



# illumine

—University of Southern Indiana—

SECRETS  
*of the*  
ZOO

SPRING 2024



Photo by Steve Bohleber '72

features

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USI Alumni are its Best Kept Secret

**on the cover**

Kijana, one of Mesker Park Zoo & Botanic Gardens' two giraffes, makes her cover debut.

She will also let you in on a few fun facts in the *Secrets of the Zoo* feature.

*Photograph by Elizabeth Randolph, USI Manager of Photography and Multimedia.*



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# THE BIG PICTURE

The Bass Fishing Team, founded in 2018, is one of seven USI Club Sports. USI's current team has 29 members (two females and 27 males) angling to bring home wins as they compete against universities nationwide. From Kentucky Lake to Florida's Harris Chain, this highly competitive sport is experiencing rapid growth, with tournaments hosting up to 400 boats bobbing on the water. The student anglers learn to read topographical maps and employ the boats' navigational systems to advance their skills and knowledge while they bond over the love of fishing.

*To learn more about USI's Bass Fishing Team scan the QR code.*



# PRESIDENT'S PERSPEC



I love dogs and all animals, but I did not want one at the time, especially a puppy. I was the new Provost for USI, when my family and I arrived in Evansville from Buffalo, New York, in 2010, and knew I would be too busy to participate in its care and that it would take all of us to simulate and create the loving home it deserved.

Having had many pets in my life and both bachelor's and master's degrees in animal sciences, I knew how much work a pet can be. I also knew we were a spontaneous family, with a lifestyle unsuitable for a puppy. Still, my wife, Lynn, insisted. "It would be good for the children," who had been uprooted from their home and friends.

I was a firm No, but she was a firmer Yes.

Our children, Ayinde and Nia, promised to care for the dog but did not know what they were promising. They did not know the responsibility that goes into caring for a life. Nia, my then 10-year-old researcher, found a breed known for its smaller size, limited shedding and positive temperament. Despite my ignored objections, I drove us to Kentucky to get our new family member, Jaz, an eight-week-old, beautiful, jet-black cockapoo.

The first evening, Jaz cried and cried. Nia woke me in the middle of the night to tell me he was sad. I explained we were his new family now and it would take time for him to get acclimated. The next morning, Nia and Ayinde got up early to feed, pet and take Jaz outside before going to school, like I knew they

would on his first day at our home. But it wouldn't take long for their promises to take responsibility to fade.

A few days after we got Jaz, Nia asked if the family could go get ice cream. I reminded her of our responsibilities to Jaz, that he was new to our home and could not be left alone. We have to be here with Jaz, engage with Jaz, learn who Jaz is and help Jaz learn about us. Now, go get your brother, get Jaz's leash and take him for a walk.

That happened three days in a row. First it was ice cream, then a movie and then a family ride. After each request, I said the same thing: No. Go get your brother, get Jaz's leash and take him for a walk.

Nia came to me on the fourth day holding Jaz and in tears. Baba, she said, *WE* made a mistake. Our family doesn't have enough time for Jaz. We are a family on the go and Jaz is not able to go, he's just too young.

I sent Nia to get her mother and brother so we could have a family discussion. When they were all in the room, Nia's crying became more intense while she petted Jaz as if to convey, *don't worry, we will get you a good new home—a family with time.*

I asked Nia to read aloud what was on Jaz's collar.

She read his name, address and phone number.

I said, read all the words on the collar. It says Jaz Rochon. You left off Rochon. Nia and Ayinde, Jaz is a family member. He is one of us. We cannot give him away. That is not the way we work in this house. We, all of us in this household, made a commitment to Jaz when we brought him into our home. His life depends on each of us. He is our responsibility.

Responsibility is something I think a lot about as a father, husband, son, brother, friend, neighbor and President of our University. I constantly ask myself,

"What lessons in responsibility am I teaching my children and what responsibilities to the world at large is this University teaching our students?"

I believe each of us has a responsibility to not only our immediate, personal worlds but the world at large as well. Young people are always watching the way adults in their lives navigate responsibilities, (especially when corners are cut) and it influences their understanding of commitment and responsibility. As the leader of the University of Southern Indiana, I am committed to instilling in our students a sense of responsibility to society. To teach them the importance of being intentional in making the world a better place for all living creatures, humans and animals alike.

At USI it's not just about academic excellence; it's about cultivating a compassionate and socially-aware community. Whether it's ensuring that our students engage with children through the Boys and Girls Club or simply fostering a campus environment that promotes global citizenship and respect. Our responsibility as an educational institution is honorable and immense.

Thirteen years after Jaz's arrival in my family's lives he still serves as a poignant reminder of the profound responsibilities we all bear. The lessons USI imparts on responsibility echoes beyond the classroom, shaping the future actions and contributions of our students to make the world at large a better place. The responsibilities each of us bears to society—from the neighbor next door to those being persecuted halfway around the world—are equally immense.

I believe that we all (beginning with me and including our entire campus community—students too) must deeply consider our responsibilities—how we define them, how we engage them and how we execute them. Our children and the world at large deserve this effort from each of us. Remember, their eyes are upon us.



## High Tech Healthcare Upgrades Underway

An \$18.5 million renovation of the Health Professions Center, home of USI's College of Nursing and Health Professions, began last May, poised many programs for future growth through state-of-the-art laboratory equipment to enhance student learning and highlight the latest in healthcare technology. "USI is already well-known throughout the region and the state for educational excellence in the College of Nursing and Health Professions, and these renovations will further enhance learning opportunities for students in all of our programs," said Steve Bridges '89 M'95, USI Vice President for Finance and Administration. "And because the majority of our graduates tend to stay in Indiana after graduation, USI is helping meet our state's healthcare workforce needs and ultimately improve care for all Hoosiers."

The final construction phase begins this year (using an additional \$49 million provided by the Indiana General Assembly in the 2023 legislative session) and includes renovation of the second-floor office areas, the remainder of the first floor and a 40,000-square-foot addition on the east side of the building.



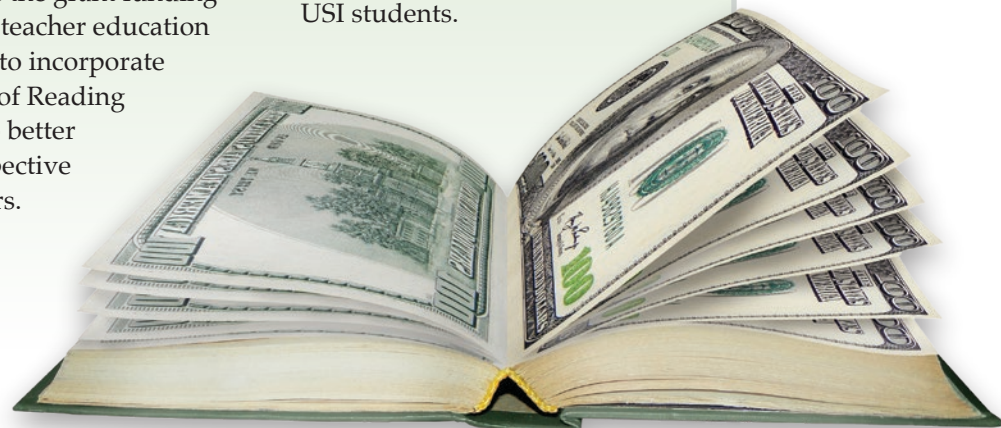
## LITERACY GETS A \$1 MILLION BOOST

USI's Pott College of Science, Engineering, and Education, through its Teacher Education program, was awarded \$1 million from the Lilly Endowment Inc., to integrate Science of Reading-aligned principles into teacher preparation programs to strengthen literacy in the state. "It is imperative that more of Indiana's elementary students learn to read proficiently, and it is essential that current teachers and the next generation of teachers are prepared to use proven principles to teach reading in

their classrooms," said Ted Maple, Lilly Endowment's Vice President for Education.

USI will use the grant funding to revise its teacher education curriculum to incorporate the Science of Reading approach to better equip prospective P-12 teachers.

Additionally, funding will be used to establish a literacy resource center at the University and broaden clinical experiences in reading instruction for USI students.







## LOST IN WONDER: USI Lab Transforms Indy Museum Experience

The Children's Museum of Indianapolis knew it had a problem. Its visitors did not know where to go after encountering the 17-foot, 2,000-pound robot prop from the movie Transformers upon entering the museum. The Museum wanted to learn what guests' eyes were focusing on. To find out, it partnered with the University of Southern Indiana's Biometrix Discovery Lab last summer on a wayfinding study. With the Lab's eye-tracking glasses and technology, the goal was to provide the Museum with insights that could help them evaluate their current signage to better guide visitors throughout the Museum.

The partnership has been positive for everyone involved. While the research elicited new information for The Children's Museum, the collaboration created more visibility for USI's Romain College of Business. "Partnering with the largest children's museum in the United States absolutely helps the visibility and reputation of the Lab," said Dr. Chad Milewicz, Coordinator of the Biometrix Discovery Lab and Chair of the Economics and Marketing Department. "Whether it is a potential student or a potential organizational partner, when someone sees or hears we are partnering with The Children's Museum of Indianapolis, it catches their attention."

To learn more about partnering with USI's Biometrix Discovery Lab or to schedule a tour, email Dr. Chad Milewicz at [ccmilewicz@usi.edu](mailto:ccmilewicz@usi.edu).

## PET FRIENDLY

USI Housing and Residence Life is changing pet policies for all students living on campus starting in the 2024-2025 academic year by allowing any student to apply to keep a pet in the residence halls and apartments. Animal-Friendly areas will be designated in each housing community for students approved to have a pet reside with them in their assigned living space. USI is currently operating a pilot program that allows students to keep pets in the Branch and Orr Buildings.



## RECOGNIZING ACHIEVEMENTS

Chase Mosser '18, history, sport management, knew being part of an intramural sport elevated his USI experience as a student, "It was how I started to create relationships and friendships," he said. When he joined USI as the Program Coordinator of Intramural and Club Sports, he wanted to find ways to expand the Intramural Sports program, not just in improving it, but also finding ways to recognize students for their work on the field as athletes and officials and proposed the idea of creating an Intramural Hall of Fame. "I love this program and this University," Mosser adds. "This place has given me so much, and all I want to do is give students the same great experience I had."

The bar for inclusion is high, with a threshold of five inductees each year. To be considered for the Hall of Fame as an athlete, a student must excel in sportsmanship, have 124 wins (an average of 30 wins a year over four years), 10 championship wins, or win a state championship in one sport four years consecutively.



# score | BOARD

## WINNING STREAK

Members of the Women's Basketball team said they came to USI to win, and win they did, capturing both the 2023-2024 Ohio Valley Conference (OVC) regular season title and the 2024 OVC Women's Basketball Tournament Championship in March, making Women's History Month that much sweeter. The historic run secured the first USI team championship win in the University's Division I era. The two OVC championships this season were the first OVC titles for USI Women's Basketball and the first OVC team championships in USI Athletics history. "To win both championships in one season in such a strong fashion is an outstanding feat," says Beth DeBauche, OVC Commissioner. "The fact the program is only in year two of the membership transitioning process makes the accomplishment even more remarkable. The future is certainly bright for USI Women's Basketball."

Women's Basketball Head Coach Rick Stein '92 guided the Screaming Eagles to a 22-6 overall record and a 17-1 conference record, improving its OVC wins by 11 games from the 2022-23 campaign. The Screaming Eagles are only the fifth women's basketball team in OVC history to win at least 17 games in the conference season, and they did it in only their second season of Division I play. "Credit goes to each and every player on our team and each and every one of these young women who've put in the time and effort (and) our coaches, [and the] amazing job that they've done this year," Stein says.

