and its basement bar had a colorful reputation by the time it closed. With equal parts conviviality and seedy intrigue, The Drake was known for a good steak and fries, for allegedly serving anyone who could see over the bar, and for its longtime bartender, Willy—real name Willie Whitfield—immortalized by spray paint.

The original Drake closed in a cloud of public outrage, having become a nuisance to downtown Amherst, and its memory faded from the community’s consciousness. But the plea for its restoration never disappeared from the bricks on Amity Street.

Enter Gabrielle Gould’s vision for her new hometown. And, alongside her, many UMass alums who helped to bring this venue into the world, including Brad Hutchison ’94, ’12MA, who worked on The Drake as a project architect with Kuhn Riddle Architects. For him, The Drake was a passion project as much as a professional one: When, after a decade of touring with his blue-grass band, he returned to UMass to earn his master’s degree in architecture, his thesis project was the design for a small music venue.

Hutchison says that small venues have slowly evaporated from the area. But these venues are a vital link for performers just starting out in the music industry—he calls them the “Music Minor Leagues.” The reintroduction of The Drake is a big step toward replenishing the local music scene and, hopefully, fostering an arts community for everyone. In its first year of operation, The Drake hosted 53 free events, and the availability of free and accessible performances is paramount in the BID’s plan.

A champion of equity and accessibility, Elisha Walker ’17 is the youngest town councilor in Amherst, and one of the first two women of color to serve on the council. Walker hopes that The Drake will help to develop

a tighter-knit Amherst community across generational, cultural, and racial lines. She caught a glimpse of that future when the venue hosted Tem Blessed ’96, a local artist known for socially conscious hip hop. “The turnout for that was amazing,” Walker says. “This is what I envision when I envision the town being lively and really giving back to the community.”

Walker also hopes to further the incorporation of UMass students into the town, and she sees venues like The Drake—places where students can feel part of a wider community—as key in bridging that “town and gown” gap.

Gould seconds that motion, and adds, “The Drake wouldn’t be here without support from the community—and that includes UMass.” The economy of Amherst rests on the shoulders of the university, she says. And the almost daily concerts at The Drake mean that students of all musical preferences find themselves in town for a show, joining crowds of locals on the neon-lit dance floor.

The venue is quickly becoming a hub of community, while simultaneously putting Amherst on the map in the music world. And then? “I just want it to keep growing,” Gould says. “I want it to become iconic.” (Again.)



Check out The Drake’s lineup: umass.edu/magazine/drake

Photos: Lisa Beth Anderson





ACTIN UP

UMass scientists
fight a deadly fungus
on a molecular level

> ALEXIS ALI

Over the last several decades, hundreds of amphibian species around the world have become endangered or extinct. The cause? A unique type of fungus known as *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* (*Bd*). As the fungal infection grows, it makes it hard for amphibians to regulate their body temperature, release gases, and breathe; eventually, this leads to heart failure.

Photo: CSIRO

As anyone who has taken high school biology knows, changes in the composition of the animal kingdom have widespread impacts. With each extinction, the food chain is forced to adapt. On a global scale, the changes can be catastrophic. With increased frog deaths, for instance, mosquito populations are on the rise—spreading mosquito-borne diseases at higher rates. Fortunately, biologist Lillian Fritz-Laylin and her team of UMass researchers are studying *Bd* to understand how it operates and find ways to stop it in its tracks.

Fritz-Laylin's research comes at the problem of *Bd* by focusing on actin—a group of proteins found in plant, animal, and fungal cells responsible for creating microfilaments that help them move and build internal structures. Actin has evolved to operate differently across species. “As a field, we have invested so much into understanding how yeast uses actin, and how animal cells use actin, but we don’t know how the actin structures in these different species relate to each other.”

Our culprit fungus, *Bd*, belongs to the division of the fungi kingdom called chytrids, which branched off from the fungal lineage much earlier than ordinary

mushrooms, or even yeast.

They have cell structures that are, in some ways, more like animals. “I started studying chytrids because their genomes suggest that chytrids can do all these things that other fungi can’t,” explains Fritz-Laylin. “Understanding chytrid biology will help us integrate our knowledge of animal and yeast actin.”

By understanding how actin works in chytrids, scientists like Fritz-Laylin can learn to manipulate the actin-triggered processes happening within *Bd* cells and, eventually, help stop their spread among amphibians. “Using host molecules, we can trigger a switch between different stages in development, from the motile form that can swim through water to the stationary growth form,” she says. “Other labs are exploring using this trigger to make a trap of sorts. Because if you can make [*Bd* cells] nonmotile, then they can’t spread.”

REVERSE-ENGINEERING A FUNGAL THREAT COULD SHIELD OUR ECOSYSTEM FROM CATASTROPHE.

Though mycologists—scientists who study fungi—have known about chytrids since the 1970s, limitations in technology made it difficult for them to unpack their inner workings. But today, the UMass Amherst team is able to study live samples to see how they react in a variety of environments under state-of-the-art microscopes. The team is also working on ways to create strains of *Bd* to help epidemiologists study its impacts. One new strain has even been modified to glow in the dark, allowing scientists to track how it spreads on the skin with the naked eye.

The knowledge these researchers are gathering will not only help to slow and potentially stop the spread of *Bd* among amphibians but could lead to breakthroughs in the fight against future fungal threats to our ecosystem.

PLAY BY PLAY

BY ALEXIS ALI

Tucked away in a corner of the Mullins Center behind an unassuming door lies a dizzying array of screens, mixers, switches, and control boards with blinking neon buttons—simultaneously impressive and overwhelming. This setup is where junior and senior sports journalism students are learning to stream, edit, direct, and eventually master all manner of sports broadcasting. Students in the Live Digital Sports Production I and II courses taught by Senior Lecturer Greeley Kyle finish their second semester having broadcast UMass athletic events for channels that include ESPN+ and NESN. From maintaining the scoreboard to cuing up instant replays, they develop muscle memory of operating the intricate control board switches and moving around the control booth with deft precision, not unlike the athletes they capture on their screens.

This hands-on method of teaching was the brainchild of Kyle, who also serves as the director of the sports journalism department. “Students get very excited about the class, as it gives them a chance to experience the production side of a subject they’re passionate about—sports!” he explains. With more than 20 years’ experience in journalism, news reporting, and editing for television, Kyle recognized the need for undergraduate students to get as much hands-on training as possible before graduation.

“Coming into the class,” he says, “most students are planning careers writing about sports, doing color or play-by-play broadcasting, or covering sports on camera. They’re fascinated to go ‘behind the scenes’ and take part in the complexities and technology that look so seamless for the fans sitting at home.”

In the first semester, Kyle covers the technical basics and production processes through lectures and observations. He encourages students to analyze what they see and begin incorporating their new skills into simple broadcasts. As they head into the second semester, the video production director guides students through the practical applications of what they’ve learned. That’s when hands-on broadcasting begins. Students learn each role within a production team, including on-screen design work, replay packaging, and camera direction. “Many have enjoyed finding a new way to be creative with sports—creating graphics, editing replays, shooting the action, and even directing the coverage,” Kyle notes.

