

SPRING 2017 VOL. 18

# CONTACT



TREATING AUTISM  
IN A PETRI DISH p.9

STU'S NEW SIM  
FAMILY MEMBER p.5

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Teaching Excellence**

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# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.  
Ecclesiastes 3:1*

For those of us living in South Florida, the change of seasons is marked more by the ebb and flow of tourists, than the rise and fall of the thermometer and leaves on a tree. But in the true meaning of this verse of scripture, in fact our lives are marked by different kinds of seasons.

On a personal note, and as I am sure you may have heard, I recently announced to the University community that I will be retiring in January of 2018. I have been proud to serve the students and alumni of this great institution for the past 22 years, and to have witnessed an incredible commitment to education, faith and service by so many students. It has been a privilege to have had a front row seat as St. Thomas has continued to blossom and grow, marked by the hundreds of the diplomas that I am blessed to have signed each Spring and Fall. There is no doubt that we have educated generations of "Leaders for Life." I plan to remain in Miami after I retire next year, a community that I have grown to love dearly, and full of many special friends that I have made throughout the years.

This year will also mark a new time of reflection and analysis for the St. Thomas community, as we embark on a strategic planning process with our long-time sister institution, Barry University. At the request of our respective sponsors, the Archdiocese of Miami and the Adrian Dominican Order, we will look at whatever opportunities may exist to strengthen Catholic higher education in South Florida. From the days when the all-women Barry College and all-men Biscayne College shared classes and social activities, we have had a special connection. Today, the universities share not just a common Catholic mission and values, but many complementary offerings. The outcome of this strategic planning process is unknown; after all, we are only in the beginning. There is no timeline and there is no deadline. But we do know that whatever the outcome, it will only benefit the men and women of these two excellent universities by providing them with expanded opportunities to learn and grow.

These are exciting times at St. Thomas University. This spring is a season of reflection and anticipation, further punctuated with the renewed hope that Easter brings.



## NEW LEADERSHIP FOR TRUSTEES

The St. Thomas University Board of Trustees unanimously elected Jorge Rico '86, as the new vice-chair during its November meeting. A Trustee for the past four years, Rico also chairs the Gus Machado School of Business Advisory Board, and has been leading the efforts to build a new home for the expanding school.

"We are incredibly fortunate to have such a dedicated leader on our Board," said Chair John Dooner. "His vision and focus really have been – and will continue to be – instrumental in our efforts to cement St. Thomas' position as the leading Catholic university in the southeast."

Rico, managing director at MBF Healthcare Partners, replaces Rodger D. Shay. Shay, a member of the Board of Trustees for 11 years, passed away after a brief illness last summer. A long-time supporter of Catholic education and many cultural and education organizations, Shay served as vice-chair of the board for the past eight years, and was involved in supporting many of the new programs on campus, including the construction of the state-of-the-art Carnival Cruise Lines Science and Technology Building.

# CONTACT

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## CELEBRATING HALF A CENTURY AT ST. THOMAS

When professor Richard Raleigh started teaching at St. Thomas University in 1966, assignments were done on typewriters not computers, research was done at the library not on the internet, music was heard on the radio not Spotify, and St. Thomas University, known as Biscayne College, was graduating its first class.

Fifty years later, Detroit-native Raleigh remains dedicated to the university and his students, and says living through the university's growth and transformations has brought him much happiness throughout the years.

"Being part of the evolution of St. Thomas University, from its beginnings as a small men's college to the thriving co-ed university it is today, has been the great joy of my life," Raleigh said.

In addition to being a professor of English and the humanities, he is a published poet whose work has appeared in more than two dozen literary quarterlies, and is recognized as one of the earliest members of the Hemingway Society.

He is also the university's resident historian on all things St. Thomas: from the university's founding, its Augustinian roots, to its expansion into the St. Thomas University of today.



In the classroom is where Raleigh has truly left his mark. Aside from being voted STU Professor of the Year nine times, students and alumni all agree that Raleigh's passion for literature and the humanities, combined with his sharp-witted personality and compassion, make him a spectacular professor.

Former student and current university professor Sean Melvin, in speaking to the

Miami Herald said, "He has this attachment with his students and they trust him. For people going through a crisis, he wasn't just a professor, he was a counselor."

On Saturday, Dec. 17, Raleigh was honored with a celebration of his service to STU over the past five decades. During Fall commencement exercises, he was awarded the Presidential Award for Distinguished Service by Msgr. Casale. Afterwards, friends, colleagues, and current and former students – some who travelled quite a distance – gathered to thank him for his exceptional teaching and service to the university during a reception.

As he approaches year 51 at STU, Raleigh says he has no interest in retiring.

"Even after 50 years, I'm still happy and excited to have the job I have," he said. "I'm truly blessed."



*Honoring and celebrating Professor Raleigh. From left to right, Dave Umbach '77, Professor Richard Raleigh, Tim Bauer '78, Gina Olson and husband Gregory Olson '77, and Frank Killeen '78.*

## INSPIRING OPENING NIGHT FOR STU BASEBALL



It was a truly special opening night for STU Baseball as Javier "Javi" Perez, principal of South Dade High School and an assistant baseball coach for St. Thomas University from 1996-98, came back to St. Thomas on Jan. 31, to help the Bobcats kick off their season and their quest for a return trip to the NAIA World Series.