Due to restrictions during USI's DI probationary period, the team was not allowed to advance to the NCAA Tournament, but they did secure a place in the Women's National Invitation Tournament (WNIT). There, they doused the fire of University of Chicago's Flames and forged ahead to face University of Wisconsin's Badgers with a record-setting fan base of 3,283 supporters cheering them on. While they didn't win that game, they made us all proud.





## COACH OF THE YEAR

For the fourth time in his career and first time in the Ohio Valley Conference (OVC), Rick Stein, Women's Basketball Head Coach, was named Coach of the Year. Stein, who is in his 25th season as USI Women's Basketball head coach, led USI to its 750th win in program's history in late February, with more than 600 of those wins as an

assistant coach and head coach. Plus, Stein helped coach the Screaming Eagles to their 14th season with 20 or more wins and its 35th overall winning season.

*To read more about the team and other Division I accomplishments, scan the QR code.*



EXPLORE

the Animal World Thro

# SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

## Virgin Reproduction Inspires Research

By Brittany Skinner '20

How did a female Jamaican boa snake, housed in USI's Biology Department, which has had no contact with any male snake for seven years produce a clutch of offspring? That is what Dr. Kyle Mara, Associate Professor of Biology, Dr. Kim Delaney, Interim Assistant Dean of the Pott College of Science, Engineering, and Education and Associate Professor of Biology, and undergraduate biology student David Graber '24 are investigating.

This phenomenon of a virgin birth, known scientifically as parthenogenesis (aka, asexual reproduction), is not uncommon among some snake species, but it is unheard of for the Jamaican boa species.

The research being conducted by Mara, Delaney and Graber on the Jamaican boa is considered pure or basic research, meaning it

aims to improve scientific theories to better understand and predict natural phenomena. Basic research can lead to translational research, which aims to provide applicable results to directly benefit human health. Transitional research can eventually lead to clinical research, determining the safety and effectiveness of the discoveries on human subjects. While in many cases basic research does not lead to further research, it does contribute to our knowledge of the natural world we live in.

Mara is providing information about the biology of the snakes and the normal mating procedures, while Delaney and Graber are comparing the DNA of the mother and the offspring to explain how she gave birth without being bred with a male. "I have been keeping and breeding snakes and other reptiles for 18 years," says Mara of his experience. "During that time, I have successfully kept and produced offspring from dozens of species."

ugh

In species with low population sizes, such as the Jamaican boa, parthenogenesis may seem like a solution to increasing their numbers but depending on how often it occurs, it could create challenges for their survival. "If we are able to show parthenogenesis in this species, it would have significant implications for the genetic diversity of this threatened species in the wild along with captive breeding programs attempting to preserve this species," says Mara.

While creating babies via parthenogenesis would add more individuals to the total population, it would decrease genetic diversity. In most cases, sexual reproduction creates more genetic diversity which increases the chances the species could survive changes to their environment through natural selection.

If they are unable to show parthenogenesis in the Jamaican boa, the research will still prove an unusual phenomenon—that the snake stored sperm in her body for seven years. Such long-term storage is a rare occurrence in snakes and the ability of females to store viable sperm within the reproductive tract has mostly occurred in periods of months to a few years at most.

No matter their discovery, this snake has done something extremely rare and the research of Mara, Delaney and Graber into this phenomenon will not only expand our understanding of reproduction, but fertility and species conservation as well.

## parthenogenesis

[par-thuh-noh-jen-uh-sis]

*noun, Biology.*

1. development of an egg without fertilization

## A Study in Snakes

By Brittany Skinner '20

The leaves are changing, and the wind is rustling through the trees as Dr. Kyle Mara, Associate Professor of Biology, leads a group of students in his herpetology course, Biology of Reptiles and Amphibians, down a road that has been closed off temporarily for the migration of thousands of snakes.

Twice a year, in the spring and fall, 2.5 miles of Snake Road in the Shawnee National Forest in southern Illinois closes to all non-foot traffic to allow for the migration of 22 species of snakes. Weather permitting, Mara travels with USI students to observe native reptiles and amphibians in the wild. He leads the hike down the road discussing any species they encounter and the biology of why the migration takes place. In the spring, the snakes move from their winter hibernation spots into the swamps and wetlands for breeding activities and in the fall, they move from the summer breeding grounds to the bluffs where they will hibernate. The most common snake seen during the migration is a cottonmouth, or water moccasin, one of three main venomous snakes native to Illinois.

"Hands on research, whether in the classroom or outside of class activities, is at the core of USI's Pott College of Science, Engineering, and Education's mission of 'Learning by Doing'. The struggles and triumphs of designing, implementing and analyzing their own research projects gives students a valuable insight into the process of gaining new information in real-world scenarios," Mara says of the importance of research for students. "Research is frustrating at times, but the exhilaration of discovering something that no one else yet knows is one of the best parts of being a scientist."




## Swimming with Sharks: Underwater Research

By C. L. Stambush

**F**aculty's independent research is key to student successes, and earlier this year Dr. Brent Summers, Associate Professor of Biology, headed to TREC (Tropical Research and Education Center) in Ambergris Caye, Belize, to serve as Scholar in Residence while studying life in the Mesoamerican barrier reef, the world's second largest barrier reef. "I have several independent projects including those that are looking at the percentage of coral cover in protected versus non-protected reef areas," he said. "I'm also doing several smaller projects on marine fishes, and at least one on a marine mollusk called the 'flamingo tongue.'"

Research such as this not only provides insight and understanding to the health, diversity and ecological connections of underwater life, but it impacts the lives of Belizeans. "My research will help to protect and conserve important ecological and economic resources on the reef," Summers says. "The economy of this area is highly dependent on a strong and healthy reef ecosystem, which provides economic benefits from the tourism that it creates."

Summers is uniquely familiar with the TREC facility, as he has taken groups of USI biology students there for the past 15 years, providing them an opportunity to learn about marine ecosystems. "This is a popular course with students as it provides a cost-effective short-term study abroad opportunity," he says. 



*Hope Burdette*



# FIELD NOTES

Alumni Drawn to Work/Volunteer with Animals

by C. L. Stambush

**A**cross disciplines and degrees, some alumni have chosen to embrace animals of all sorts as part of their personal and professional lives. Whether volunteering at local animal shelters, earning certifications to employ dogs as part of their social service work, creating therapeutic devices for racehorses and more, USI alumni tell us how their lives have intersected with the animal kingdom.



*Melanie Stewart*



*Darla Perigo*

# Alumni Gone Wild

## FILE NAME:

**April (Hensley) Beard '09** • Biology • 7th Grade Math, 8th Grade Volleyball, Basketball and Track Teacher/  
Jim Ned Middle School

## DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY:

I worked with animals for a long time as a wildlife biologist doing fieldwork and then as a wildlife rehabilitator/caretaker in sanctuaries and zoos before becoming a teacher. I credit Dr. Bandoli\* with giving me the start to my [biologist] career. After graduation, I went to Puerto San Carlos for a year to intern working with blue crabs, whales, octopuses and sea turtles. I went on to intern at a big cat sanctuary in Bridgeport, Texas. I got my first full-time job at Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation in Kendalia, Texas, as an animal caretaker, wildlife rehabilitator and wildlife educator and trainer to incoming apprentices.

## REFLECTION:

Teaching zoo teens [programs] and apprentices wildlife rehabilitation showed me I was meant to be a teacher.

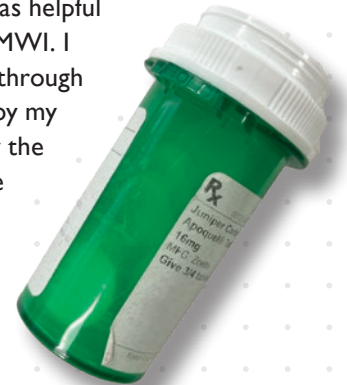
*\*James Bandoli, Professor Emeritus of Biology*



*April Beard*

**File Name:** **Matthew Miller M'22** • Healthcare Administration • Pharmacy Manager/MWI Animal Health

**Activity:** My pharmacy team and I are responsible for providing prescription product orders from a licensed veterinarian to end users/pet owners. My education from USI's online MBA program was helpful in obtaining my current role with MWI. I use many of the skills I developed through the program daily. I very much enjoy my current job and feel encouraged by the positive effect our work has on the health of the animals we serve.



**File Name:** **Keri (Duckworth) Bush '10** • Art • Owner/  
Wildfox Studios; Social Media and Marketing Coordinator/  
Project Coyote

**Reflection:** My dad has always said, "Do something you love, and you'll never work a day in your life." This advice has guided me to intertwine my love for animals and art into my professional journey. Interacting with animals and telling their stories has become a central tenet of my career, which has taught me valuable lessons in compassion, responsibility and ecology.



*Keri Bush*



Laura Gibson



**File Name:** Laura (Draper) Gibson '13

• Biology • Associate Veterinarian/College Mall Veterinary Hospital

**Activity:** I have been involved in the veterinary field since I was in high school! Although I knew I wanted to be a vet since I was a kid—it was just in my DNA—I have held lots of

positions: shelter volunteer, kennel attendant, vet tech, ASPCA intern, veterinary student and now a full-fledged Doctor of Veterinary Medicine!



Jake England

**File Name:** Jacob "Jake" England '07 • Biology • Prosthodontist/United States Army

**Activity:** I teach residents at Schofield Barracks in Hawaii. I've been deployed to Kuwait and used to work in the White House Medical Unit in Washington D.C. Occasionally I get to do dentistry on military service dogs.



Don Daniel

**File Name:** Don Daniel '73

• Communications • Ranger/ Great Sand Dunes, National Park Services

**Activity:** My career as a mounted Ranger began riding patrol in the Grand Canyon in 1975. In 1989, I joined the Reno Police Department, and two years later myself and four other officers started the first Horse Mounted Unit in the state of Nevada. In 2010, I returned to summer jobs with the Park Service, first in Yosemite Valley (California), then Bridger Teton National Forest (Wyoming) then Yellowstone. Riding horseback in the backcountry with grizzly bears and bison puts my riding skills to the test.

More...

Alumni Gone Wild

- **Patrick "Pat" Ziemer '73**  
• Communications • Founder and CEO/Magna Wave PEMF and Aura Wellness
- **Kyle Godfrey '16**  
• Accounting and Professional Services • Senior Accountant/ Denver Zoo
- **Karla (Mathieu) Haas '82**  
• Social Science • Founder/ Rudy Green's Doggie Cuisine

Alumni Animal Houses

- **Dana (Titzer) Pool '12**  
• Management • Human Resource Business Partner/ Best Friends Animal Society
- **Kendall (Cummings) Paul '95**  
• Communications • CEO/ Vanderburgh Humane Society, Inc.

# Alumni Animal Houses

## FILE NAME:

**Amanda (Guthrie) Klotsch '04** • Public Relations and Advertising • President and Founder/Redemption Rescue, Inc.

## DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY:

I help dogs and cats sitting in shelters get a second chance. I have always loved animals and became a volunteer for multiple local rescues in 2007. I wanted to start my own rescue so I shifted gears in 2015 and became a realtor so my schedule would have the flexibility to run a rescue.

## REFLECTION:

Redemption Rescue, Inc. is still going strong, [so far] helping over 1,000 dogs and cats find their forever home!