Watching the group of staff and student broadcasters in the Mullins Center is like watching a well-practiced soccer team’s

attack. Each member knows exactly what role they play in creating a seamless live broadcast. The director speaks in a sort of shorthand to the students assigned to graphics and replay, who incorporate the orders along with their own intuition and knowledge of the game to anticipate upcoming needs. During a recent broadcast, Sean Sears ’24, on graphics, updated the score in real time and set up any transitions needed to switch from a replay cut back to the live coverage. Evan Nikas ’23, at the replay desk, would record and cut specific plays he thought would be significant and edit them so they could play in slow motion or at regular speed, prepping clips to be replayed at just the right moment during a lull in the game.

As you can imagine, not only does this experience build students’ confidence and expose them to previously unknown professional opportunities in the

“FOR ME PERSONALLY, IT’S OPENED UP A LOT OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR A CAREER IN SPORTS”

world of broadcast production, but it also helps set them apart as they apply for jobs after graduating. “At the end of the class, they have a ‘reel’ video of their best work to show potential employers or internship directors what they can *already* do,” says Kyle.

Nikas took his first Live Digital Sports Production class in the fall of 2022. “Taking that course was one of the best decisions I have made here at UMass,” he reflects. “The class itself is extremely interesting, and, for me personally, it’s opened up a lot of opportunities for a career in sports while expanding my skill set further.”

For Nikas and other students like him in sports journalism, this experience has served as a playbook for their careers—and conditioned them with the necessary training to succeed.



See more behind the scenes with student broadcasters: umass.edu/magazine/broadcast

Photo: Lisa Beth Anderson



Renovating the American Dream

THE FUTURE OF SHELTER

BY MOLLY DOROZENSKI '04MFA

ILLUSTRATIONS BY THOM DUDLEY

At 8 a.m. on a Monday morning,

her phone is already ringing off the hook. As our interview begins, Joyce Sacco '94MPA pauses to take a call on her Philadelphia office line and receives some bad news. "I just hope it's not about another young person," she says.

Sacco is the director of housing at the Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services. She works on the critical nexus of the nation's housing crisis: affordable housing for people with behavioral health issues that make a stable home hard to come by and hard to keep. Among the populations she serves are young adults aging out of the foster care system, those impacted by the opioid crisis, the unemployed or underemployed, those with serious mental illness, and people with disabilities who can't stay in wheelchair-inaccessible shelters. While Sacco believes in "housing first," she points out that housing someone without support for those other issues doesn't solve the problem for the long term. "Putting someone who's still actively using in an apartment by themselves is oftentimes not the best option. That doesn't help the person, their neighbors, or the landlord."

Across the nation, there is a shortage in multiple categories of housing, from subsidized to low-income to market-rate. The standard for affordable housing cost is 30% or less of one's income, yet 46% of American renters from

all economic levels exceed that threshold. The cost of housing has far outstripped the rate of wage increases and inflation. For some, this puts them at risk of homelessness, and for others, it sets off a chain of events that compromise their mental and physical health.

"People may not be homeless, but they may be cost burdened," says Sacco. "Meaning, they're paying 50% of their income. So what does that mean? They're not eating well? They're not getting their medication, or getting medical care, because they have to maintain the apartment?"

Understanding the housing crisis starts with the simple idea that there are not enough homes for everyone, and yet the implications are sprawling and complex. UMass alumni are asking questions like: How do we build better homes—and neighborhoods—for the long term? What does affordable housing mean for people in both cities and towns at all different income levels? What makes a community, and how have disruptive technologies like Airbnb changed our growing concept of home?

From local housing officials in Philadelphia and Los Angeles, to builders in western Massachusetts, our alums attest that the right solutions vary, but the intentions are the same: to rebuild our sense of home and community in a moment where neither can be taken for granted.

HOUSING MATH

Despite Sacco's specialty, she doesn't think mental health is the sole root of homelessness in Philadelphia. "It's really a housing availability and affordability issue. If there were enough types of housing that meet people's needs, there wouldn't be homelessness. It's kind of that simple." In Philadelphia, for every three people needing housing services, there is capacity for only two. "So what happens to that third person?" asks Sacco. "They stay in jail, they stay on the street, they stay in a long-term behavioral health hospital." Without available units, there is little Sacco can do. "You can wrap services around people, but if you don't have an affordable housing unit ..." she trails off in frustration. "We scrimp and every unit is like gold."

The U.S. is short about 1.5 million homes. And while the specific impacts that Sacco sees in Philadelphia are in many ways unique to the city, the impact is being felt everywhere. The housing crisis is both a national catastrophe with cascading effects and an extremely local problem.

Los Angeles has been described as the U.S. epicenter of homelessness. Azeen Khanmalek '10, who is the director of affordable housing production in the office of L.A. Mayor Karen Bass, says that on any given night, 40,000 people in the city are unhoused. Further, he says, "African American folks make up less than 10% of the city of Los Angeles, but account for one-third of the people experiencing homelessness in the city." Increased levels of homelessness among already marginalized groups drive even more inequitable outcomes.

Khanmalek's work centers on how to increase the supply of affordable housing and build it faster, which involves solving problems around permitting, making approvals happen faster, supporting stronger policies, and using city land for development. But the funding for initiatives, which range from

"We scrimp and every unit is like gold."

federal housing vouchers to city programs, isn't nearly enough to slow the rate of homelessness—which has nearly doubled in the past 10 years.

Short-term solutions like building shelters might be less expensive, but they don't solve the problem. "If we have 45,000 homeless people in the city of Los Angeles and we build one additional shelter bed, we don't have 44,999 homeless people, we still have 45,000 homeless people. The only way to end someone's experience of homelessness is through a permanent home of their own," says Khanmalek.

SPIRALING NEEDS

The housing shortage also increasingly affects more people as housing prices rise. "Many middle-income people are priced out of buying a house, so they rent instead. That shrinks the rental market for everyone, but makes it especially tough for people who are underemployed or living below the poverty line. They're the last in the pecking order," says Sacco. The impacts of the short supply are felt most acutely by the lowest-income part of the population.

The "housing theory of everything" coined in 2021 by economists Sam Bowman and Ben Southwood, touches on some of the points that Sacco and Khanmalek address: Without secure, affordable homes available to all, we experience a cascading series of effects that include health issues, economic inequality, and climate change. This happens at

"The housing crisis is both a national catastrophe with cascading effects and an extremely local problem."

both micro and macro levels. For an individual with behavioral health issues, Sacco points out, dealing with mental or physical health is very difficult while being unhoused. "You can't really start to work on employment, physical, or mental health issues if you're living on the street."

Khanmalek agrees that multiple other crises stem from the housing shortage. "It's not just a drag on our local economy but our regional economies. The housing crisis contributes to climate change by driving people to live farther and farther away from their jobs and having to commute long distances. It locks people out of wealth creation by not only draining their resources but also because buying a home is one of the primary ways that people climb to the middle class."