Perez, who lost both of his legs last April when a drunk driver veered off a road and hit him as he coached his son's baseball team, threw out the ceremonial first pitch before the opening day baseball game between St. Thomas University and Florida Memorial University (FMU), the university where Perez played college baseball.

Perez spoke with the players before the game, giving them words of encouragement and vowing to return and throw another pitch once he meets his goal of walking again with prosthetic legs.

The Bobcats defeated FMU 11-0, and raised more than \$1,000 for #javistrong to help Perez and his family with medical expenses.

## GLOBAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP WEEK AT STU

Vybez, an app that helps students find hip, local hangouts, was the winning business idea presented by Brianna Flemmings during the student entrepreneurship competition "60 Seconds to STartUp," part of Global Entrepreneurship Week (GEW) at STU, Nov. 14-16, 2016. Student and community entrepreneurs gathered during a three-day schedule of events, speakers and activities. Now in its eighth year, GEW at STU, organized by the Gus Machado School of Business, is strengthening the entrepreneurial and innovative culture of its students and local community by exposing them to new business trends, and successful, local entrepreneurs.

"At St. Thomas University we want to foster innovation, new business creation and career exploration," said STU President Monsignor Franklyn M. Casale. "Our hope is that events like GEW at STU inspire our students to become leaders in entrepreneurship."

GEW is the world's largest celebration of those who invent products and create new companies and start-up businesses, in addition to those who use their business to create a social change. During one week each November, GEW inspires people everywhere through local, national and global activities designed to help them explore their potential as self-starters and innovators.

## CONFERENCE ON ETHICS, JUSTICE AND THE COMMUNITY

The Center for Ethics at STU hosted the Ethics, Justice and the Community Conference, Friday, Sept. 30. The conference examined the challenges and opportunities faced by law enforcement and criminal justice institutions in the 21st century, and explored reforms that will achieve effective and ethical outcomes in our communities. Panel discussions covered topics such as: policing in the 21st century; police-citizen encounters; crime, punishment and restorative justice; criminal justice reforms; and media coverage of crime.



*Nearly 300 students walked across the stage at the Fernandez Family Center during the 2016 Fall Commencement ceremony. Congratulations, Bobcats!*

## STU WELCOMES ITS NEWEST MEMBER: TOMMY VILLANUEVA

On Tuesday, Dec. 6, St. Thomas University's SIM (simulator) family welcomed a new addition, Thomas "Tommy" Villanueva. Tommy is now part of STU's growing SIM family and friends—mom Rita, dad Augustine "Gus," older brother Anthony, sister Annie, grandmother Clare, and pal Charlie. He weighed in at 7 lbs. 2 oz. and measured 21 inches long.

Tommy is part of the School of Science's newly acquired childbirth simulator. This simulator is a lifelike mannequin (mom Rita) that includes a birthing fetus (Tommy) used to give nursing students practice in a variety of labor and delivery scenarios. Each simulation is controlled by an instructor, who sets the childbirth to a normal delivery or a variety of obstetrical emergencies, and students make decisions based on the mother's and baby's vitals, and verbal cues.

STU enhanced its Simulation Laboratory to provide more opportunities for simulated clinical practice to students in the nursing program. SIM laboratories like STU's give students the ability to practice nursing skills in a safe environment.

"This simulation laboratory is specially designed to offer experience and preparation for students interested in working in nursing," explains Rosa Rousseau STU's simulation lab coordinator. "We are proud to provide real-world scenarios in a controlled and supportive environment where students can focus on becoming safe and efficient health practitioners."



Our expanded, state-of-the-art simulation laboratory, located in the Carnival Cruise Lines Science and Technology Building, now features seven SIM mannequins, ambulatory care exam tables, an incubator and medical equipment, designed to offer invaluable opportunities to enrich and enhance learning, as well as to increase student confidence.

## UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH RECOGNIZED IN THE SOUTHEAST

Six undergraduate science researchers from St. Thomas University participated in the 49th Southeast Undergraduate Research Conference (SURC) at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, S.C., on Jan. 28, where STU chemistry majors Brandon Gamboa and Amanda Penton garnered Best Poster Honorable Mention.

Their research poster presentation looked at the effect of magnetic fields on oscillatory reactions. The oscillatory reaction studied, Belousov-Zhabotinsky, can be used as a model for biological oscillatory processes, such as circadian rhythm.

"The confidence exhibited by our students, along with the acquired knowledge, when presenting their posters is a valuable lesson that cannot be taught in any lecture hall or online environment," said School of Science professors Luis Fernandez and David Quesada. "Meetings such as SURC really open our students' eyes. They find out that they are not alone, that their peers also conduct research, and that the quality of STU research is at the same level of much larger research institutions."

This was the first time STU participated in SURC. The student's posters and research

content was on par with those of much larger research institutions participating, such as University of Georgia, University of South Carolina, University of Tennessee, UNC-Chapel Hill, and Ole Miss.

"It is at conferences like SURC where the effort of our students and faculty, and the quality of their research is rewarded with the recognition and praise from their peers," added Professor Quesada.



## SUSHI IN THE SUKKAH

Students, faculty and staff of all faiths gathered on Oct. 19, at STU's Sukkah for kosher sushi, bagels, and music. The Jewish Law Student Association, led by Yisroel Silverman, built the sukkah, or temporary hut, on campus to mark the Jewish festival of Sukkot, Oct. 17-25. It was located in the patio in front of the Law School's Career Development Building.