*Amanda Klotsch*

**File Name:** **Lauren Perigo '13 M'24** • Mathematics and German Studies • Founder/Warrick Tails on Trails

**Reflection:** It is a great feeling to give these dogs some exercise, companionship, love and exposure while they wait for their forever homes. It is also a place for community members to get exercise, make friends and give back. I have created so many great friendships through this program!

**File Name:** **Cameron Lewis '20** • English • Clinic Receptionist/Vanderburgh Humane Society

**Activity:** I have the privilege to meet so many new animals every single day, whether they're ones at the shelter looking for homes or an already adopted pet coming in to be spayed or neutered.



*Lauren Perigo*



# Alumni Pet Projects

(Tardigrade)



## FILE NAME:

Steve Bohleber '72 • Political Science and History  
• Attorney

## DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY:

My aspirations to be a research or wildlife biologist were redirected by the turmoil of the 1970s so I became a "citizen scientist." I have done bat research in the rainforests of Peru and the caves of Kentucky alongside the world's leading bat biologists. I have also become an active and published wildlife/nature photographer. It has helped me advocate for wildlife conservation with photographs of the beautiful animals and natural places around the world.

## REFLECTION:

My proudest connection to the animal world has been my 25-year affiliation with the world's most complete All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory, which continues its quest to discover and catalogue all life forms above the bacterial level in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. So far, nearly 1,100 forms of life previously unknown to science have been discovered. I am proud that one of them has been named after me because of my volunteer and financial support of the project. A tardigrade with the common name Bohleber's Waterbear (*Milnesium bohleberi*) has given me an "immortality" and unique connection to an animal that few can claim.



Steve Bohleber

**File Name:** Alexander "Alex" Kessler '13 • Psychology  
• Case Manager/Echo Housing Corporation • Volunteer Dog Walker at the Vanderburgh Humane Society

**Reflection:** It's something that I can look forward to after a stressful week. It brings me happiness to be able to get outside, walk around the park and get some time with the dogs. It motivates me to get out of my house and exercise while also getting pet therapy from the dogs. It's a win-win for everyone.



Alex Kessler

**File Name:** Michelle (Carrier) Jones '11 M'18 • Radiologic and Imaging Sciences, Health Administration • CT Technologist/Owensboro Health Regional Hospital • Fosters dogs

**Reflection:** Working in healthcare can take a physical and mental toll, especially these last couple of years, so playing with puppies helps. Adoption meetings are a favorite thing of mine because I love seeing the animals meet and fall in love with their new family.





Emily Patton

**FILE NAME:**

Emily Patton M'20 • Business Administration  
• Marketing Brand Manager/Escalade Sports

**DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY:**

I am a volunteer for several rescues and have a hobby of creating content on Instagram for dogs' accounts. [One dog], Winston, was recently diagnosed with hemangiosarcoma, a very aggressive cancer, and given three months to live. I created a bucket list for him, and we have done so many local, fun things. But my biggest objective is for Winston to inspire others to give back to animals in need, as he did with me.

**REFLECTION:**

Winston's Instagram account is such a creative outlet for me—it serves as a playful account where I can test out ideas or content strategies I can then bring to the social media accounts I help manage at work.



Gennie Adams

**File Name:** Geneva "Gennie" Adams '06

• Theatre Arts and French Studies •  
Title Examiner/Near North Title Group  
• Volunteer Docent at Mesker Park Zoo  
& Botanic Garden

**Activity:** I have been a Docent at the Zoo for 13 years. Teaching people about animals they would not normally get to interact with is really great and, of course, I love spending time with the animals too.

**File Name:** Beth (Edwards) Poppre '94

• Communications • Assistant Professor  
and Administrative Manager/A.T. Still  
University of Health Sciences • Agility  
Trainer/Competitor

**Reflection:** My passion for dog agility has helped me maintain work-life balance in my career in higher education.



Beth Poppre

**File Name:** Jennifer Bufkin '98 • Speech,  
Communications, Theatre (Teaching) • English Teacher/  
Owensboro Public Schools • Volunteer Rescue Center  
Manager and Board Member

**Reflection:** My communications background from USI is extremely helpful in my work with SparKy Rescue. Beyond just caring for the animals, I spend a lot of time doing public relations work, social media, communicating with potential adopters and marketing our adoptable pets. I spend many hours each week, in addition to my time teaching, to help grow our nonprofit, no-kill rescue to better the Owensboro community.



More...

## Alumni Pet Projects

- **Tami Jaramillo Zuniga M'12**
  - Liberal Studies • TRIO Student Support Services Academic Counselor/ University of Southern Indiana • Fostered 30 dogs
- **Melanie Stewart '17**
  - Exercise Science • Personal Trainer/517 Fitness • Fosters critically sick kittens for the Vanderburgh Humane Society
- **Precious "Hope" Burdette '23**
  - Art • Graphic Designer/ GreenLight Collectibles • Shows dogs as her hobby
- **Jennifer (Jones) Laval '73**
  - Elementary Education • Retired Case Manager/Indiana Family and Children Services • Volunteer at the Vanderburgh Humane Society for 10 years
- **Norma Lawrence Unser '00**
  - Public Relations and Advertising • President/ CCUBED LLC • Animal Shelter Volunteer
- **Darla Perigo '14 M'18**
  - Business Administration and Communication • Communication Associate/ USI's Romain College of Business • Volunteer Photographer for Warrick Tails on Trails



Jane Gilbert

# Alumni Lending a Paw

## FILE NAME:

**Cynthia "Cyndie" (Brashear) Kieffer M'05**

- Social Work • Independent Services Coordinator/ Owner and Therapist of Sit.Stay.Heal.

## DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY:

I completed my Master of Social Work thesis on the benefits of animal-assisted interventions when working with people diagnosed with intellectual and developmental disabilities. I am a certified professional practitioner in Animal Assisted Play Therapy, serving people under 18. In 2022, I became an Instructor for the International Institute for Animal Assisted Play Therapy. The dogs also join me in my full-time job [with the Southern Illinois Case Coordination Services].

## REFLECTION:

I am grateful to be able to combine my desire to serve others alongside working with my dogs.

**File Name: Jane Gilbert '01** • Speech, Communications, Theatre (Teaching) • Drama Teacher at EVSC McGary Middle school

**Activity:** I became aware of my dog's "gift" during her stay with my father at his assisted living complex. Her sixth sense of comforting others was obvious by then. I enrolled in a program called K-9 Angels. The dogs trained and passed a course to become certified therapy dogs serving nursing homes, hospitals, etc.



Cyndie Kieffer





*Marcy Crull*

**FILE NAME:**

**Marcy (Hooper) Crull '02** • Health Services  
• Executive Director/Cope Environmental Center

**DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY:**

Our mission is to promote the sustainable use of Earth's resources through education and demonstration. Cope Environmental Center's Living Building is home to tree frogs, aquatic turtles, a sand boa and a corn snake. Our animal ambassadors help teach visitors and students about ecosystems, habitats and sustainability.

**REFLECTION:**

Animals have always been a passion of mine. My family is home to 10 animals. Working at Cope has allowed me to share my passion for animals and teach others the benefits animals have on an ecosystem.

**File Name: Amy (Huebschman) Lutzel '96**

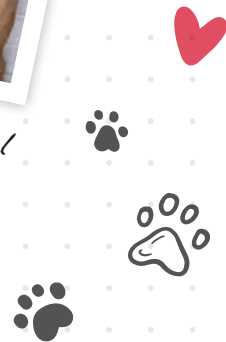
• Communications and German Studies • Wellness  
Director/Ivy Tech Community College

**Activity:** I started Paws 'N Relax in 2013 where Certified Pet Therapy Animals visit campus to help students with stress and anxiety during final exam week. We were the first college in the region to offer pet therapy. 🐾



*Amy Lutzel*

To read more about alumni and animals, scan the QR code.



# PAWS, CLAWS AND PROBES:

A TALE OF ULTRASOUNDS IN THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

By C. L. Stambush

The *hissing*  
and  
*long, sharp claws*  
unnerved alumna and USI  
faculty member Dr. Kathy Peak  
the most.

Mesker Park Zoo & Botanic Garden's Komodo dragon was not a fan of the probe Peak rubbed on her belly either. "Most of the time the animals are sedated or under general anesthesia, but this one was not," said Peak, USI's Clinical Assistant Professor of Radiologic and Imaging Sciences, who holds four degrees from USI: AS'92, BS'11, M'16, D'22. "They just carried her out and plopped her down on a table; she wasn't really having it. She has very long claws and every time I would move the probe around, she would hiss and jerk."

Trained first as a radiologic technologist and then cross-trained in ultrasound, Peak wasn't educated in animal anatomy, and reptile organs weren't remotely familiar. Still, she deftly scanned the unhappy dragon's tummy searching for a reason behind her mood changes.

"She was not acting right, and they were afraid she was egg-bound. That's where they develop eggs, but don't lay their eggs," Peak said. "[The Zoo's staff] wanted me to see if there were any eggs in her that had not passed; to see if that was causing her issue."

Peak has scanned a variety of animals in the six years she's partnered with the Zoo as a community resource. "I've had the opportunity to scan the François langur monkeys, the De Brazza's monkeys, the red-ruff lemurs and the ring-tailed lemurs, the red panda, the clouded leopard, some squirrel monkeys, the jaguar—Beliza—howler monkeys, Fong the sun bear and the Komodo dragon."

USI's relationship with the Zoo began about a decade ago. "My former program chair, Claudine Fairchild, used to go to the Zoo at the request of their veterinarian, Dr. Maria Sprigg, to help out with exams. Dr. Sprigg was a big proponent of being able to utilize community resources that were available to her." Ultrasounds are part of the Mesker Park Zoo's annual wellness checks of its animals, along with physical and

dental examinations, X-rays and lab work. "They just like to have some imaging studies done to make sure there is nothing untoward going on with the animals," said Peak. "If we do find something, they could proactively head that off at the pass before it gets worse."

Peak's expertise has been called on for research projects, too, as in the case of the binturong, Vivvy, pregnant with male and female twins: Pretzel and Poppy. "I did head measurements of the babies to help develop growth tables for that species based on head size and hormone levels found in mom's feces."

The Zoo's Health Services Department is equipped with a small examination/surgery room, but many of the Zoo's animals won't fit through the door. In those cases, the medical team goes to them. Beliza, the jaguar who was diagnosed with cancer in 2019, is the largest animal Peak has scanned, and her favorite, noting the big cat's fur is soft and not wiry as she'd expected.

"Since she is large and a more dangerous animal, instead of coming to the veterinary suite, Zoo staff took all of their equipment to her enclosure," Peak said.

"They sedated her there with a tranquilizer dart and waited until she could be safely moved. Then they placed her on their examination table and finished the anesthesia process. From there, I did my exam, and they did all of theirs."

Animal anatomy is different from human—except for primates, which Peak says are *startlingly similar to humans*. "Probably the biggest challenge, if they are sedated and not under general anesthesia, is the wiggling and moving around," she said "Even a little bit is like trying to catch a moving target. And the fact that they have fur. With humans we use ultrasound gel and that acts as a couplant between the ultrasound transducer and the patient's skin. But with animals, there is an added layer of fur. You have to use a lot of gel. Sometimes I use [isopropyl] alcohol in spray bottles





# Medical Imaging Meets Market Demands

By C. L. Stambush

**D**iagnostic medical sonography (DMS), also called ultrasound, has been part of USI's educational offerings for 19 years, but it did not become its own degree program until 2021. Initially, it was offered to radiology students interested in learning ultrasound as a completion program that added a year or two to their studies and housed under the Radiologic and Imaging Sciences Department. "Now when students graduate, their diplomas say Diagnostic Medical Sonography, instead of Radiologic and Imaging Sciences," said Dr. Kathy Peak, Clinical Assistant Professor of Radiologic and Imaging Sciences.