DENSIFY TO REVITALIZE

Khanmalek points out that “before, we used to deal with shortages by just building out.

We used to build new suburbs, new subdivisions, just go farther and farther away from city centers, but we are reaching the outer limits of how far people can live from their jobs and the environmental degradation that we’re willing to tolerate. We’re not able to deal with our housing supply problem by just building out anymore. In order to provide opportunities for people, you have to ensure that new housing development projects are near transit so that they are accessible to job centers, resources, schools, and parks,” he says.

As with other public projects, “not in my backyard” (NIMBY) pressure makes it hard to build housing where there is space for it or where it is needed. “If you need affordable housing, you need it to be built somewhere, and the NIMBY problem arises not just for affordable and supportive housing, but any multifamily housing,” Khanmalek says. “NIMBY resistance is stopping

housing from being built, which we desperately need. The past half century of land-use policy as it relates to housing protected existing single-family, low-density neighborhoods that are generally wealthier and whiter, and has generally driven more multifamily development to lower-resource areas. Not only are lower-resource communities bearing the burden of new growth, but that is also driving gentrification and displacement.” Adding housing density to mostly single-family, wealthy neighborhoods has been successful in other cities at reinvigorating neighborhoods; it can bring down housing costs, support nearby small businesses, and reduce carbon by encouraging people to shop locally.

“**NIMBY resistance is stopping housing from being built”**

BUILDING WHAT WE NEED— AND GREENING WHAT WE HAVE

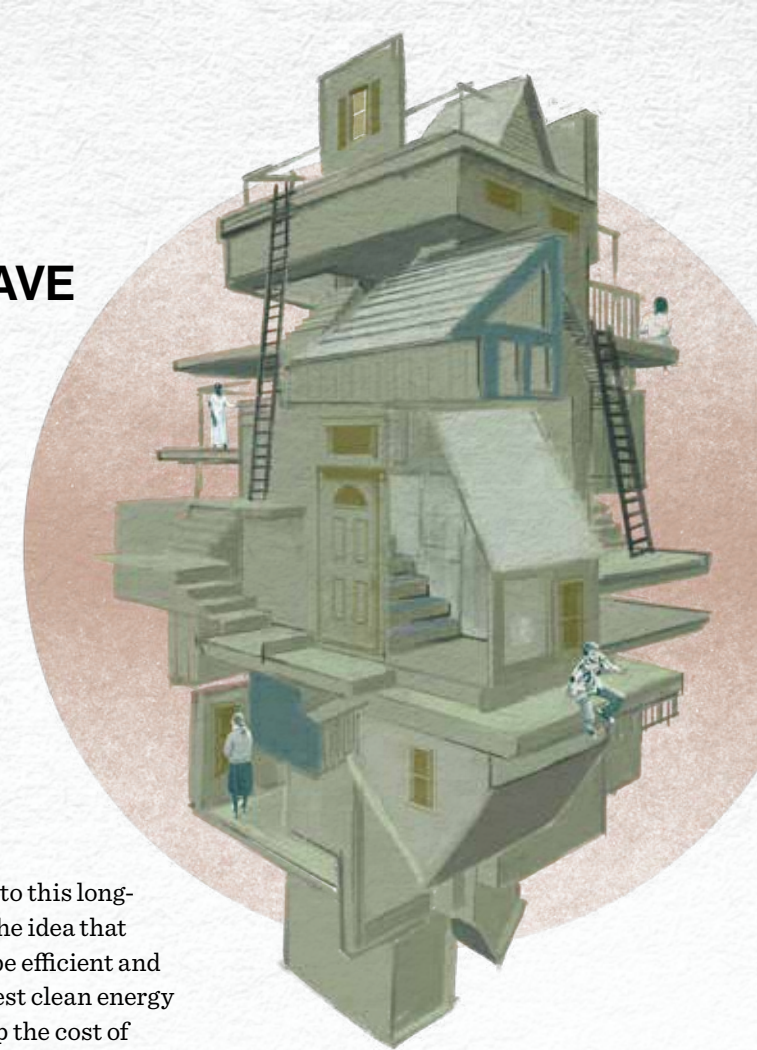
Seth Lawrence-Slavas ’17
’19MA, CEO of Wright Builders,
builds in western Massachusetts with a long-term view, solving not only immediate housing shortages but making sure we don’t end with the same problems in 30 years. As a builder, he sees the problem as more than just numbers. “You can build all you want, but if you’re not building something that somebody wants and you’re not building it in an area that allows for people to progress, then you’re just wasting resources.”

As building new homes has failed to keep pace with the number of homes needed, we’re also left with aging houses that require significant investment to meet needs. Home construction has dropped significantly since 2006. Public subsidized housing stock expires, and new investments have not kept pace. “There has been a long retreat on the part of the public sector from supplying affordable housing for the people who need it most—since the 1950s, and especially since the 1980s—to the point where public investments in housing are extremely anemic overall,” Khanmalek observes.

Long-term thinking is at the core of Lawrence-Slavas’s building philosophy, and that starts with the impact that we have on the planet. “We’re trying to do no harm here,” he says. “We’re not just building code minimum buildings that are gonna last 30 years and then need to be

replaced.” Built into this long-term thinking is the idea that buildings should be efficient and fitted with the latest clean energy technology to keep the cost of living low.

It also means looking at existing buildings and figuring out how to make them cost effective for today. But each case is different, and in some cases retrofitting an older building creates more carbon than it saves; so Lawrence-Slavas relies on software to help make decisions that have the lowest impact on the climate. He chooses materials like new-growth wood over materials with higher embedded carbon, like steel. He focuses on efficient solutions that also make the housing more affordable for the long term. “What people talk about in affordable housing is also that once you get people into that housing, there are still continual costs. So eliminating energy costs, creating efficiency, that type of thing, it actually makes those building projects more feasible.”



THE MEANING OF HOME

Lawrence-Slavas bought his own first house when he was 27.

“It was in Vermont; it was an old house. I’ve always worked a lot and I’ve always worked really hard, but I was never able to save anything. And I finally got to this point where I could put 20% down on a \$120,000 house in Vermont, and I did it. What it meant was that I could start actually building equity. That one house changed my life.”

Tom Barrett ’86 has also found his own sense of home amid the changing housing market. He owns a four-bedroom house in Stowe, Vermont, and began renting out rooms or occasionally the whole house on Airbnb, using the extra income to cover his mortgage. “I was kind of nervous and it was kind of strange to have strangers come into my house at first. But the experience has been fantastic.”

He has mixed feelings about Airbnb as a whole, and cites it as a factor in making homes less affordable (the high number of Airbnbs in his area has disrupted the rental market). But for him, it has been a positive. In addition to the revenue, he’s formed long-term friendships with people who have stayed at his place, includ-

ing a couple that stayed there for three months while looking for their new home. But he also notes that both he and his guests long for privacy, and he has increasingly found ways to give people some space without too much personal interaction.