# AROUND CAMPUS

## IT'S THE YEAR OF THE ROOSTER



With traditional foods, glowing lanterns, dragons, and lots of red, STU students kicked off the 2017 Chinese New Year on Jan. 26. Each Chinese New Year is characterized by one of 12 animals which appear in the Chinese zodiac, and this year marks the Year of the Rooster. The next Year of the Rooster will be in 2029.

## ELEMENTARY ENGINEERS AND SCIENTISTS GATHER AT STU

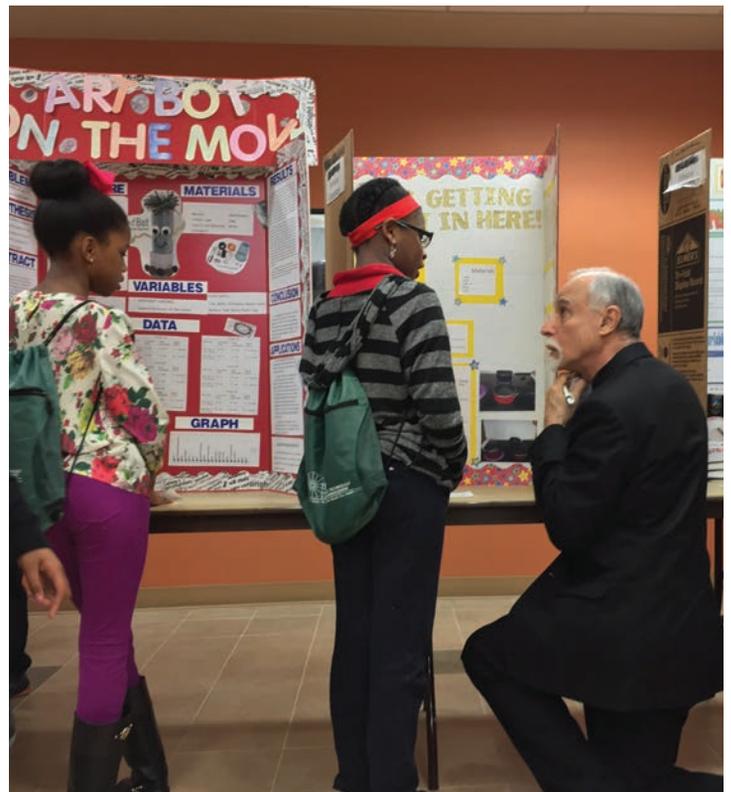
With science projects in tow, more than 150 elementary school students from 19 schools across Miami Gardens converged on St. Thomas University during the 6th Annual Science and Engineering Fair on Monday, Dec. 12.

The event is one of many science-based initiatives from Councilman David Williams Jr., who has been praised for efforts in building science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programs throughout schools in Miami Gardens. STU has proudly partnered with Miami Gardens to produce the annual event since its inception, and provides the prizes for the winning projects.

One of the university's STEM role models, Provost Dr. Irma Becerra, who holds a doctorate's degree in electrical engineering, said she is excited to continue to grow the event and to work with students from local schools who have an interest in STEM.

"It's a great opportunity for students to visit our campus and meet our science faculty and students," Becerra said. "It's part of our responsibility to be leaders in STEM outreach to the community, and to foster a passion for the sciences in students. Through events like these we keep our youth interested in STEM, engage with our community, and promote higher learning."

Faculty and students of STU's School of Science are among the judges talking and working with students during the event. Other judges included representatives from the Patricia and Phillip Frost Museum of Science, and William Pino and Sara Fulton, members of STU's Science Advisory Board, among others.



## SHEDDING LIGHT ON MODERN-DAY SLAVERY

Artist Susan S. Buzzi hopes to generate awareness about a topic that is still rarely known across our nation in her exhibit titled "Responsibility & Vigilance." The exhibit, first created to complement the Human Trafficking Academy at STU's School of Law with a series of posters comprised of original imagery, is on display in the Archbishop John C. Favalora Archive & Museum (located in the Main Library) through May.



## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: IRISH DANCER VICTORIA MOLINA



Jigs, reels, ghillies, hornpipes and feisanna. No, it's not Urban Dictionary's latest slang words; it's Irish step dance.

For 22-year-old Victoria Molina, an STU communications major and education minor, these words have been part of her everyday vocabulary since the age of 4. She began Irish step dancing at her great-grandmother's encouragement, competing and performing across Florida and the United States.

Trying to balance a social life, school and work can be hard enough for most college students. But for Victoria that struggle is compounded by hours of dance training and practice, working at the Law Library, and teaching dance to elementary school children.

"More than anything else, my hectic schedule is a blessing," she said. "Throughout high school I was very ill – battling two bouts of mononucleosis [mono], and an unknown virus – and I was bed ridden for months at a time. So I'm very thankful to be able to do all that I do." The health setbacks she suffered also affected her dance training, but in 2014 she got a clean bill of health and focused years of pent up dance energy into Irish step dancing.

An Irish step dancing competition is called a feis (pronounced fesh), or feisanna, if referring to more than one. During a feis Victoria is barely recognizable. She dons a wig with cascading jet black curls, wears elaborately bedazzled dresses called solo dresses, and high white socks called poodle socks.