Sonography is the science of using sound waves to create a diagnostic image to investigate an illness, injury or possible treatment of a disease. A sonographer works under the direction of a physician to perform sonographic examinations of many parts of the human body or, in the case of the work Kathy Peak does with Mesker Park Zoo, animal bodies.

At USI, Peak splits her time teaching in both the DMS and Radiologic Technology (RT) programs. She's excited by the growth happening in RT, too. "With the building renovations in the Health Professions Center, we are getting an entirely new lab and classroom that will include four energized (working) digital X-ray rooms, an energized CT scanner and an MRI simulator closely resembling a working MRI machine."

The new state-of-the-art equipment accompanied by advanced imaging software ensures USI's radiologic and imaging students develop outstanding practical skills through hands-on training and small class sizes. That's probably why since 2008, 100% of graduates seeking employment within the field of imaging sciences were employed within a year of graduation.


to mat the fur so the ultrasound waves can penetrate through the fur and skin and into the organs of interest."

Peak started her career as a radiographer and sonographer in a hospital before eventually landing in academia, including eight years as the technical director of a vascular lab. "I loved it and learned so much from the surgeons, but when Claudine Fairchild contacted me about a teaching opportunity at USI, I applied. I've been here for 12 years now."

Ideally, Peak would love to take students with her when she's called to the Zoo. "We have to have the stars aligned where they are not in class and they are not in clinical education, but there has been at least one [time I took] a student with me," she said. "She was able to scan the animal we were looking at that day."

Since her students can't go to the Zoo, Peak brings the Zoo to them. "I always try to update my students on what I've been looking at, show them some pictures, if I'm able to, tell them what kind of things I found, what we were looking for and the purpose of the study," she said. "They always find that very interesting."

Peak's passion for her students is obvious, it's one of the reasons she was awarded the 2023 Faculty Development Award for the College of Nursing and Health Professions. "It's probably the hardest job I've ever had, but hard in a different way. I have to think in a different way now: how to challenge my students; how to convey the information that comes so naturally to me, at this point in my career, to people who are just learning how to do it."

Mentoring and collaborating make-up the rhythm of Peak's career. "I had some really great mentors that I'm still in contact with," she said. "They taught me a lot; I feel like I owe them my career." Now, Peak is training the next generation of professionals. "One of the most rewarding things to me is when someone calls me their mentor. That's one of the highest compliments they can give me." 





Secrets

20

# Keepers of the Zoo

By C. L. Stambush  
Photography By Elizabeth Randolph

*USI Alumni  
are the Keepers of the Zoo*

Nested on a hill on Evansville's west side is one of the city's jewels: historic Mesker Park Zoo & Botanic Garden. Venture through the entrance gates for a journey through exotic animal kingdoms and you'll find more than penguins and jaguars. At the heart of the lush and leafy jungle are a band of USI alumni working in various capacities. "Most people think we are all taking care of animals," says Erik Beck '94, biology, Executive Director of Mesker Park Zoo & Botanic Garden and the Executive Director of the Zoological Society.

Mesker Park Zoo & Botanic Garden, accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums—the gold standard of zoos for animal welfare and fun, safe, educational experience for everyone—is both a city government entity and a nonprofit.

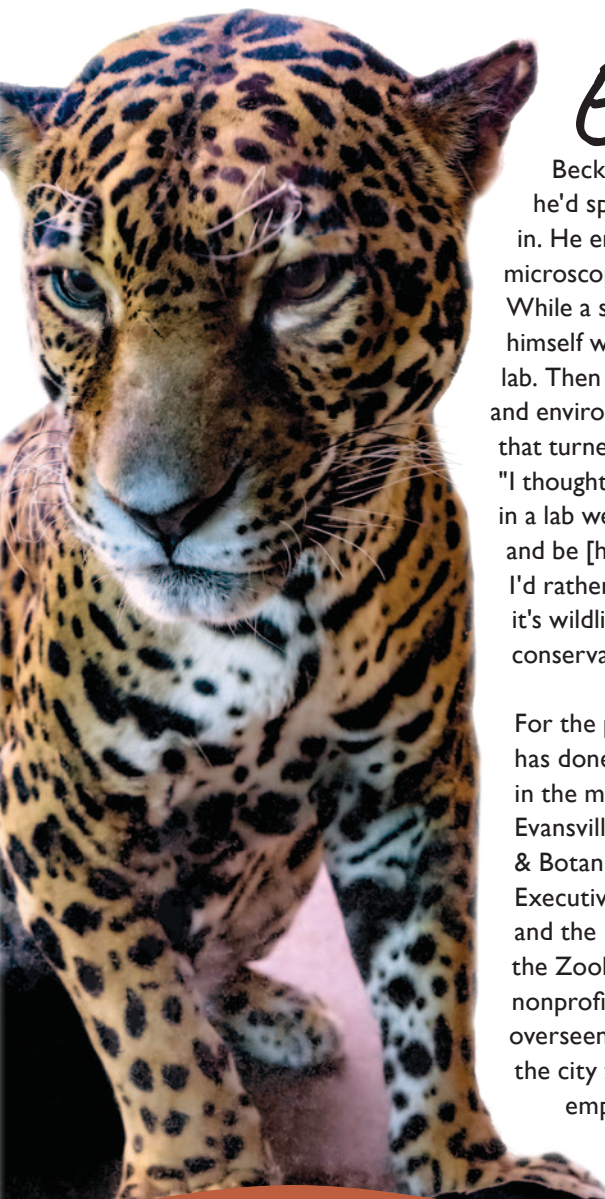
Alumni working for the city, in addition to Beck, are Deputy Director Paul Bouseman '99, art; Zookeeper Loretta (Werner) Manning '93, biology; Botanical Curator Misty (Voelker) Minar '00, geology; Registrar Dana Bae '04, sociology; Zookeeper Lisa (Kaetzel) Merrick '12, biology; Guest Services Molly Mayo '21, public relations and advertising; and Zookeeper Tristan Baughn '20, biology. Alumni working for the nonprofit are Beck, who wears both hats, and Volunteer and Program Coordinator Daytona (Williams) Begle '19, psychology.

Together they bring a combined work history of more than 155 years. Over those years, they have seen the Zoo expand, shift directions and create homes for scores of animals from around the world. Now, they are revealing some of their insider secrets of the Zoo.



# Animal King: Decoding Overall Operations

By C. L. Stambush



Exotic animals were not part of the work environment Erik Beck '94, biology, imagined he'd spend his career immersed in. He envisioned it would involve microscopes, not monkey biscuits. While a student at USI, he saw himself working in a pharmaceutical lab. Then he took a few ecology and environmental biology courses that turned his plan upside down. "I thought, 'I don't want to be stuck in a lab wearing a lab coat all day and be [hunched] over a test tube. I'd rather be outside. Whether it's wildlife biology or nature conservancy.'"


For the past 29 years, Erik has done just that and more in the many roles he's held at Evansville's Mesker Park Zoo & Botanic Garden. As both the Executive Director of Mesker and the Executive Director of the Zoological Society (the Zoo's nonprofit arm) since 2017, Erik has overseen every aspect of running the city zoo and nonprofit. From employees to capital projects, his name and reputation

are on the bottom line. Erik says it was USI Professor Emeritus of Biology Dr. James Bandoli who suggested Erik apply for the position of Zookeeper. "I kind of got lucky and never left," he says. "It's different every day here. You never know what each day will bring."

Erik's rise to the top started at the bottom as a second shift Zookeeper, something the Zoo no longer has, although it is open 365 days a year. "We used to be here around the clock, making deliveries, taking care of animals, making the diets for the next day," he says. After six years, he moved up to Animal Curator, supervising 18 Zookeepers, managing the logistics of caring for the animal collection, overseeing their diets, living environments, travel and mating partners.

In 2006, Erik was promoted to General Curator where he took on his first leadership role, managing the operations of the Zoo with the Animal Department, Facilities Department and Guest Services reporting to him. As General Curator, he was responsible for the Zoo's largest capital project in its history, the \$13 million Amazonia Rainforest. In 2010, he became Director of Operations and managed the nonprofit Zoological Facility—Guest Services, Facilities, Horticulture, Concessions, capital campaigns, construction planning and more.

Zoos—short for zoological parks—have evolved since their Egypt and Mesopotamia origins where rulers and aristocrats created menageries as early as 2500 BCE. They were circuses that never left town and places people went to feed and ride the animals. Erik says zoos began to



radically change 30-40 years ago. So much has changed since he began in 1995. "It's pretty much unrecognizable from where it started." Today's zoos are focused on animal welfare, education, science and conservation. "In the 1960s, visiting a zoo meant seeing animals in cage after cage," Erik says. "We don't do that anymore. Today's habitats are places where these animals live their entire lives. They get extraordinary care from birth, life, geriatric, to passing. Our jaguar, Beliza, has been on cancer medications for three years now. She is doing great. It was an expensive decision, but it is one we would make every single time."

Erik and his team devote a lot of time and energy to determining what animals will be best suited for Mesker Zoo. When they look at species to add to the collection, they consider the conditions of southern Indiana, their knowledge of the species, and what they will take on in terms of space and resources. Will they need to build a state-of-the-art facility? What can they afford to do?

A good example of this, Erik says, is the Rhino Program. "There are five species of rhinoceros in the world—Africa's White Rhinoceros and Black Rhinoceros, and Asia's Sumatran rhino, Javan rhino and the One-Horned rhino. "Asian rhinos are solitary. Our space, the old elephant habitat, allows us to house one rhino. Since [our zoo] can only house one rhino, we need a species that likes to be alone, as opposed to the herd-centric African rhino."


As a young Zookeeper, Erik was part of Mesker's longtime resident elephant Bunny's team charged with transitioning her from zoo life to The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee. "I trained her to get in the trailer and took her down to the sanctuary."

Bunny, an Asian elephant who'd arrived at the Zoo as a baby in 1952 and remained for 40 years, had developed chronic foot disease and other conditions associated with elephants in captivity. "It was emotional, and it divided the city. People were either for it or against it."

Erik says the Zoo today strives to tell complex stories of the interactions between animal welfare, conservation and humans. "The Penguins of Patagonia exhibit is a great example," he says. "Our interpretive plan—the graphics and story [in front of the exhibit]—talks about water, water quality, pollution, climate change, plastics and how decisions humans make, whether it is in the grocery store, our recycling programs, buying a soda in a can versus plastic bottle, impacts these birds."


To ensure the Zoo remains true to its mission, Erik and his team develop a new Master Plan every seven to 10 years, seeking to balance the needs of new animals with those of the current animal collection. In 2023, the undertaking of a new plan began. "The master plan does the hard exercises of what needs to be taken care of to keep these species in our Zoo and then what can we bring in new," Erik says. "We look at the entire Zoo campus, prioritize areas we want to develop, and start looking at the Zoo's story being told to visitors as they walk in."

Looking back over his nearly three decades at the Zoo, Erik can't help but be thankful for those few ecology and environmental biology courses redirecting his life. "We do some incredible things at the Zoo. Not only do we get to deal with the animal side of it but people too. We get to see families engage as they step away from their screens, get outside, enjoy the animals and learn about them from our zookeepers."



The Zoo had 20 births in 2022 and 18 in 2023—not including the hundreds of fish hatched annually.