The tension Barrett feels between homeownership and cost, connectedness and privacy, shows how the American dream is evolving. The house we imagine as part of the American dream sets neighbors apart with picket fences. But as social isolation has risen drastically in the last 10 years, causing its own serious physical and mental health impacts, single-family homeownership is increasingly not meeting social needs, leaving people disconnected from their communities.

Our idealized notion of home didn’t happen accidentally. Khanmalek points out that “since World War II, we’ve moved to a nation of relying on automobiles, suburbanization, and the kind of single-family homeownership and restrictive zoning and land-use policies that really protected this one kind of idealized lifestyle.” Federal and local policies all contribute to reinforcing this vision.

SWEAT EQUITY

Megan McDonough ’04, ’08MS is the executive director of Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity.

Her work is to help lower-income people and families in Hampshire and Franklin counties build their own homes alongside experts and volunteers. The Habitat for Humanity program pairs this “sweat equity” with an affordable mortgage, paving the way for a more accessible homebuying experience. McDonough describes these homeowners as people who might have a decent job, “but they’re a one-income household and they just can’t make the numbers work to purchase, and their rent keeps going up every year. Or their landlord decides to sell their house and they’re left with having to move again and again, or living in substandard conditions.”

McDonough can see the scale of the crisis but also believes solutions are within reach. “We need people building rental apartments that are subsidized. We need market rate apartments, we need subsidized homeownership, we need market rate homeownership. Rather than being overwhelmed by the enormity of the housing crisis, Habitat for Humanity says, what can we do *today*?”

So far, her chapter has built 52 homes, with four currently under construction and three slated for next year. Some of the volunteers who build those homes are current UMass students with the Habitat for Humanity club. The process of building their own home connects new homeowners to their communities as well.

The future for our homes and how we live could be a bright one if we create connected, integrated communities that support shorter commutes, help local businesses thrive, and create a more balanced mix of housing that lowers costs for everyone. Just as rising prices can harm people at all economic levels, solutions for affordable housing can give many people additional opportunities and a better quality of life.

So how do we get from a seemingly obstinate problem to this vision of the future? McDonough isn’t daunted. “We have hundreds of volunteers who come together to make this dream of homeownership possible for people. On their own, they couldn’t house someone. But by breaking down this big problem into smaller pieces, we say, okay, who’s gonna go buy the nails? Who’s gonna pick up the hammer?”



Seth Lawrence-Slavas ’17, ’19MA explains what makes a net-zero, sustainable house: umass.edu/magazine/housing

ICE CREAM OF THE CROP

Why is there oolong tea and tequila in your scoops?

> HEATHER KAMINS

PICTURED HERE ARE THE WINNING FLAVORS FROM 2022, AND THEY ARE:

TOP SCOOP:
Spicy Pineapple Margarita (pineapple, chili, tequila)

MIDDLE SCOOP:
Pistachio Rodeo

BOTTOM SCOOP:
Sublime (lime zest and graham crackers)

Ever see a far-out flavor in the ice cream aisle and wonder where on earth those ideas come from? Well, some of them come from the UMass Amherst Department of Food Science (ranked in the top tier of food science departments worldwide), where students develop new flavors for its annual ice cream flavor contest.

The contest comes at the end of a semester-long course in which students brainstorm, research, and refine flavors. “What I found most interesting is that students are so creative,” says lecturer Peiyi “Penny” Shen ’18PhD, who took over teaching the course this year.

Judy Herrell ’86MEd, who owns and operates Herrell’s Ice Cream in Northampton, serves as the judge for the annual contest. She also works with students during the semester to help them develop and troubleshoot their flavors. In terms of what makes a flavor a winner, Herrell considers the technical aspects along with the flavor itself. “There are a lot of things I look for,” she says. “Texture, viscosity, taste. Reproducibility is a huge one.”

Lecturer Matthew Steffens ’89, ’92MS, who taught the course for about six years, emphasizes the importance of marketing, including choosing an intriguing name. Magic Wings, a lavender-honey flavor from several years ago, was inspired by the butterfly conservatory in South Deerfield.

What flavors might show up next in your local ice cream shop? Our experts pointed to a few trends they see in the marketplace. Comfort-food influences are big. “It looks like people are going back to their roots,” says Herrell, mentioning flavors like caramel. Steffens cites tastes connected with the holidays, which come with a sense of nostalgia.

Some flavors cross over from the world of beverages. “We also have the trend of alcohol in ice cream, which is a really hot topic in the food industry,” says Shen, noting that tea-inspired ice creams are in fashion as well.

Flavors these days are also likely to come from far and wide. Steffens cites the recent example of Chicha Morada, a sorbet based on the traditional Peruvian juice made from various fruits and purple corn. Ice cream flavors can be inspired by “any country that you can think of,” Steffens says. And vegans rejoice—plant based products of all kinds are popular, he says.

Shen says that social media plays a role in flavor development, as students “are able to catch up with the most current trends and topics in the industry.” No longer are they limited to what the big producers are putting out—now they can see the unique flavors that boutique shops are creating all over the world. This means the next great ice cream flavor might come from anywhere—including right here in Amherst.

Photo: Lisa Beth Anderson

MOUTHWATERING WINNERS FROM THE SPRING 2023 CONTEST

FIRST PLACE: TEA HOUSE BLOSSOM

Oolong tea and peach flavor with rosemary extract.

Created by Jingyi Cheng ’23, Zachary Kwalick ’24, Luke Ma ’23, and Jiaying Sun ’23.

“What gave Blossom the edge was that when you put a scoop in your mouth and you inhaled, you would feel the flowering of the tea, and nothing is better than that.”

—Judy Herrell

SECOND PLACE: MAIZE CRAZE

Jalapeño, poblano, and habanero flavor with vegan corn bread chunks and a hot honey swirl.

Created by Astrid D’Andrea ’23, Jacqueline Frederick ’23, Erica MacGrory ’24, and Amelia Navarre ’23.

THIRD PLACE (TIE): HIDDEN ROYAL-TEA

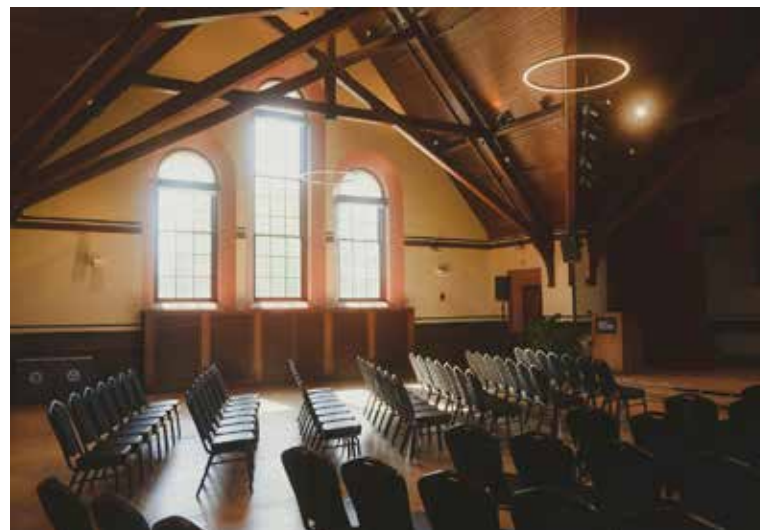
Earl Grey tea, frozen peaches, peach preserves, and lavender water.