Given the rigorous competition schedule lined up for this year, Victoria, who has been with the STU dance team since her freshmen year, decided to step down as team co-captain. It was a tough decision to make, but it was the best decision for the team. She has several local competitions throughout the year, as well as some in other cities. And, in April, she has the Irish Step Dancing World Championships in Belfast, Ireland.

"It'll be my first time out of the country, so I'm really excited," she said. "Shortly after I get back, I graduate! It'll be bitter sweet -

I'll be leaving the school that's helped me become the leader I am in and out of the dance studio."

Victoria takes the stage at the 2017 World Irish Dancing Championships April 9 – 16.

As he approaches year 51 at STU, Raleigh says he has no interest in retiring.

"Even after 50 years, I'm still happy and excited to have the job I have," he said. "I'm truly blessed."



*Victoria Molina and friend Valerie Escobar wearing their Irish step dancing costume.*

## ANITYA FANTÔME STUDENT ART EXHIBIT

STU student Weiyi Fan a.k.a XIAOFANX is a Chinese artist born in Inner Mongolia, China, based in Wynwood, Miami. He moved to Miami in 2013 for his graduate studies in communications at St. Thomas University's School of Arts & Education, and he is currently completing his graduate thesis in Electronic Arts under the guidance of Dr. Gloria Ruiz. His artwork is displayed throughout galleries in Miami, and in the STU Main Library.



# FACULTY NEWS

## **PRESIDENT MSGR. FRANKLYN CASALE**

has been selected to receive the South Florida Hispanic Chamber of Commerce's Golden Eagle Award in recognition of his more than 22 years of leadership at STU. The Golden Eagle Award is the chamber's most prestigious award.

## **DR. SUSAN ANGULO**

and her husband Jaime were awarded the Sancho Panza Award. In the past many community leaders and media personalities, that in many ways contribute to better the quality of life in South Florida, have been the recipients of the award.

## **SISTER ONDINA CORTES AND MARCIA NARINE WELDON**

were guest speakers at a conference titled "Doing Business in Cuba: Legal, Ethical and Compliance Challenges" held at Barry University.

## **DEAN ALFREDO GARCIA**

has been selected to receive the South Florida Chamber of Commerce's Hispanic Leadership Award in the legal category.

## **DR. CLAUDIA HERRERA**

director of campus ministry, successfully completed her doctorate's degree in Practical Theology at St. Thomas University.

## **MARC-TIZOC GONZÁLEZ**

argued before the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division against the proposed reform of Standard 316, which would make it more difficult for law schools with diverse student bodies to retain ABA accreditation.

## **GIGI LAUDISIO**

has been promoted to Associate Vice President for Development and Interim Vice President for Advancement and Communications.

## **DR. JEFF PICKENS**

was recognized for his commitment to the community of Miami Gardens, and for his participation as a judge and organizer for the 6th Annual Science & Engineering Fair.

## **PROFESSOR KEITH RIZZARDI**

joined a panel discussing environmental justice and the Trump administration at the ABA Midyear Conference in Miami; led a full-day training session on public records laws for 75 local government leaders at the Treasure Coast League of Cities in Port St. Lucie; and presented on environmental and energy law at Barry Law School in Orlando.

## **APROFESSOR MY RONNER**

served as Discussant on the Dostoevsky and the Law Panel at the Conference of the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages.

## **DR. FRANCIS SICIUS**

was a featured speaker at the inaugural Dorothy Day Symposium "Revolution of the Heart" held at Loyola University of Chicago.

## **LARRY TREADWELL**

was promoted to director of the University Library. Prior to this promotion, Larry was the library's interim director.

## TREATING AUTISM IN A PETRI DISH

Walk by professor Alexis Tapanes-Castillo's lab at St. Thomas University, and you'll see gloved students dressed in lab coats and hunched over microscopes. What you won't know just from looking is that the students are trying to treat autism in a petri dish.

Under the watchful eye of Tapanes-Castillo, STU undergraduates are growing and manipulating stem cells. In collaboration with the University of Miami, these students are playing a key role in researching autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

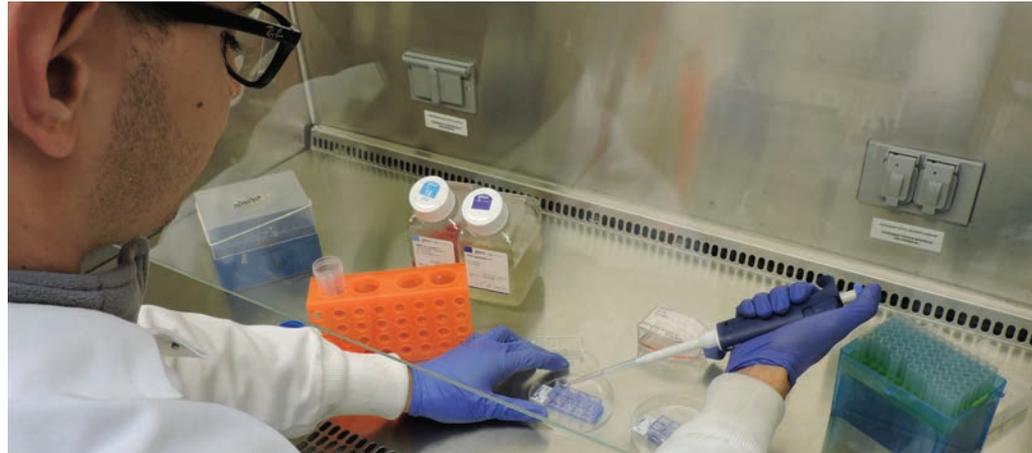
"In the labs at UM, a microscopic piece of skin is taken from participants with autism and reprogrammed into a stem cell," Tapanes-Castillo explains. "Using different techniques and drugs, the stem cells are then turned into neural stem cells. At STU, we grow these neural stem cells from patients with autism, as well as neural stem cells from patients who do not have autism."