Did you know?





# Cagey Compliance: Revealing

**A**s a former enforcement agent for a prosecutor's office and a detail-oriented person, Dana Bae '04, sociology, is uniquely suited for Mesker Park Zoo & Botanic Garden's Registrar's position. A Zookeeper for big cats and carnivores for 10 years, she shifted to management 15 years ago. As the Registrar, she is responsible for keeping the Zoo compliant with animal regulations, overseeing the data zookeepers record daily into a global animal database system (ZIMS—Zoological Information Management Software), obtaining permits for endangered and rare species, securing loan agreements between zoos, tracking funding sent to various animal conservation initiatives and more. "Most people don't know how zoos are run," she says. "People think they are places where animals are displayed or bred, but it is so much more complicated than that."

During Dana's decade and a half as the Registrar, the role has morphed from data entry to management and compliance. "When I started out, it was considered more of an office and recordkeeping position that handled permits," she says. Zookeepers used to turn in daily handwritten records of the animals they cared for and she would type it all into the Zoo's computer system.

Her skill as an accurate recordkeeper means she's called on to help the veterinary team during surgeries or when an animal dies. "Sometimes we have to knock down a big animal, they have me take notes because I'm good with data and making sure everything, such as time of an injection, is precisely recorded," she says.

Keeping the Zoo compliant is what keeps it open to the public by ensuring the necessary permits are obtained and kept current. "The USDA/Animal Welfare permit is a big one. If we don't have that or don't renew it on time, they can shut our whole Zoo down," Dana says. Other necessary permits for the Zoo are for waterfowl, composting, plant sales, depredation and more. "We have permits that allow us to trap birds of prey and relocate them, so they don't harm our animals."

The Zoo also has a permit for the conservation work it is doing to restore the Eastern hellbender salamanders to Indiana. "We have a 'special purpose-possession permit' because they are endangered and we are breeding them, even though they are all owned by the State."

The water in the Penguins of Patagonia exhibit is heated and cooled by state-of-the-art geothermal controls in the Zoo's Lake Victoria.

**Did you know?**



While a passion for animal welfare is in Dana's DNA, finding her footing in the animal world was

# Registrar Workings

By C. L. Stambush

not so straightforward. She began at USI as a traditional student studying biology, changed her major several times then took a series of jobs without finishing her degree before being hired at Mesker in 1999. It was the Zoo that allowed her to finally earn her degree in sociology. "When I started here, I could only go to school part-time, and my boss worked with me [to attend classes], allowing me, as a Zookeeper, to leave in the middle of the day to finish my degree," she says.

Today, Dana's sociology education plays a role in her work as the Zoo's Registrar, especially in dealing with people from cultures around the world to save some of the planet's rarest animals. "I do a lot of animal shipping and when you study cultures you study a lot of things around the world, and that understanding helps when shipping to other countries," she says. Studying sociology also inspired her love of travel. Every few years she heads out to immerse herself in a different culture: Kenya, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, Mexico, Jamaica, Nepal and more. "People ask, 'Do you go to all these countries just to look at animals?' I go to all those places to visit the culture, but the animals are tied to it."



Photo of Eastern Hellbender eggs courtesy of Mesker Park Zoo & Botanic Garden



# Wild Success:

"There are so many forms of life in the world. You really couldn't make up anything more fantastic than what's already here," says Mesker Park Zoo & Botanic Garden's Paul Bouseman '98, fine arts, who started at the Zoo part-time during college in 1991. "I couldn't imagine living in a world without those incredible animals and places."

He means it, too. As the Zoo's Deputy Director, Paul helps oversee its conservation work locally, regionally and internationally, to ensure the world won't be without them. "Everything we do leads back to conservation," he says.

Since Mesker Park Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums\* (AZA), it is required to not only care for animals, but also invest in operational best practices, participate in conservation work in the wild and at the Zoo, engage in education and outreach, and give direct monetary support to conservation projects and organizations. "We try to focus on the animal conservation programs that relate to the animals people see at [our] Zoo. On almost every one of our signs, you can find something you can do to help the species that you're looking at, like reducing plastic waste and protecting water quality. It's a high priority for us, to enable people to act to preserve nature."

The Zoo is a volcanic garden, which supports water conservation and geothermal energy.

Did you know?



In one conservation success story, the Zoo's staff have been working with other partners in the state since 2014 to help prevent the extinction of the Eastern hellbender salamander in Indiana. "This completely aquatic species is the third largest salamander in the world and is susceptible to poor water quality in the

rock-bottom streams it inhabits," Paul explains. "By the early 2000s, the whole state population was limited to a handful of individuals in one watershed, the Blue River. The population was too small to be self-sustaining."

Visitors can see how the Zoo raises and conditions the salamanders for successful release and survival in the wild in a public exhibit. "We have an artificial stream here at the Zoo, where we condition juvenile animals to living in a stream, because we can recreate the currents."

The Zoo also worked directly to improve the natural habitat of the salamanders in Indiana, by "doing a lot of education about water quality and pollution control through our streams," says Paul. "In 2023, biologists captured a juvenile hellbender in the Blue River that had resulted from natural breeding. This was proof positive that the hellbender population had recovered to the point that natural breeding was again occurring in the state of Indiana."

The Zoo's work has also made a difference to a wolf subspecies in the Southwest United States, helping bring the Mexican Gray Wolf "from the brink of extinction







# Divulging Conservation Efforts

by AmyLu Riley '93

back into their role as elk and deer predators in their natural habitat. In 2019, three wolf pups born at Mesker Park Zoo were cross-fostered into the wild population through the United States Fish and Wildlife Service Mexican Wolf Recovery Program," says Paul. "The first step in cross-fostering is locating a den with pups of a similar age. Then the pups born at the Zoo are placed in the unattended dens of the wild mother. When she returns to the den, she will raise them as her own. It makes for a very smooth transition to the wild for those animals."

The Zoo's involvement in several other conservation initiatives is also helping both far and near—from Humboldt penguins in Peru, to the local salamander population in Evansville's Wesselman Woods Nature Preserve. Zoo staff serve on over 30 AZA Taxon Advisory Groups as expert advisors on conservation needs and other issues for animals from amphibians to xenarthra. Direct financial support for the conservation of range country and to AZA's SAFE (Saving Animals From Extinction) program helps protect African lions, cranes, cheetahs, giraffes, gold frogs, ground hornbills, jaguars, langurs, lemurs, North American Songbirds, North American Monarchs, penguins, red pandas, rhinos, tigers and vaquitas.

The Zoo also participates in 51 of the AZA's 500 Species Survival Plans to manage genetically diverse, demographically varied and biologically sound populations of animals in human care.

Plant life is another conservation focus. Staff members are currently working on a project to preserve Indiana's only known location of the Ovate-leaved Catchfly plant, by reducing competition from invading poison ivy and maple saplings, and are growing "an assurance population" of the plants

at the Zoo's Botanic Garden from collected seeds "as a safeguard against local extinction."

Another of many conservation success stories is happening at the Gift Shop, where visitors' basket purchases help protect rainforests. "We developed a partnership with Dr. Daniel Bauer [USI's Professor of Anthropology] to help support conservation in South America. The sustainable baskets that we have in the gift shop through the Chambira palm project is a way for [Peruvian] people to support themselves in a way that doesn't harm the native wildlife."

The project is an example of how local individuals and organizations can innovate to support global conservation. Paul says Zoo personnel are always looking for ways to integrate conservation in all of their thinking, and to provide interactions with visitors that create empathy for and interest in conservation.

"At the heart of what we do every day is to look after the animals in our care, but also to hopefully impact positive change and measure that change both in the region and globally."

*\* AZA accreditation is the gold standard for animal care, conservation, education, guest experience, safety, facilities, staffing and operations.*





# Ground Zero:

## Unmasking Botanical Forces

By C. L. Stambush

**M**isty (Voelker) Minar '00, geology, Mesker Park Zoo & Botanic Garden's Botanical Curator, does not mind that two of the Zoo's tortoises (Aldabra tortoises named King and Koopa) winter in one of the three greenhouses she supervises, since she's had two leopard tortoises (Cleo and Herby) of her own for the past 25 years. "I've had them longer than my children who are 18 and 21 this year," she says. "[The tortoises] live outside in the summer and inside a heated room in the garage in the winter with our rescue hermit crabs. We also have three dogs and two cats, along with a fish tank. So not only do I work at the Zoo, but I also live in one!"

The Zoo has been Misty's home for 30 years, starting part-time on the grounds maintenance crew while attending USI. As a student, she changed her major five times before finding her roots in geology. "I didn't know what I wanted to do," she says. "In the Geology Club people were so cool and so fun and camped all the time, I was like, 'Oh, maybe this is me.'"

Misty's enthusiasm for the program came from Dr. Paul Doss, Professor of Geology. "I went on a lot of trips with him [and my classmates], and we had some great times camping and learning and having fun," she says. "Some of the professors [in the program] had different expertise, so it was nice to get a little bit of every discipline. I just loved it all enough to know that's what I wanted to do versus biology. Plus, I'd have had more math with biology so I'm like 'no thanks.'"

As the Botanical Curator for the Zoo's 45-acre campus, Misty's responsibilities include greenhouses, a staff of four full-time and 12 seasonal employees, plus many volunteers. "We do everything from cutting down trees to maintaining the trees to keeping the pathways clean, the beds clean," she says. "We take care of all interiorscapes that have plants in them, from Amazonia to the Komodo Dragon. We also coordinate and provide plant material from a special browse list that serves as part of the diet for some animals and as enrichments [to enhance] their natural behaviors."

Aside from maintaining the grounds and exhibits, Misty and her crew propagate plants for the Zoo's annual plant sales—24 years and going—as well as the orchid shows—15 years now. "We love to use native plants in our sales because they have an important relationship with native birds and bugs that is vital to the food web," she says. "We like to throw in some





fun, more exotic plants, too. We've got some cool things here like a caladium that came from seed on the Amazon River. You won't find it at box stores or even some of the nurseries."

While Misty's past is rooted in her passion for the Zoo, it is the future she's most excited about. "I want to be sure the Zoo continues to move in the direction we are going and help to achieve our mission. I am excited for [the Zoo's] 100-year anniversary coming up in April of 2028. The history is fascinating and it's crazy to see what it has evolved into

[during the past] 100 years! I am very passionate about this place and want to make sure everyone else is as well!"

The Zoo is home to tens of thousands of plants (native and exotic) from more than 3,000 plant species.

Did You Know?



# Elusive

**B**uilt seamlessly into the rockface of Mesker Park Zoo & Botanic Garden's Amazonia exhibit is a secret door. Zookeeper Loretta (Werner) Manning '93, biology, who oversees the fish tank area, free-flight birds and the toucans (who were rescued from an animal smuggling ring in Texas), opens it and leads us through. "This area is what we call the mezzanine area, it houses reptiles (boas and lizards) and insects. I also have a breeding pair of lesser Madagascar tenrecs. They are not Amazonian, obviously, but they are in my area because we have [some of] the best temperatures," she says.

The tenrecs, along with several tortoises, winter in the Amazonia exhibit for the warmth. In addition to these visitors are Caribbean giant cockroaches that don't so much fly as "fall with style" and a pair of emerald tree boas born in the same clutch. "Their camouflage is that they look like an unripe pile of bananas on a tree," says Loretta.