Created by Nathanael Krulewitch ’23, Garrett LaDuke ’23, Kristine Lee ’24, and Lily Saad ’24.

THIRD PLACE (TIE): BERRY TEQUILA TANGO

Raspberries, cranberries, lime, salt, and high-end tequila.

Created by Tevin Early ’24, Taha Gacimi ’23, Paul Maguire ’23, and Michael Polidor ’23.



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SURFACING UNTOLD HISTORIES

It isn't every month in the life of an academic that one discovers they've been awarded *three* prestigious fellowships. But earlier this year, Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, professor of English and Paul Murray Kendall Chair in Biography, was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Radcliffe Fellowship, and a Samuel F. Conti Faculty Fellowship. "It was a pretty exciting several weeks," says Gerzina, who will use the time and money to write her next book.

"This project is one I've been working on for a number of years, and I've applied for grants and never got

one for it," says Gerzina. "Then, I thought, well, I'll try one last time." As it turns out, that last time was the right time. A surge of interest in Black history propelled her 1995 book *Black England: A Forgotten Georgian History* to be reissued in 2022 with a new foreword from Zadie Smith. "Suddenly, it was time again. So they brought the book back, and I think that's what led to the grants."

Her next book, tentatively titled *The Black Wife*, will look at Black women in Britain from the Tudor period onward, examining what their lives were like compared to how they were represented in the popular culture of the time. "It's just sort of quiet stories that I think will shed some light on what it was really like to live there," says Gerzina.

—Heather Kamins



Photo: Michael Benabib

TRAJECTORY OF A TEACHER

Ana Traversa '95MA opens doors for ESL speakers

"My first-grade teacher asked everyone to whisper in her ear what we wanted to be when we grew up," says Ana Traversa '95MA. "I whispered *teacher*." True to her ambition, Traversa went on to study English in her native Argentina and eventually became a teacher. A six-week English exchange program brought her to UMass in 1990, but just before she

was to return home, she was offered a scholarship to the master's degree program. In 1992, she enrolled as the first Latin American student in the graduate English program. She was 29.

Particularly memorable for Traversa were the courses she took with Peter Elbow, Anne Herrington, and Charles Moran that would change the trajectory of her career. When she returned to Argentina, she integrated their new process writing and portfolio assessment pedagogy into the curricula at Universidad de Buenos Aires and Universidad CAECE.

On a whim, in 2006 Traversa applied for a job with the Educational Testing Service (ETS). She was asked questions about the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), an exam that measures international students' English language skills. Much to her surprise, she got the job—and has developed content for ETS language tests since.

Traversa's passion for teaching has impacted the lives of thousands of students. What has she discovered along the way? "Learning is about much more than formal education," she says. "It's about growing together."

—Sommer Browning



Traversa tells her story on video:
umass.edu/magazine/traversa



‘STAND CLEAR OF THE CLOSING DOORS’

Millions of New Yorkers ride the subway every day, sharing standing room with their neighbors—and sharing sound waves with **Charlie Pellett ’77**. “Stand clear of the closing doors, please,” his warm, booming voice announces. Pellett is a reporter and anchor for Bloomberg Radio. Years ago, as part of an effort to improve the clarity and audibility of subway announcements, he auditioned alongside co-workers to become one of the most ubiquitous voices in America.

Pellett’s fascination with the recorded voice began in childhood. Born in London, he was teased for his English accent when he moved to the United States as a child. In response, he trained himself to speak with an American accent by listening to the radio. “When I was in college I fell in love with radio,” Pellett said in a 2013 interview. His time at the UMass radio station WMUA led to a decades-long career at Bloomberg and a voice that spans the boroughs.

Pellett even brought his distinctive voice to an appearance on Conan O’Brien’s show in 2017, and lent it to the song “Bang!” by pop group AJR. Though his voice is in high demand, he’s always there for New Yorkers each time they board the train.

—Ari Jewell

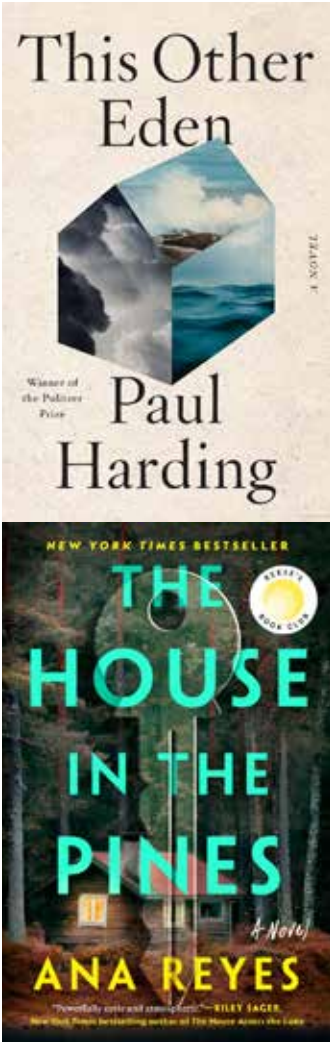


Pellett isn’t the only alum with a voice lent to transit—**Frank Oglesby ’83** has been the voice of Boston’s “T” for more than 25 years. More about these train stars: umass.edu/magazine/standclear

BRACE YOUR SHELF

Looking to curl up with a good book? UMass Amherst boasts a diverse and talented pool of alumni writers, so there’s always something novel (pun intended) to discover. New releases that are making a splash: **Paul Harding ’92**, Pulitzer Prize–winning author of *Tinkers* (Bellevue Literary Press, 2009), was profiled earlier this year in *The New York Times* about his third novel, *This Other Eden* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2023), which was inspired by a true story about an island off the coast of Maine that became one of the first racially integrated towns in the Northeast. The novel is nominated for the National Book Award. **Nathan Hill ’04MFA**, bestselling author of *The Nix* (Knopf, 2016), is back in bookstores with *Wellness* (Knopf, 2023), billed as a “poignant and witty novel about modern marriage, the often baffling pursuit of health and happiness, and the stories that bind us together.” **Ana Reyes ’03** became an instant *New York Times* best-selling author earlier this year with her debut novel, *The House in the Pines* (Dutton, 2023), an atmospheric psychological thriller set in western Massachusetts that was selected by Reese Witherspoon for her book club. A new book from **Jane Yolen ’76Med?** Always! Author of over 400 books for adults and children, Yolen has won the Caldecott Medal, the World Fantasy Award for Life Achievement, and many other awards. *The Scarlet Circus* (Tachyon Publications, 2023), a collection of romantic fantasy stories, is just one of the books she’s published this year.