***"Research of this caliber isn't available to undergraduate students at other universities. It's exciting to work on something that could possibly help millions of people with autism."***

Under a microscope the cells look like sunbursts with branches. To the untrained eye, the only difference between the ASD cells and the control cells appears to be the number of branches (connections) they make, and how far they branch out. Many believe that having so many connections is what causes individuals with autism to easily become overwhelmed by the environment.

"One of the theories is that the cells of those with autism grow too quickly and make too many connections," explained Tapanes-Castillo. "Ironically enough, genius is also thought to originate from cells making too many connections."

Since the stem cells are just a few weeks old when STU students receive them, they are responsible for culturing (growing) the cells. In other words, they are responsible for nurturing the cells to maturity, which can take 100 days.



In the lab, students are also testing molecular differences between the control cells and autistic cells. The testing of specific candidate molecules is based on data obtained by UM, who has sequenced the DNA of thousands of people with autism, and family members that don't have autism. These differences are tested at STU using genetic engineering techniques.

"Since we grow the cells in the lab, we can control which molecules they make. We can turn genes on and off; and we can manipulate the levels of specific molecules using lab viruses," said Tapanes-Castillo. "We can see if changing the levels of these molecules, which are different between autistic and non-autistic people, make the autistic cells look and behave more like the control cells."

In February, the cells were infected with viruses, which the students helped create in the lab, and the experiment is under way to see how the cells will react to the virus. They should start understanding how the virus affects the biology of autistic cells over the next several months.

Leana Ramos, an STU undergraduate majoring in biology and chemistry, as well as completing specializations in research and English literature, says she feels very fortunate to be participating in such groundbreaking research.

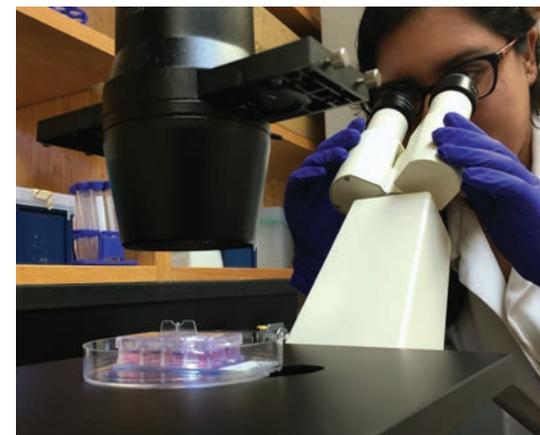
"Research of this caliber isn't available to undergraduate students at other universities," Ramos said. "It's exciting to work on something that could possibly help millions of people with autism." Ramos credits the University's undergraduate research programs and its professors for the year-long fellowship she was recently awarded at the National Institute of Health (NIH).

Tapanes-Castillo stresses a very important aspect of their research: they are not trying to completely eradicate autism. They're trying to treat it, so that those with autism can manage it better.

"We want to understand the biology of autism so that we can help patients manage its challenges—the feelings of anxiety, the sensory overload. However, we would not want to eliminate the ability of autistic cells to make extra connections. This ability may be what gives autistic individuals special talents."

Currently there are no medications for autism because not enough is understood about the biology of the disorder to suggest specific medications. ASD patients are usually prescribed medications that treat other conditions like obsessive compulsive disorder, epilepsy, anxiety, and so on. Although the symptoms range dramatically in type and severity, autism can be characterized by problems communicating, difficulties interacting with others and repetitive behaviors.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a disorder that affects the lives of millions around the world. In the United States, one in 68 children live with autism, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).



# BLUEPRINT FOR LEADERSHIP UPDATES

## WHY WE GIVE

When STU assistant professor of criminal justice Debbie Goodman Lerner was in elementary school, her teacher Ms. Rene entered her essay in a Miami-Dade essay contest, and she won. During the awards reception she was awarded a \$1,000 scholarship to be used when she entered college.

When asked by a reporter what the award meant to her, she replied, "My dreams are becoming a reality, and I'm going to help others achieve their dreams too."

At that moment the philanthropic seed was planted. "It was truly such an honor and privilege to have been the recipient of that scholarship," she said. "And, it was from that moment on that I decided I would give back to others in the future."

Through the years, she's given to several different scholarship programs that have benefited a vast group of individuals, from aspiring police officers in the police academy to aspiring leaders at STU. During November's Scholarship Luncheon at STU, which honors



donors and scholarship recipients, Debbie was brought to tears by what the student sitting next to her said to her.

"He happened to be the direct recipient of my gift to the university, and he told me, 'Professor, not only is your gift helping me achieve my dreams, but it's helping my family through some trying times.'"