Loretta knew as a young girl watching the graceful stingrays at SeaWorld that fish were in her future. "I have always loved and been fascinated by fish and the underwater world. There's so much to explore and wonder about." An Evansville native,

Loretta majored in biology and participated in a student research trip to Belize her senior year at USI. The trip was amazing, but the Biology Program was no walk on the beach. "Dr. Jack Marr [Associate Professor Emeritus of Biology] really



# Insights: Confessing Zookeeper

by C. L. Stambush



made me work for my grades in his classes," she says. "It taught me to work harder than I ever had to in high school or even some of my other college courses."

After graduation, she moved to Nashville, Tennessee, for her first zookeeper job with the Nashville Zoo at Grassmere. "I had the job before I graduated but I came here in 2007," she says over her shoulder as we descend a staircase into the 10,000 square foot Amazonia underbelly. As I follow her down into secret passageways, a macaw's screech rings out. "She hears me, so she knows I'm here," says Loretta.

Crackers, one of the Zoo's two blue and gold macaws, loves Loretta.

The other one, Gandy, not so much. "Macaws are very particular about who they like and trust. Crackers likes me but no one else. Gandy likes everybody but not me," she says.

Both Crackers and Gandy were previously someone's pets before the Zoo took them in. "Macaws can live up to 80 years old. A lot of people don't know that when they get them as pets. They are still, unfortunately, very popular as pets." Gandy did not deal well with being rehomed

to the Zoo. "Crackers used to live with Gandy, who was completely stressed and plucked her head bald," Loretta says, adding she makes sure he has lots of enrichment toys to keep his mind busy and his beak off his feathers.

Like Crackers and Gandy, some of the Zoo's animals have names, but not all. Some are simply known by their gender and species. Others get named by the public, such as when the baby penguin was born in April 2023: Louie Pickle. The two names were strong contenders, so the Zoo christened him with both. "I like to give things names when they earn them, or if we have a tradition of naming them," says Loretta. "The lesser Madagascar tenrecs all have Star Wars themed names because that's what the original pair had as names, so I've given all their offspring Star Wars names."

In a cage near the macaws is Eve, a South American prehensile-tailed porcupine born at another zoo on Christmas Eve. Porcupines are nocturnal and 5-year-old Eve is not interested in Loretta's pleas to come down from her perch high on a branch in her cage. "This is the difference between hand-raised and parent-raised [animals]. She was parent-raised, and these guys are nocturnal, so they don't tend to want to be awake during the day," she says, noting Eve's uncooperativeness.

Eve may not want to engage with us, but Crackers does, and lets out another screech as we turn to leave. I wonder, what confessions is she making?

Once, the Zoo only had one type of monkey biscuit; today it has five to seven different types of biscuits to meet the nutritional needs of various primates.

Did you know?





# Hidden Wildlife: Exposing

Secreted out of sight in a barn and/or private room lives a team of Mesker Park Zoo Ambassador Animals, a collection of 23 species ranging from a striped skunk to tortoises to hissing cockroaches, specifically selected to teach and bring awareness to the public about the importance of protecting ecosystems on our shared planet Earth.

Daytona Begle '19, psychology, is the Zoo's Volunteer and Program Coordinator and *de facto* "booking agent" for Meadow (striped skunk), Clarence (miniature horse), Naya (Kenyan sand boa) and others when it comes to organizing and presenting educational events at schools, nursing homes or large corporations. "Ambassador animals are ones that can be used for programs. We mostly acquire ours through other AZA\* accredited zoos," she says. "When determining if an animal would be a good Ambassador, we look at its size, temperament, personality and the conservation message they can bring to guests."

As a USI student, Daytona knew wildlife would one day be part

of her career, so she trained as a Docent for Mesker. "I always knew I wanted to go into the zoo world, I just wasn't sure what I wanted to do in that world, so being a Docent was my first step into getting a job at one," she says. Today, her role at Mesker involves training and managing its 80 Docents as well as its 40ish Zoo Teens, a program that teaches high school students ages 14-18 life skills through an immersive volunteer program.

Working with so many diverse people, she relies on her USI education to help her read people. "Being a psychology major has helped me understand people a bit better. I need that in this role because I am the face of the Zoo's Education Department," she says. "Whenever someone contacts us for a program, it's me [who helps them]. When groups come, I greet them and present programs.

All the volunteer communications are through me."

Daytona developed her event planning skills at USI, but she was born with an enthusiasm for it and all things education. "I loved USI. I was very involved when I was there. I was part of the Activities Planning Board my whole USI career and that got me involved in doing many events on campus.

There was never a dull moment for me; always something to do."

The Zoo has  
246 animals,  
representing  
151 species  
from around  
the globe.

Did you know?



# Educator Roles

By C. L. Stambush

The events/programs she plans at the Zoo include animal encounters, biofact tables, games and activities for children. "I think people really love our more exotic ambassador animals—like our three-banded armadillo that [people don't see in this area]. He (Bocce) is very active and runs around the whole [program]. The younger kids love our lionhead rabbit. She (Bella Bunny) is very tame, easy to touch and very cute." For the adults, Daytona likes to bring out Meadow. "They really love seeing her. She is great, especially since we have skunks in our area, so we get to teach people why they are not harmful."

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\*Association of Zoos and Aquariums

Photo courtesy of Mesker Park Zoo & Botanic Garden





# Spooky Sightings:

Every time Molly Mayo '21, public relations and advertising, Guest Services Assistant at Mesker Park Zoo & Botanic Garden, looks at Clementine, one of the Zoo's two giraffes, she sees Frankenstein's monster. Not in Clementine's face, but one of her spots. "One of my favorite things about Clementine is she has this little spot at the base of her neck shaped like Frankenstein's monster," says Molly. Since she likes scary movies, it's no surprise she sees a classic spooky figure, even if it does not come from her favorite film: *Halloween*.

In the eight years Molly's worked in the Zoo's Guest Services, she's worked her way up from attendant to senior attendant to assistant manager as one of four Guest Services Leads. "I started here in high school. It was a great little summer job. I could work weekends only, and they were so flexible with my hours through college," she says. "I've always loved it here. It's like a little home away from home."

Being creative and fun has always been central to her roles in Guest Services. She has planned parties for guests who wanted them hosted at the Zoo, designed whimsical displays in the gift shop and led guests to giraffe feedings. "I always try to make the guest experience the best I can," she says. "Some people go to Disney World twice a year, but some people come to the Zoo once a year in the summer and





# Decrypting Guest Experiences

by C.L. Stambush

that is their big trip. So, I try to make it a good, fun experience."


Molly's USI education prepared her well for her current role. "The PR [background] really helps when working with people—to have strong communication skills, people skills and to be able to sell the Zoo in a good light. Marketing helps in the Gift Shop when making displays and putting things where they will sell the best."

As a traditional student, she commuted 10 minutes to campus. "I really enjoyed USI. It wasn't too small, but it wasn't too big. My USI professors were very helpful. There were a few that really made an impact and I still use things I learned at USI every day, especially from John Morris [Instructor in Radio and Television] and Mary Beth Reese [Instructor in Communication]. They showed me different ways to do things and outlets for me that I did not know existed."



Nearly half of the profits from Chambira palm baskets sold in the Zoo's Gift Shop go directly to the Peruvian community that made it.

**Did you know?**

Molly continues that tradition of helping others see things in a new light with the Zoo's clients today, showing them the unique things she has discovered. Like the monster-shaped spot on Clementine. "Whenever people ask, 'How do you tell [the giraffes] apart?,' I always point out the little Frankenstein [monster] shape on the base of her neck." 



View exclusive videos of alumni who work at the Zoo:



# INSIDER INSIGHTS to WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY

By Daniel Craig

## I am a rural person at heart;

raised with a healthy appreciation for nature, wildlife and the beauty found far away from the noise of the city. I find joy in the calm morning waters and the gentle rise of a Great Blue Heron on its way to feed in the shallows. But when I moved to Evansville in 1990, I did not appreciate the wildlife bounty southern Indiana offered at first.

Over the last 30 years, however, I have developed into a hobbyist photographer of landscape and wildlife shots. I am particularly fond of bird photography. There is something about the texture of their feathers, the depth of their eyes and their quizzical poses that appeals to me.

Today, I find southern Indiana to be a beautiful place to explore, full of opportunities to view a wide variety of migrating birds, enjoy dense woodlands and stand beside still waters.

It took me a long time to gather all the gear (most of it second hand) necessary to fully enjoy wildlife photography and to learn my pursuit of capturing nature, so I'll share some of my insights here.

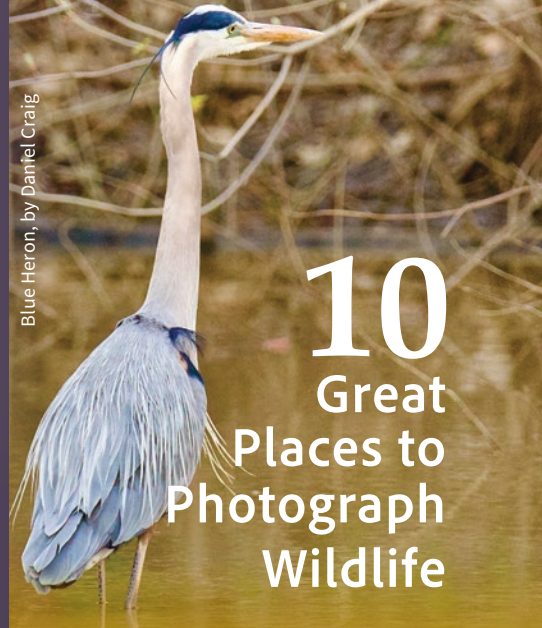


Short-eared Owl, by Daniel Craig

# RAPHY



Red-winged Blackbird, by Daniel Craig



Blue Heron, by Daniel Craig

## 10 Great Places to Photograph Wildlife

### 10 Tips for Taking Great Wildlife Photos

1. Learn the principles of photography first. Practice them regularly to get comfortable shooting in different degrees of light.
  2. DO NOT shoot in auto mode. Shoot manually or in aperture priority mode.
  3. Always try to shoot with the sun at your back.
  4. When photographing at sunset, continuously adjust exposure settings for light, quality of light and the desired shutter speed, at least every other minute.
  5. When using a DSLR, enable one point focus and practice panning and focusing on a moving target with the idea that you are wanting to place the focus point on the eye of an animal.
  6. Pick your location in a manner to isolate your subject without obstruction and be patient.
  7. Learn as much as you can about the species you hope to photograph, including migration paths, habitat, calls, cries and even how their wings sound in flight. You will often hear the bird before you see it.
  8. Study and anticipate the behavior of your subject. Then look for regular patterns that you can trust when you are trying to capture a unique pose or action.
  9. Join local, regional and/or national photography groups on social media, so you can learn from the community.
  10. Learn the rules and culture of wildlife and bird enthusiasts to have a better understanding and respect for wildlife and your fellow enthusiasts.
1. USI's Reflection Lake
  2. USI-Burdette Trail
  3. Hovey Lake
  4. Wesselman Woods Nature Preserve
  5. Howell Wetlands
  6. Bluegrass Fish and Wildlife Preserve
  7. The Patoka River Bottoms and Patoka Lake
  8. The Duke Energy Power Plant
  9. Saunders Woods
  10. The Floodlands South of USI Along the Ohio River



Read what is in Dan's personal camera and lens collection online by scanning this QR code.