—Heather Kamins



IRON AGE

Les Savino ’48, age 100, has a level of self-discipline many younger people might envy. A profile by *Today* revealed that he drives to the gym and works out for three hours most days. The great-grandfather spends three days a week lifting weights and two doing cardio at the Hanover Area YMCA in Pennsylvania—a schedule he started back in 1983. If that routine sounds too spartan, don’t worry—Savino still eats dessert and drinks two martinis every day as well. “If you enjoy life, it preserves you,” he says. “You want to keep on going. Here I am at 100. I don’t want to stop.”

LEADING MINDS

In July, **Nemat “Minouche” Shafik ’83** started her new role as president of Columbia University—the first woman in history to hold the position. Shafik has previously served as president of the London School of Economics, deputy governor of the Bank of England, vice president at the World Bank, and deputy managing director of the International Monetary Fund. In a letter to the campus community, Columbia’s board of trustees called Shafik a “brilliant and able global leader, a community builder and a pre-eminent economist who understands the academy and the world beyond it.”

CLASS NOTES

1970s

Bill Meissner ’72MFA is the author of 12 books, most recently *Summer of Rain, Summer of Fire* (Texas A&M University Press, 2022). This family drama draws from a true story about an aerial bombing of a Midwest powder production plant during the Vietnam War. National Book Award winner Tim O’Brien writes: “This novel captures those small, powerful details that combine to produce an indelible image of one of the most wrenching eras in our nation’s history.” Meissner’s next novel, *The Wonders of the Little World*, is due out in the spring.

Daniel Kennedy ’73Med reports that his messaging business, USA Writing Services, recently opened a new office in Vienna, Austria, where it now offers German-to-English translation and editing for businesses in the heart of central Europe. Kennedy is also the founder and executive director of Daniel Kennedy Communications Services, an award-winning international PR and marketing communications consultancy.

Bill Ballou ’74 wrote an article for the *Worcester Telegram* about being on the committee that chose the nickname “Minutemen” 50 years ago. Ballou, who was the sports editor for the *Massachusetts Daily Collegian*, calls the moniker “the most enduring of the University of Massachusetts nicknames.”

Dennis M. Desmond ’77 published his debut novel at the age of 70. *Eddie and the Vegetarian Vampire* tells the story of 12-year-old orphan Eddie, who befriends the vampire Count Bloodless, rejected by his own family because he is a vegetarian. The two forge an unlikely friendship as Eddie helps the Count find the food he needs, and the Count helps Eddie unlock the secrets of his past.

1980s

Called the “Steampunk Guru” by *The Wall Street Journal*, **Bruce Rosenbaum ’84** runs a steampunk art and design company, ModVic, with his wife, Melanie. The couple purchased an 1876 Victorian church in Palmer, Massachusetts, which they converted into a home, gallery, and workshop space in the retro-futuristic steampunk style. The building, known as Steampunk Wonderland, was featured on the Netflix series *Amazing Interiors*.

Bestselling author **Laura Zigman ’85** released her latest novel, *Small World* (Ecco, 2023), which was named a *New York Times* Editor’s Choice and was noted in *People* magazine. The book is “a heartfelt novel about two offbeat and newly divorced sisters who move in together as adults—and finally reckon with their childhood,” says the publisher.

Bill Janovitz ’89, widely known as the singer and guitarist of alt-rock band Buffalo Tom, is also a successful author. His most recent book, *Leon Russell: The Master of Space and Time’s Journey Through Rock & Roll History* (Hachette, 2023), became a

New York Times bestseller. *The Boston Globe* profiled Janovitz upon the book’s release and said he possesses “an insider’s understanding of how music is made and a literary flair for bringing that process to life on the page.”

1990s

Mike Yates ’92, head brewer at Springfield’s White Lion Brewing Company, joined forces last year with former UMass (and NBA) basketball star **Marcus Camby ’96, ’17** to create the successful Marcus Camby New England IPA. Earlier this year, the two teamed up again to open a second location for the brewery in Amherst, with a plan to eventually operate as a nano-brew house and offer one-off experimental ales, a test kitchen, a taproom, and outdoor space.

Tem Blessed (Temistocles Ferreira) ’96 and **Michael LaRicca ’01** have written and illustrated the young adult graphic novel *Planeta Blu: Rise of Agoo* (Dark Horse, 2023). The afrofuturist adventure tells the tale of inner-city youth teaming up with animals to take on a global ecological crisis. Initially launched through a successful Kickstarter campaign, the book was picked up by Dark Horse Comics, one of the largest comics publishers in the nation. It can be preordered now and will be released on November 7.

Brothers **Joe Maruca ’96** and **Michael Maruca ’01** won a Silver Award at the 2023 New York International Olive Oil Competition for their TRE Olive brand olive oil. Their family has been making extra virgin olive oil in the Calabria region of southern Italy since 1934 and created the TRE brand in 2010 to ship high-quality olive oil directly to consumers.

2000s

Multimedia storyteller, artist, and photographer **Julia Swanson ’00** launched The Art Walk Project, a series of self-guided micro-tours that help people engage with public art in their community. Currently available in Boston and Cambridge, each Art Walk includes a short written introduction, a map, information about the artists (where available), a photo gallery to help identify each work, and downloads of both the map and the artwork.

Meeting with the Taliban and the United Nations was just part of the job for **Hina Rabbani Khar ’02MS**, who has served as the Pakistan Minister of State for Foreign Affairs. This was her second time in the role, which she was originally the first woman to fill in 2011.

Marissa (Alarie) Santos ’06, ’22MBA was named to *New England Home Magazine*’s “5 Under 40” list for her interior design work. Santos runs her own firm, Marissa Santos Design, just outside of Boston.

2010s

Fadia Nordtveit ’10MA, ’15PhD launched the multimedia project Talking Out of Line, which brings together leaders from a variety of industries to discuss issues related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. The streaming video series features a different industry and leader on each video episode.

In 2009, **Christina Roth ’11** created the College Diabetes Network in order to connect with other UMass students who had type 1 diabetes.

HITTING A HIGH NOTE

Natalie Lewis ’21 is one of six winners of the 2023 Metropolitan Opera Eric and Dominique Laffont Competition. Now in its 69th year, the competition is designed to discover promising young opera singers and assist in the development of their careers. Lewis, who distinguished herself during her time at UMass through her participation in the UMass Chamber Choir and Vocal Jazz Ensemble and in productions like Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*, has started her career strong with a string of successes, including receiving a Kovner Fellowship to attend the Juilliard School in New York City to pursue her Master of Music in Vocal Arts, winning the Houston Grand Opera’s “Concert of Arias” competition, and making her Carnegie Hall debut this past spring.