Giving, whether it is monetary or in the form of mentoring, has an enormous

impact on not only the individual receiving the award, but the community as well. Everywhere you look on campus there are examples of donors' support in action - student scholarships, faculty, buildings, lecture series, research equipment, among other things.

"When students reach their professional and personal goals they go out into the community and do amazing things. And one day, they'll give back to the institution that helped them realize their dreams," added Goodman.

"For me, it just made such perfect sense to give to a university like ours, who gives so much to its students and community. Giving, even a little, helps in big ways. Why wouldn't one give to St. Thomas?"

Debbie is a criminologist, published author of eight books, educator, and former TV show host. Prior to teaching in STU's criminal justice degree program she served as chairperson of the Miami Dade College School of Justice.

## NEW INTERNSHIP SCHOLARSHIPS HONOR PROFESSOR

A career in the liberal arts may be rewarding, but students find that securing paid internships to obtain very valuable hands-on experience to jump-start their career can sometimes be challenging. In honor of Professor Richard Raleigh's 50th anniversary of teaching at STU, two alumni have provided seed money for the "Professor Richard Raleigh Service Internship Fund," a fund dedicated to providing stipends for internships for students in Biscayne College. The new scholarship fund was

announced during the reception honoring Professor Raleigh's teaching anniversary in December.

"Our students in the liberal arts and social sciences are often not able to secure paid internships," explains Biscayne College Dean Pam Cingel of the typical internship with non-profit agencies. "As valuable as an internship is for real-world experience and opportunity to secure employment, some of our students don't have the luxury

of foregoing paid employment for an unpaid internship. These stipends make all the difference in providing this important opportunity."

The University hopes to grow the scholarship fund to provide several internship stipends each semester to Biscayne College students. For information on the Prof. Richard Raleigh Service Internship Fund, email [alumni@stu.edu](mailto:alumni@stu.edu).

*STU scholarship recipients expressed their appreciation to the generous donors who support quality education at St. Thomas University. The annual Scholarship Luncheon, held on Nov. 30, 2016, at the Goldbloom Convocation Hall, provided an opportunity for the students who have received scholarships to personally thank the donors.*



# GENEROUS GIFTS TRANSFORM STU

Throughout its 56-year history, St. Thomas University's campus footprint and academic stature has grown thanks to transformative gifts from alumni, friends, businesses, and foundations. Capital gifts to STU's Blueprint for Leadership Plan ensure that the University will continue to be a dynamic institute of higher learning for decades to come. Investments in scholarships, programs, faculty, and facilities are underway thanks to donations toward our Blueprint for Leadership Plan. On behalf of our students, faculty and staff – thank you for your faith and investment in St. Thomas' future!

## \$5,000,000++

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# POINTS OF PRIDE

## ● STU RANKS TOP 3

According to the U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard, STU is one of the top three South Florida universities producing the highest-earning graduates 10 years after enrollment.

## ● THOUSANDS RAISED FOR HAITI'S HURRICANE MATTHEW RELIEF EFFORTS

STU donors contributed more than \$30,000 to the post-Hurricane Matthew relief efforts in Haiti's northwest region.

## ● 50TH WINTER CONFERENCE ON BRAIN RESEARCH

Two undergraduate STU biology students were selected to present posters at the 50th Winter Conference on Brain Research in Montana. The best neuroscientists in the world come together to present their latest works, network and socialize at this conference.

## ● CABELL'S JOURNAL LISTING

STU's Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (JMR), an international, multidisciplinary, peer-reviewed journal devoted to publishing quality feature and research articles on a variety of topics, has been indexed and listed in Cabell's journal directory, a leading journal information company.

## ● UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH RECOGNITION

Six undergraduate researchers from St. Thomas University participated in the 49th Southeast Undergraduate Research Conference (SURC) at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, S.C., on Jan. 28. STU chemistry majors Brandon Gamboa and Amanda Penton garnered Best Poster Honorable Mention.

## ● ACADEMIC ALL-SUN CONFERENCE AWARDS

Six of the 24 student-athletes named Academic All-Sun Conference were Bobcats: Whitney Battoe, Priscila Ertty, Jessica Ingram, Kelli Kosydor, Kimberly Martino, and Caitlin McCluskey. Recipients must have a 3.5 grade point average or better, have completed two semesters at their institution, and be of sophomore academic standing.

## ● SUN CONFERENCE PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Volleyball player, Whitney Battoe, a sophomore from Naperville, Ill., was named player of the year. She totaled a team-high 303 kills, and had a .241 hitting percentage. She also added 143 digs, 45 blocks, and 33 aces.

## ● 'HIGHEST IMPACT' TEACHER

An STU alumna, Evelyn Falcon, was recognized by the Florida Department of Education as one of the state's "Highest Impact Teachers." This recognition is a result of her student's academic growth and performance during the past three years. Less than 10 percent of eligible public school teachers receive the high-impact rating.

## ● 300 AND COUNTING

Bobcat Baseball coach Jorge Perez marked his 300th career coaching win on March 18, during a game against University of South Carolina Beaufort.