*Daniel Craig, Associate Professor of Music and Director of the USI Chamber Choir and Womens Choir, is serving his 33rd year at USI. He is a lecturer in music history/appreciation. Under his direction, the USI Chamber Choir has toured extensively in Poland, Ireland, Germany and Canada. In 2016 and 2018, the Chamber Choir won the Premier Competition at the Mayo International Choral Festival in Castlebar, Ireland.*



Sandhill Cranes, by Daniel Craig

# Howling and Meowing: Survey Shows...

By C. L. Stambush

We asked USI faculty, staff and administrators if they identified as a cat person, dog person or another animal-type person. Of the 214 who spoke up, many said they loved dogs and cats equally, while a handful expressed adoration for hermit crabs, bees, rabbits, horses, bearded dragons, turtles, fish and Miniature Hereford cows.

The reasons some expressed a particular animal preference over others covered a wide range, from allergies to independence to unconditional love to low maintenance to more forgiving natures. Despite the personal partialities, all cited companionship as the number one reason for any pet.



"[Cats] are sophisticated, loving and independent. As being a college professor is a career that requires a LOT of hours at school, having a pet that doesn't require walks or a feeding schedule makes our cat the perfect companion."

"My dog is my buddy! When I received my beagle, Val, as a gift in 2017, I never imagined I would forge as strong of a bond as I now have with her. Throughout my twenties, she moved across state lines with me, traveled, hiked and became my constant companion. When I started dating my now husband, she easily weaseled her way into his heart and was a part of our wedding last year. Without a doubt, she is my soul dog, and I will never have another one like her."

"I truly can't choose between cats and dogs! I have two of each. My dogs are goofy and make me laugh, they do tricks and they love to play. My cats love to cuddle with me, one of them likes to ride on my shoulder and the other one drools! All of my pets are the best!"

## What kind of activities do you do with your pet?



"We love staring into the void together."

"My kids are grown, so now my dogs and grand dogs keep me busy. I've been known to take them trick or treating to friends and family."



# Class Notes

## STAY IN TOUCH

EMAIL us  
at [alumni@usi.edu](mailto:alumni@usi.edu).

UPDATE your  
information  
and send photos  
via the form  
at  
[USI.edu/AlumniUpdate](https://usi.edu/AlumniUpdate).

*Class notes may be edited  
for length or clarity.  
We regret that  
we may not  
be able to use all  
submitted photos, and  
reserve the right to select  
which ones are included.*



## 1980s

**Emily Gartner '84**, business administration, is a self-employed textile artist, teacher in Evansville.

**Shannon Bradley '87**, communications, is a remote Lead Writer of Auto Loans at Nerd Wallet in Newburgh, Indiana.

## 1990s

**Randall Snead '91**, communications, is an olive grower at Casa del Sol Punte in Ninho do Açor, Portugal.

**Elizabeth (Snider) Carter '92**, art, is a Paraprofessional at Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation in Evansville.

**Antone "Tony" Greubel '92**, political science, concluded his assignment at the U.S. Embassy in Suva as Deputy Chief of Mission in June 2023. In August 2023, the State Department detailed Tony for one year to the East West Center in Honolulu, Hawaii, as Diplomatic Fellow. Tony was also recently promoted to the Senior Foreign Service with the rank of Counselor. His spouse, **Izumi Greubel M'94**, secondary education, has joined him in Honolulu, Hawaii.

**Scott Cockrum '93**, English, is Administrative Partner at Lewis Brisbois Bisgaard & Smith LLP in Highland, Indiana.

**Tamara (Drone) Schuler '93**, business administration, is a financial advisor at Bison Financial Group – Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC in Evansville.

**Jason Burkhardt '97**, business administration, is Interim CEO at Helping His Hands Disaster Response in Vincennes, Indiana.

**Wendy Bredhold '98**, sociology, is Senior Manager of the Transmission Initiative at National Audubon Society, working remotely in Evansville. She will be leading the build-out of the grid in support of the clean energy transition while mitigating the impact on birds and wildlife.

**Andrea Greaney '98**, elementary education, is Principal at Corpus Christi School for Catholic Diocese of Evansville in Evansville.

## 2000s

**Jeffery Hay '00**, health services, is Population Health Data Analyst at Vandalia Health Network in Charleston, West Virginia.

**Zachary "Zac" Jackson '01**, economics, is Chief Financial Officer and Controller of the City of Carmel, Indiana.

**Nicole (Wehr) Oser '01**, art, is Creative Project Manager at Branded by Woods in Huntingburg, Indiana.

**Marcy Crull '02**, health services, is Executive Director of Cope Environmental Center in Centerville, Indiana.

**Amanda Miller M'02**, social work, is Co-Director of Faculty Academy for Excellence and Innovation at the University of Indianapolis in Indianapolis, Indiana. She also serves as the Chair of the Sociology Department.

**Stacy Reynolds-Pickett '02**, interpersonal-organizational communications, is an Academic Advisor at Danville Area Community College in Danville, Illinois.

**Todd Palmer M'03**, social work, is BSW Program Director at Brescia University in Owensboro, Kentucky. He also earned his doctorate of social work in May 2023.

**April Settles '05**, accounting and professional services, is Chief Financial Officer at Daviess Community Hospital in Washington, Indiana.

**Kari Ford '06**, elementary education, is Associate Superintendent of Catholic Schools at Catholic Diocese of Evansville in Evansville.

**Grace (Flanagan) Nixon '06**, public relations and advertising, is Senior Manager at Eagle Hills Consulting in Indianapolis, Indiana.

**Jason Gossett '07**, accounting and professional services, and **Jennifer Gossett '14**, early childhood education, have hit the road with two of their four children, living out of a camper (even though they had never camped before). Jason is Corporate Director of Internal Audit at The Queen Casino & Entertainment and Jennifer was an elementary teacher at Springs Valley in French Lick, Indiana. They will homeschool their daughters Lydia (14 years old) and Daphen (8 years old) while their twin sons, Gavin and Aiden, are away at college.

**Philip Smith '07**, radio and television, is Police Chief of the Evansville Police Department in Evansville.

**Alejandra Wong '07**, social work, is Head Language Assistant at Wall Street English in Merignac, France.

**Gabriel John Hayden '08**, accounting and professional services, finance, is Manager of State Income Tax at Ernst & Young LLP in Indianapolis, Indiana.

**Andrew Wilkins '08**, public relations and advertising, is Director of Marketing at GBC Bank in Greenfield, Indiana.

**Nathan Beach '09**, political science, is Broker/General Manager of Property Management Incorporated in Newburgh, Indiana.

**Adam Trinkel '09**, political science, public relations and advertising, is Executive Director for Downtown Evansville Economic Improvement District in Evansville.

## 2010s

**Rachel (Atkins) Cox '10**, business, is Global Supply Chain Transformation Manager at Kimball International in Jasper, Indiana.

**Danielle (Chase) Mullican '10**, communication studies, is Power Supply & Renewables Technical Training Specialist at CenterPoint Energy in Evansville.

**Dani Finkelstein '11**, business administration, is General Adjuster at Engle Martin in Severance, Colorado.

**Amber Hasenour '11**, marketing, is Web Merchandising Specialist at Touch of Class in Huntingburg, Indiana.

**Kelsey Meier '11 M'17**, elementary education, school administration and leadership, is Principal at St. Joseph School for Catholic Diocese of Evansville in Evansville.

**Michaela (Gentry) Bolling '13**, elementary education, is a K-12 ESL teacher at Southwest Dubois County School Corporation in Huntingburg, Indiana.

**Laura Gibson '13**, biology, is Associate Veterinarian at College Mall Veterinary Hospital in Bloomington, Indiana.

**Jordan Lorenzo '13**, history, is Deputy Prosecuting Attorney at Bartholomew County Prosecutor's Office in Columbus, Indiana.

**Samantha Owen '13**, social work, is Team Leader at Ireland Home Based Services in Evansville.

**Kristina (Ladika) Wright '13**, business administration, is Quality Assurance Manager at WorkOne in Terre Haute, Indiana.

**Ashlynn Johnson '14 M'19**, health services, health administration, is Member Development Officer at Indiana Members Credit Union in Evansville.

**Matthew Benningfield '15**, mathematics, is Data Scientist 2 at Humana in Louisville, Kentucky.

**Jeffrey Beranger '15**, engineering, is Principal Project Engineer at Westinghouse Electric Company in Newington, New Hampshire.

**Ashton (Mossberger) Logan '16**, social work, is Brokerage Assistant at Acadia Commercial in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

**Chelsey (Hedrick) Robling '16**, criminal justice studies, is Implementation Project Manager at Navitus Health Solutions in Madison, Wisconsin.

**Kaelyn Macke M'17**, nursing education, is the owner of Awakened Goddess Yoga in Evansville.

**Candyce Meadows '17**, psychology, is a Family Advocate at YWCA in Evansville.

**Lynde Anquillare '18**, elementary education, is a School Support Administrator at Catholic Diocese of Evansville in Evansville.

**Timothy Bennett '18**, philosophy, is Reservations Coordinator at University of North Carolina, Wilmington in Wilmington, North Carolina.

**Kelsey (Shannon) Boss '18**, geology, is Environmental Specialist I at Lochmueller Group in Evansville.

**Mitchell Ferguson '18**, engineering, passed his professional engineering exam and is now a licensed professional engineer.

**Rosalinda Guardado '18**, Spanish studies (teaching), is a Spanish Teacher at Southridge High School for Southwest Dubois County School Corporation in Huntingburg, Indiana.

**Alexander Palstring '18**, accounting and professional services, is Senior Accountant Officer at Field & Main Bank in Henderson, Kentucky.

**Tia (O'Neil) Rohner '18**, public relations and advertising, is a Counseling Administrative Assistant at Bosse High School for Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation in Evansville.

**Taylor (Davis) Woolsey '18**, elementary education, special education, is a Special Education Teacher at Westfield High School for Westfield Washington Schools in Westfield, Indiana.

**Ilese (Sabelhaus) Anderson M'19**, healthcare administration, is Executive Director of Cedar Lake Residencies at Cedar Lake, Incorporated in La Grange, Kentucky.

**Aaliyah Hoskins-Perkins '19**, health services, is Registrar at Headland Regional Medical Center in Marion, Illinois.

**Lauren (Wojcuch) LaFaive '19**, communication studies, is Director of Communications and Marketing at Plymouth Community School Corporation in Plymouth, Indiana.

**Gloria (Strickland) Lynn '19**, social work, is a preschool co-teacher at Indiana University Campus Children's Center in Bloomington, Indiana.

**Heith Simpson '19**, English, is a Business Intelligence Analyst at Appalachian State University, working remotely in Rockport, Indiana.

**Matthew Tomlin '19**, economics, is a Forensic Autopsy Technician and running for 2024 Floyd County Coroner in New Albany, Indiana. He also earned his Master of Science in Physiology from the University of Louisville in Louisville, Kentucky.

## 2020s

**Whitney Bartley '20 M'21**, psychology, healthcare administration, started an Organizational Leadership PhD program at Adler University of Chicago, Illinois, in Spring 2023.

**Ashlyn Chieffo M'20**, business administration, is a Supervisor at DGPerry CPAs + Advisors in Canfield, Ohio.

**Ashleigh Kormelink '20**, health services, is Program Coordinator I of Women's Reproductive Behavioral Health at Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, South Carolina. She has also published an article this year in an academic journal titled "Anxiety, depression and global distress among African American young adults with uncontrolled asthma."

**Jennifer Thomason M'20**, healthcare administration, is Chief Operating Officer for Centerstone in West Frankfort, Illinois.

**Ella Banks '21**, business administration, is Merchandiser II at Archer Daniels Midland in Mendota, Illinois.

**Shelby Scott '21**, accounting and professional services, finance, is a Payroll Specialist at Avalere Health in Evansville.