The peer support group grew to include more than 10,000 students at over 300 college campuses and received 501(c)(3) nonprofit status in 2010. Last year, the organization rebranded as The Diabetes Link to be more inclusive to all young adults.

Aurora Vergara Figueroa ’11MA, ’12PhD was appointed Minister of Education of Colombia. A specialist in diaspora studies and Latino, Latin American, and Caribbean studies, Vergara Figueroa earned her doctorate in sociology.

Capt. **Nixon Roberts ’11MPH** has been working as a dentist in the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps, a branch of the nation’s uniformed services that advances public health. Roberts provides dental care to vulnerable populations, and he says, “I have always believed that I was called to serve the underserved, and therefore the USPHS Commissioned Corps was a natural home for me.”

Maxwell Bochman ’14 and **Rene Hurtado ’14** went viral on TikTok when they got married in their front-row seats at a Taylor Swift concert. They performed their 3-minute ceremony during a mid-show costume change, receiving cheers from the nearby audience and a coveted “like” from Swift herself the next day on a video of the wedding.

Rachel Vallarelli ’15 became the first woman to sign with the Professional Box Lacrosse Association, which launched last winter. A star player during her time at UMass, Vallarelli was ranked the nation’s number one

goalie during her senior year and finished with the eighth-best goals against average in NCAA history.

Katy Geraghty ’16 was interviewed by WBUR about her experience playing Little Red in a touring production of *Into the Woods*. Geraghty, who first played the role in a North Shore Music Theatre production at age 9, spoke about her evolving perspective on the character, how UMass helped launch her career, and fat representation in theater.

Josie Pinto ’17 is the co-founder and executive director of the Reproductive Freedom Fund of New Hampshire. She received a Social Justice Award for Emerging Leadership from Dartmouth College, where she recently completed her master’s of public health at the Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice.

2020s

Ian Goodine ’21, ’22MS and **Ethan Walko ’21, ’22MS** were named to the 2022 class of “25 under 25” by BostInno, a media hub for Boston’s innovation, startup, and technology news. The two were recognized for the startup they created while at UMass, rStream, which provides a groundbreaking approach to separating recyclables and compostables from trash and diverting them from landfills.

Mackenzie Gilligan ’21, ’22MPH converted a school bus she panic-bought into a living space so she could travel. She spoke to *Business Insider* about the joys and struggles of van life, as well as her tips for finding remote work.



PAINTING 'THE SOUL OF BLACK FOLK'

Nelson Stevens, UMass professor, activist, and prominent artist, died July 22, 2022. His paintings of the Black experience speak to the liberatory power of art and expression.

Stevens was born in Brooklyn in 1938. His lifelong devotion to art started as a child with art classes at MoMA—then on to Kent State University, where he earned a Master of Fine Arts degree in 1969. It was there, while working on paintings that lifted the Black community and centered the fight for civil rights, that he joined the African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists (AfriCOBRA)—an artist collective aligned with the Black Arts Movement. Stevens quickly became a prominent member.

Stevens used AfriCOBRA's vibrant signature “Kool-Aid colors” in his work. He described his powerful, mosaic-like portraits of African American faces as “the physiognomy of the soul of Black folk” in a 2019 interview with *The Guardian*. Earlier this year, *Color Rapping*, a 50-year retrospective, toured the University of Maryland Global Campus and the D'Amour Museum of Fine Arts in Springfield, Massachusetts.

Stevens came to UMass in 1972, where he taught for the next 30 years in the art and Afro-American studies departments. He taught through community building, helping revitalize the influential student-run Black literary magazine *Drum* and organizing a mural project in Springfield, where he and his students painted dozens of murals. For Stevens, art was not some rarefied act—it was for the people, and it belonged on the streets.

Image: Detail from *Primal Force* by Nelson Stevens. Michele and Donald D'Amour Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Mass. Museum Purchase. Photo by John Polak.



FROM SPRINGFIELD TO KENYA—AND BACK

Ruth Stutts Njiiri '75EdD died in November 2022 at the age of 93. Njiiri was born in Springfield, Massachusetts, and attended Springfield Public Schools, where she later taught until her retirement in 2003.

After completing high school, Njiiri moved to New York City, where she met and later married Kariuki Njiiri, who was from Kenya. They moved with their family to Kenya in 1958 and became involved in the independence movement led by anti-colonial activist and politician Mzee Jomo Kenyatta. Njiiri served as Kenyatta's personal secretary throughout his tenure as the country's first prime minister and then president. While there, she also helped found the Kenya Children's Library and assisted in organizing the Kenya Student Airlift, a project enabling African youth to attend colleges and universities in the United States.

Njiiri returned to the U.S. in 1968 to complete her bachelor's and master's degrees at Springfield College and then earned a doctorate in international education from UMass Amherst.

In addition to her teaching career, Njiiri was a longtime board member of the Springfield Museums Association, where she initiated the Ubora Award, which recognizes African Americans from the Greater Springfield area who have shown exceptional devotion in their voluntary activities.



THE FORCE BEHIND THE BYLINE

Viola Osgood, a pioneering reporter for *The Boston Globe*, died April 23, 2023.

Osgood was born in Georgia and was one of 11 children in the family. Her brilliance was evident throughout her childhood: In a 1984 essay, she recalled that her first-grade teacher told her, “You’d be a terrible maid. You have to go to college so you can get a job you can do.” She evidently took this to heart and became the first in her family to graduate from college after moving north to attend UMass Amherst in 1967.

Osgood began her career at the *Globe* as an intern and quickly became a force in the newsroom, following the truth to under-reported corners of Boston. She’s remembered for strongly advocating for news coverage of six murdered Black women and girls in 1979, after their deaths were ignored by local media. In addition to hard-hitting reporting, her journalistic track record shows that she was unafraid to assert a strong opinion—her essays ranged from arguments against vulgar music to defenses of abortion rights.

“She was a sage,” said Gregory Moore, a former *Globe* managing editor, in the paper’s obituary for Osgood. “She was tough, a fighter and resourceful.”

“Viola’s favorite saying was ‘God bless the woman who has her own,’” her niece Regina McKeon adds. “It’s something she lived by. She was a strong woman.”



A PIONEER OF PrEP

Dawn Kristen Smith, MD, MS, MPH, a passionate and pioneering HIV researcher and public health professional since the 1980s, died at her home in October 2022, just before her 73rd birthday.

An important highlight of Smith’s prolific career was her work on pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), which has become an essential HIV prevention tool since the FDA approved it in 2012. In 1993, serving as the associate director for HIV research for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Botswana, she helped develop clinical trial infrastructure and initiated PrEP trials.

Throughout her career, Smith worked to bring attention to the disproportionate impact of HIV on traditionally underrepresented communities in U.S. research studies.

“She loved humanity,” says her daughter, filmmaker CB Smith-Dahl. “In particular, she loved the disenfranchised—communities of color, IV drug users, sex workers, poor folks—and she wanted them to have the best medical care and to live full lives.”