## ● FLORIDA ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AWARDS

Student Michael Fernando from the School of Science was awarded "Outstanding Student Poster Presentation for Biological Sciences" at the Florida Academy of Sciences Meeting held in Lakeland, Fla. Another student, Milagros Mulero, was awarded "Outstanding Undergraduate Student Poster in the Medical Sciences." These recognitions is a reflection of the amazing work and research being conducted at STU.

## ALUMNUS ENTREPRENEUR SPOTLIGHT

Ally Simbert, 25, a 2014 STU computer science alumni, was featured in the Miami Herald's Startup Spotlight. Ally is the co-founder of Stopoint.com, a Miami-based company, which specializes in buying and selling electronics. Haitian born Ally, along with his twin brother Steeve, and friend Marc Estinville, co-founded Stopoint.com when the trio was robbed while exchanging computer equipment in person, and later scammed while selling electronics online.

Ally came to STU shortly after the devastating 2010 earthquake in Haiti. He worked in STU's IT Department servicing students' tech needs and would send his earnings to

his family who needed support—his mother in Haiti and his brother Steeve attending Oxford University. After graduating, he worked relentlessly on his business, and it has paid off. According to the Miami Herald, one of Stopoint's biggest challenges was gaining the trust and credibility of customers. But that all changed after a CNET reporter wrote about Stopoint and listed it as a top company where people can sell their Apple watches. Ever since then, business exploded. Before the CNET article, the team was doing just two or three transactions a day, but between Oct. 1 and Dec. 31, 2016, the company sold 1,500 products and generated \$340,000 in revenue.



Steeve Simbert, left, friend Marc Estinville, center, and Steeve's twin, Ally Simbert, co-founded Stopoint.com  
Photo courtesy of Patrick Farrell of the Miami Herald.

## STU CELEBRATES 70TH ANNIVERSARY OF CUBAN CAMPUS

With a mass and a typical Cuban lunch, on Saturday, Dec. 10, alumni and guests celebrated the University's 70th anniversary of the founding of its first campus.

Originally founded in 1946 as the Universidad Católica de Santo Tomas de Villanueva in Havana, Cuba, by American Augustinian priests from Philadelphia, the university's first campus was ordered to close its doors in 1961 by Fidel Castro. But many of its administrators, faculty and students were determined to continue their education, and came to Miami to start a new Catholic men's college – Biscayne College. In 1984, the college became St. Thomas University. Students who persevered through the closing of the university in Cuba and fled to the United States to complete their degree were also in attendance. For more on event and its guests stories, visit <http://bit.ly/70STU>.



## HOMECOMING & ALUMNI REUNION

Homecoming and Alumni Reunion Weekend once again brought alumni back to campus to reminisce about the days of their time as Bobcats, and make them proud and excited about what the University is doing today.

The weekend celebrations kicked off Thursday, Feb. 2, with an Alumni Game Watch Party, where alumni, students and friends watched STU basketball take on Florida Memorial University. On Friday, STU Talks featured alumnus, former U.S. Rep. Michael G. Fitzpatrick '85. He recalled his time at St. Thomas, and how it molded him into the leader he is today. The President's Reception on Friday, and Saturday events that included campus tours; "Frankly Speaking" with Msgr. Casale; Homecoming & Alumni Reunion Mass; a "meet and greet" for the Classes of 1988-1994; and a "Back at the Rath" Bash, rounded out the weekend activities.



Back at the Rath Bash (top picture),  
Former U.S. Rep. Michael G. Fitzpatrick '85 (lower picture)

## “LEADERS FOR LIFE”



### AN ALUMNUS, COACH, AND STU HALL OF FAMER

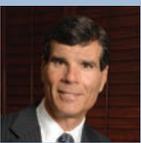
He is the executive vice president for baseball operations and general manager for the Detroit Tigers, but when Al Avila '86, visits campus, he is just “coach.” Avila, who graduated with both a bachelor’s and master’s degree in sports administration from STU, served as an assistant coach under LSU’s head baseball coach Paul Maneiri, and coached Bobcat Baseball from 1988-92. Now has a new title, officially becoming a member of the Bobcat Sports Hall of Fame.

Avila was inducted into the Hall of Fame during the Annual Stone Crab Dinner in November. Family, friends, former players and other supporters enjoyed fresh, all-you-can-eat stone crabs during the annual fundraising event for Bobcat athletics, while toasting the new inductee.



**1982**

**Luis Espinosa**, B.A. Political Science, was promoted to vice president of marketing for Florida East Coast Realty.



**Ervin A. Gonzalez**, Esq., B.A. Political Science, a partner with the Coral Gables-based law firm Colson Hicks Eidson, has been recertified as a Civil Trial Advocate by the National Board of Trial Advocacy.



**1984**

**Bill McGillis**, B.A. Sports Administration, achieved a career dream this February when he was named athletic director for the University of San Diego. He worked 13 years in sports at the University of Houston, six years at the University of South Florida, and 3 1/2 years at Southern Mississippi as athletic director before taking the USD job.



**1989**

**Dennis Ward**, J.D. Law, was elected to state attorney in Monroe County. He is a former Miami Beach police officer and U.S. Marine Corps veteran.



**Kim Theresa Mollica**, J.D. Law, was elect to county court judge (Group 14) in Broward County. She has had her own practice since 1993 handling both civil and criminal cases, and previously served as an assistant public defender in Martin and St. Lucie counties from 1990 to 1993.



**1998**

**Mike Balado**, B.A. Psychology, was recently named head coach of Arkansas State University’s men’s basketball team.



**1999**

**Dr. Nathan Connolly**, B.A. History, is a co-host of the public radio show BackStory with the American History Guys, which brings historical perspective to the America of today. Each week, Connolly and U.S. historians Ed Ayers, Brian Balogh, Joanne Freeman look at current issues and trace them back to their roots in American history.



**Eugenia Davis**, M.S. Mental Health Counseling, is the director at Valley Recovery Center of California, a substance abuse clinic in California.

**2002**

**J. Leticia Garcia**, Religious Studies, was recently promoted to associate director of the Leadership Initiative at the Harvard Business School where she continues to provide oversight for Initiative’s portfolio of leadership and leadership development programs, content development and executive coaching.

**Linda Robin**, B.A. Organizational Leadership, is currently working on her master’s degree in Christian counseling at trinity Theological Seminary of South Florida.



**2003**

**Gabriel Caballero**, J.D. Law, has been promoted partner at Holland & Knight.



**James E. Rauh**, J.D. Law, was promoted from senior counsel to shareholder at Greenspoon Marder within the firm’s alcohol beverage industry group. Greenspoon Marder is based in Miami Beach.



### 2005

**Javier Ley-Soto**, J.D. Law, has been selected by Miami Dade College as its attorney. He will handle all general counsel matters for the college's district operations and its eight campuses county-wide.

### 2006

**Dr. Towanda Seabrook**, M.S. Special Education, is the SPED department chair at Georgia Jones Middle School in Miami, Fla. She also holds a doctorate's degree in educational leadership.

### 2007

**Jennifer Correa**, M.S. Mental Health Counseling, married Sebastian Correa in 2014, and they had a daughter in September 2015. She passed the licensure exam in 2016, and is currently working part-time at Supportive Connections, a private practice located in Ocala, Fla., as a licensed mental health counselor.



### 2009

**Carlos Santisteban, J.D. Law '09 and Christyne Santisteban '11**, J.D. Law, baptized their daughter Michaela K. Santisteban at STU's Chapel of Saint Anthony. "We thought it was fitting being that we met at St. Thomas University."

### 2010

**Ana Maria Arcos**, M.S. Marriage & Family Therapy, is a behavior analyst, intake specialist, and a registered play therapist. She is starting her doctorate's degree with the International Institute for Clinical Psychology.



**Armando Hernandez**, J.D. Law, a litigation attorney with Rumberger Kirk & Caldwell, has been appointed by the 11th Judicial Circuit Committee on Professionalism to chair of the circuit's local professionalism panel.

### 2011



**Anna Fernandez**, J.D. Law, has joined the team of lawyers at Hershoff, Lupino & Yagel, LLP. She comes from the office of Luis Fernandez, P.A. in Miami, where she practiced civil and family law from 2011 until last year.



**Evelyn Falcon**, M.S. in Special Education, was recognized by the Florida Department of Education as one of the state's "Highest Impact Teachers." This recognition is a result of her student's academic growth and performance during the past three years. Less than 10 percent of eligible public school teachers receive the high-impact rating.



### 2013

**Tatiana Leon**, B.A. Psychology, is a manager and school-based therapy program coordinator at the Center for Emotional Health, a mental health facility located near Charlotte, N.C. She also works as a liaison between counselors and the therapists employed by the center.

### 2014

**Latosha Clemons**, M.S. Executive Management, an accomplished firefighter with more than 20 years of service to the City of Boynton Beach, was promoted to deputy fire chief of administration.

### 2015



**Gregory Light**, J.D. Law, is now the manager-member at Light & Gonzalez, PLLC, in Weston; specializing in consumer financial services, personal injury, and products liability litigation.

**Tony Mamodaly**, B.A. Business, is happy to announce the birth of his first child, Noah Mamodaly, on March 14, 2017, weighing 6.83 lbs., and measuring 20.8 inches.

**Amanda Rodriguez**, J.D. Law, accepted an associate position with Garcia Paez, P.A. in Miami Lakes, specializing in insurance defense, family law, estate planning, and commercial litigation.

**Lourdes Velez**, J.D. Law, accepted an associate position with Silverberg Brito, PLLC in Miami, specializing in property insurance.

### 2016

**Ashley Amortegui**, B.A. Criminal Justice, is pursuing a master's degree in criminal justice at St. Thomas University.

**Mary Escalona Rodriguez**, M.S. Reading Education, is a kindergarten teacher at Somerset Gables Academy.

**Birgith Phillips**, M.S. Educational Leadership '16 and M.S. Special Education '02, will pursue doctorate's degree in education with a specialization in instructional leadership at Northcentral University.



**Melissa Rosales**, B.A. Criminal Justice, got married after graduation, and became an elementary teacher at Children's Paradise. She is currently pursuing her master's degree in educational leadership.

# Share your NEWS!

Have you been promoted? Earned an advanced degree? Been honored for professional or personal achievements? Added to the family? We want to be in the know! Visit us at [www.stu.edu/alumni/classnotes](http://www.stu.edu/alumni/classnotes), email [alumni@stu.edu](mailto:alumni@stu.edu), or call us at **305-628-6601** to share your news!

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| 6:00 PM - 8:30 PM  | Cocktail Reception, Awards Ceremony & Silent Auction |
- 

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