After her UMass Amherst studies, Smith “started medical school while receiving public assistance when my brother and I were little,” Smith-Dahl says. “She grew up as a poor Black girl in rural Michigan, and was assigned to a manual arts high school on the South Side of Chicago. She never forgot those experiences, and she brought them as assets into every environment she worked in,” she adds.

Please submit nominations for remembrances to: updates@uma-foundation.org

For a full list of alumni and faculty whose deaths were reported to the UMass Amherst Alumni Association between March 1, 2023, and September 30, 2023, please visit: umass.edu/magazine/f23memoriam

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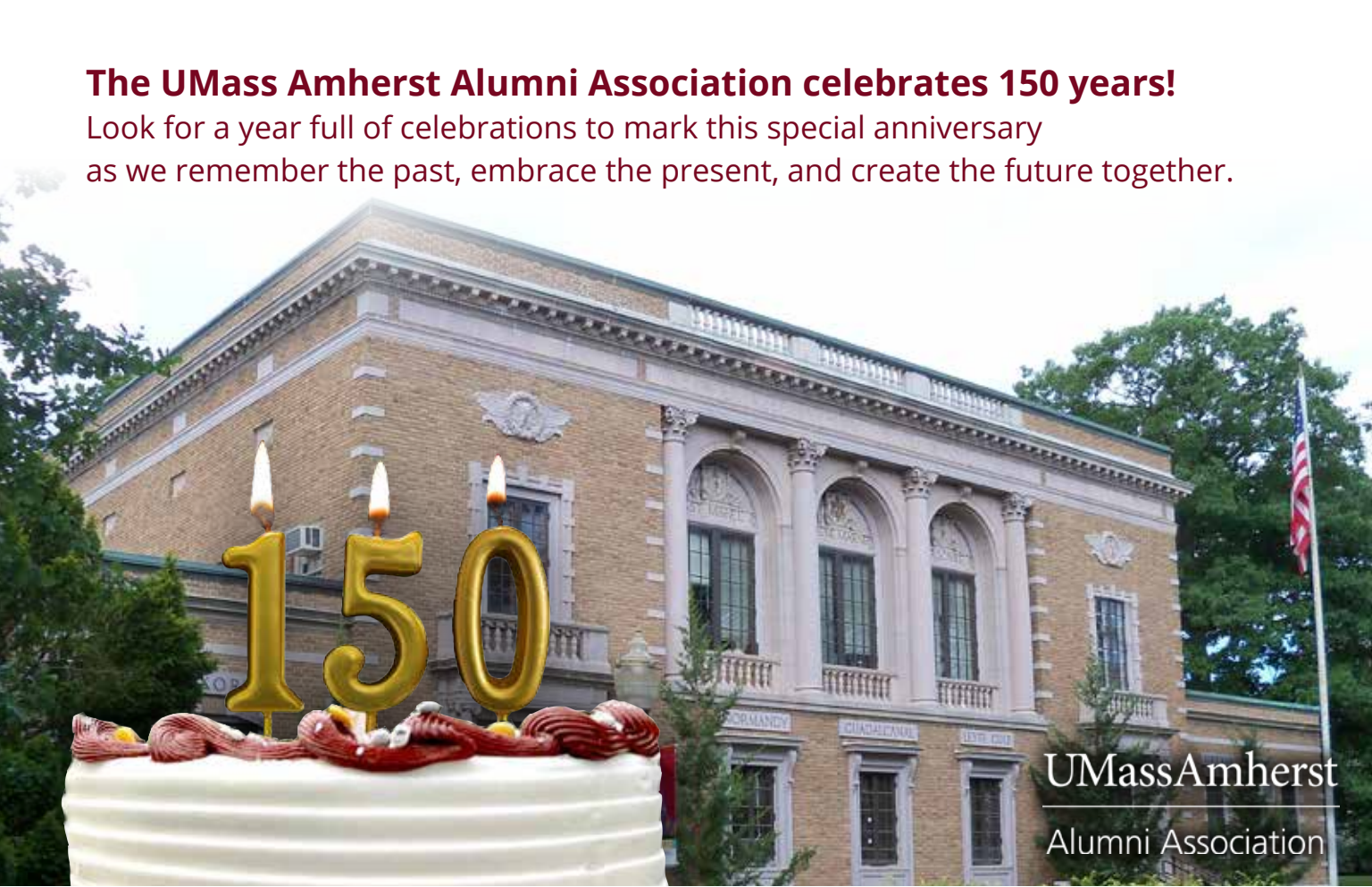
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Making and remaking
in Springfield

> MICHAEL DI PASQUALE '06MRP

Springfield, Massachusetts, is 25 miles from the UMass Amherst campus. The commonwealth's third-largest city is the birthplace of basketball, Dr. Seuss, and the country's first gasoline-powered automobile. A once-great manufacturing center, Springfield has made it through many ups and downs and still stands tall.

I've worked in Springfield for over 15 years. As the UMass Extension associate professor of regional planning, my role helps fulfill the university's land-grant responsibility to provide teaching, outreach, and public service to communities across Massachusetts. Moving beyond UMass Extension's original agricultural focus, my work addresses the needs of the state's urban areas, in particular nearby Holyoke and Springfield.

Many of my Springfield initiatives are based on a planning concept called "tactical urbanism."

Instead of creating long-term plans, this approach consists of low-cost, often temporary installations set up in cities as pilot projects to test new ideas quickly. It's a great way to work with the community to see what's working (and what isn't) in real time.

Make-It Springfield, the community art and makerspace I helped start, began as a way to bring life back to a row of vacant storefronts in the city's downtown cultural district. With help from UMass students and colleagues, I spent a long weekend in the spring of 2016 painting, cleaning, and moving furniture into a space that had sat empty for too many years.

We opened our doors for the first time in June of that year, starting off as a one-month-long pop-up. The opening was an unequivocal success: On our first day, 150 people came through the doors to sew, build small robots, and make art.

People kept coming. We adjusted along the way and have continued to grow. In the spring of this year we were able to scale up, moving into another vacant building five times as large as the original space. Make-It Springfield is now a 501(c)(3) non-profit with four paid employees

that offers dozens of events and workshops—from stained glass design to bike repair—each month.

Even after helping build and furnish the original pop-up, UMass students continue to be involved in Make-It Springfield's success. Some volunteer to give workshops in creative arts and STEM areas. Others work in the bike repair shop, where they share their skills and serve as mentors to Springfield youth.

Make-It Springfield helps students see firsthand the benefits of the "tactical" approach to planning. Our success is visible in the surrounding neighborhood. A vacant building has come to life, transformed into a popular art and creative space. We're boosting the local economy. And our UMass students, many of whom will go on to be professional planners and urban designers, are learning real-life lessons from a nearby community.

Michael Di Pasquale, a licensed architect and registered urban planner, is an Extension associate professor in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning as well as the director of the UMass Design Center in Springfield, where he focuses on the revitalization of cities and towns in Massachusetts. He's also president of Make-It Springfield Inc.



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