**Maxine Vincent '21**, biochemistry, is a Quality Laboratory Technician at Mead Johnson Nutrition in Evansville.

**Helen Bryant M'22**, second language acquisition, policy and culture, is a Japanese Adjunct Professor at Olympic College in Bremerton, Washington.

**Matthew Frisz '22**, exercise science, is a Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant at American Senior Communities in Newburgh, Indiana.

**Valeska Hubert '22**, art, is Print Coordinator/Proofreader for University Creative and Print at USI.

**Jeremy Jones M'22**, healthcare administration, is Director of Consumer Sales and Retention at Health Alliance in Champaign, Illinois.

**Chaze Patrick M'22**, public sector administration, is Veteran Engagement Manager at INvets in Indianapolis, Indiana.

**Jeaneyce St-Victor M'22**, accounting, is Senior Fund Accountant at SEI in Carmel, Indiana.

**Olatunde Aleem M'23**, healthcare administration, business administration, is Scheduler and Payroll Specialist at Sugargrove Senior Living in Plainfield, Indiana.

**Trevor Arnold '23**, psychology, is an HR Assistant at HR Solutions Incorporated in Evansville.

**Clayton Browning '23**, world languages and cultures, is a Confinement Officer at Vanderburgh County Sheriff's Office in Evansville.

**Phoebe Cornell '23**, social work, is Student Behavioral Coach at Southwestern Behavioral Healthcare in Evansville.

**Logan Craft '23**, economics, is Operations Manager at FedEx in Evansville.

**Xavier Freni '23**, social work, is a home-based Case Worker at Ireland Home Based Services in Evansville.

**Lindsay Gallagher '23**, elementary education, is a First Grade Teacher at Tecumseh-Harrison Elementary School for Vincennes Community School Corporation in Vincennes, Indiana.

**Tyler Grissom M'23**, human resources, is Territory Manager at Aramark in Indianapolis, Indiana.

**Robert Keisling M'23**, project management, is External Affairs Manager at Indiana Michigan Power in Muncie, Indiana.

**Robert Kmetz M'23**, business administration, is Director of Finance at Midlothian Country Club in Midlothian, Illinois.

**Allyson Kuhl '23**, exercise science, is Group Fitness Coordinator at Crunch Fitness in Evansville.

**Claudia Labhart '23**, German studies, biology, is Emergency Medical Technician at American Medical Response in Evansville.

**Ali Lamb '23**, civil engineering, is Civil Designer at Hanson Professional Services Incorporated in Springfield, Illinois.

**Olivia Lankford '23**, public relations and advertising, is Media Sales Specialist at 14 WFIE in Evansville.

**Savannah Mathews '23**, political science, is Strategy and Operations Assistant at Youth First in Evansville.

**Annika Padgett '23**, psychology, is a home-based teacher for Lincoln Hills Development Corporation in Tell City, Indiana.

**MaKenzie Parsons '23**, management, is Client Services Coordinator at True Rx Health Strategists in Washington, Indiana.

**Cade Prechtel '23**, civil engineering, is a staff engineer at American Structurepoint in Evansville.

**Lucas Riggs '23**, electrical engineering, is an automation engineer at Siemag Tecberg in Newburgh, Indiana.

**Brooklynn Simon '23**, biology, is Quality Health Safety Environment (QHSE) Coordinator at Kerry Ingredients in Evansville.

**Kyle Sledge '23**, mechanical engineering, is a reliability engineer at Continental in Mount Vernon, Illinois.

**Jessica Smith '23**, nursing, is a registered nurse at Deaconess Gateway Hospital in Evansville.

**Jordan Stanley '23**, nursing, is a registered nurse at Deaconess Cross Pointe Outpatient Services in Evansville.

**Savannah Staples '23**, English (teaching), is a high school English teacher at Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation in Evansville.

**Sarah Titzer '23**, nursing, is a registered nurse at Deaconess Hospital in Evansville.

**Kylan Wilbourn '23**, art, is a production design intern at Berry Global Incorporated in Evansville.

**Sabrina Yamashita '23**, psychology, is a registered behavior technician at Adapt For Life in Evansville.

## Marriages

**Jennifer Greathouse-Nance '04 M'12**, art, communication, and Matthew Nance were married May 2023. The couple resides in Mount Vernon, Indiana.

**Vanessa (David) Gaafar '13**, public relations and advertising, and David Gaafar were married September 2023. The couple resides in Carmel, Indiana.

**Tanner Gellinger '16**, criminal justice studies, and Jackie (Hackett) Gellinger were married October 2023. The couple resides in Fishers, Indiana.

**Traci (Smith) Hill '17**, communication studies, and **Hunter Hill '19**, communication studies, were married in 2023. The couple just moved into their first home in Nineveh, Indiana.

**Bridget (Butcher) Mahoney '17**, elementary education, and **Colin Mahoney '16**, marketing, were married October 2023. The couple resides in Petersburg, Indiana.

**Taylor (Davis) Woolsey '18**, elementary education, special education, and **Mark Woolsey '19**, marketing, were married July 2023. The couple resides in Indianapolis, Indiana.

**Lauren (Wojcuich) LaFaive '19**, communication studies, and **Kyle LaFaive '18**, accounting and professional services, finance, were married December 2022. The couple resides in Plymouth, Indiana.

**Ashleigh Kormelink '20**, health services, and **Aaron Betz** were married August 2023. The couple resides in Charleston, South Carolina.

**Maxine Vincent '21**, biochemistry, and **Cameron Vincent** were married September 2023. The couple resides in Henderson, Kentucky.

**Megan (Gardner) Frisz '22**, elementary education, and **Matthew Frisz '22**, exercise science, were married June 2023. The couple resides in Evansville.

**Noelle (Grooms) Walther '21 M'22**, business administration, human resources, and **Sydney Walther** were married February 2023. The couple resides in Newburgh, Indiana.

**Aubrey Gay (Lerasan) Armbruster M'22**, healthcare administration, and **Christopher Armbruster** were married May 2023. The couple resides in Wadsworth, Ohio.

**Calista (Hazelip) Etienne '22**, public relations and advertising, and **Zeb Etienne** were married October 2023. The couple resides in Grandview, Indiana.

**Kaitlin (Albrecht) Hopf '22**, management, and **Isaac Hopf '22**, computer science, were married May 2023. The couple resides in Jasper, Indiana. They have also bought a house, adopted two chunky cats and became full-time employees this year.

**Emily "Aero" (Burbank) Pelekai-Librea '22**, criminal justice, and **Ke Koa Pelekai-Librea** were married August 2023. The couple resides in Fairfield, Illinois.

**Clayton Browning '23**, world languages and cultures, and **Alyssa Browning '23**, social work, were married April 2023. The couple resides in Evansville.

## Births

**Nathan Beach '09**, political science, and **Tamara "Tami" (Klueh) Beach** welcomed **Lincoln Eugene** and **Graham Michael** in January 2024.

**Chelsey (Hedrick) Robling '16**, criminal justice studies, and **Dylan Robling '15**, business administration, welcomed **Drew Elizabeth** in December 2023.

**Ashley (Toone) Dausman '17**, criminal justice studies, sociology, and **Hank Dausman '17**, finance, welcomed **Maeve Nicole-Rose** in May 2023.

**Hannah (DeWeese) Westrick '17**, individualized studies, and **Peter Westrick** welcomed **Callum Perry** in April 2023.

**Danielle Coomes '18**, mathematics, and **Zachary Coomes** welcomed **Ryan Edward** in September 2023.

# USI FAMILY Retiring

## ROMAIN COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

**Manfen Chen**, Professor Emerita of Finance  
20 years

## POTT COLLEGE OF SCIENCE, ENGINEERING, AND EDUCATION

**Dave Ellert**, Instructor Emeritus in Engineering  
20.5 years

**Glen Kissel**, Associate Professor Emeritus of Engineering  
20 years

**Zane Mitchell**, Dean Emeritus Pott College of Science, Engineering and Education, and Professor Emeritus of Engineering  
14.5 years

## ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

**David Adcock**, Custodial Services Shift Supervisor  
25 years

**Steve Bequette**, Director Emeritus of Public Safety  
15 years

**Terri Bischoff**, Director Emerita of University Creative and Print  
16.5 years

**Carolyn Campbell**, Senior Administrative Assistant  
27.5 years

**David Dockery**, Custodial Worker  
10 years

**Donald Fleming**, Property Supervisor and Service Coordinator  
30 years

**Cathy Goldsborough**, Assistant Director Emerita of Business Operations, Housing and Residence Life  
14 years

**Donna Holm**, Custodial Worker  
12 years

## In Memoriam

**LaVon Michel '72**, business education, of Huntingburg, Indiana, died September 13, 2023. She worked several years for the National Park Service at Lincoln Memorial in Lincoln City Indiana, retired from the Southwest Dubois School Corporation in 2008 after 28 years of teaching and was an adjunct teacher for Vincennes University Jasper for 15 years. She loved her pet cats and Alaskan Malamutes dearly, enjoyed jewelry beading and collecting Longaberger baskets.

**Ralph "Doug" Campbell '73**, marketing, of Evansville, died December 6, 2023. He served in the U.S. Air Force from 1965-1969 and went on to be a successful salesman and manager for National Chemsearch Corporation for 30 years, where he achieved his goal to be part of the "Inner Circle." Doug will be remembered for his vibrant personality, ability to see the silver lining, hard work and determination.

**Cathy (Siemers) Crowds '73**, social science (teaching), of Evansville, died December 14, 2023. She worked for the Catholic Diocese of Evansville as an event coordinator and was a secretary at the Catholic Center. Cathy was an active volunteer for many years at the church and the Diocese of Evansville Catholic Center. She enjoyed exercise and being active, especially teaching aerobics and playing pickleball.

**Daniel "Dan" King '73**, biology, of Cincinnati, Ohio, died December 7, 2023. He retired from Contractors Materials after 35 years. Prior to retirement, Dan volunteered as a mentor to prisoners and after retirement assisted in leading a class with City Gospel Mission, helping men who were reforming their lives. Dan brought warmth, joy and a larger-than-life personality to everyone he encountered. His infectious spirit and outgoing nature left an indelible mark on the hearts of all who knew him.

**Lawrence "Larry" Trapp '73**, business administration, of Evansville died January 7, 2024. He worked in a leadership role for the Ostomy Association. Larry loved sports and was an avid Indianapolis Colts fan and enjoyed long daily walks. He was a longtime member of St. Theresa Catholic Church. He will be missed by all those who knew and loved him.

**Norton McDaniel '74**, management, of Evansville, died November 5, 2023. He was a U.S. Air Force Master Crew Chief for fighter jets during the Vietnam War, stationed in England. Norton spent his career working in computer programming and management for Strouse's Men's Clothing stores and the Tennessee Education Department in Computer Management, retiring in 1996.

**Arthur "Art" Werner '74**, accounting, of Evansville, died January 9, 2024. He was a veteran of the U.S. Army and worked in computer systems and accounting with several area businesses. In semi-retirement, he worked as a courier for German American Bank. Art was a gentleman and humble who volunteered his time generously.

**Phyllis (Morris) Maddox '75**, dental hygiene, of Evansville, died November 4, 2023. She was an Assistant Professor of Dental Hygiene at the University of Southern Indiana for 35 years. Phyllis was instrumental in facilitating a collaboration between the USI Dental Hygiene and Nursing programs and Deaconess Hospital, in which dental hygiene and nursing students worked together to provide oral care for hospital patients. She was the recipient of the 1992 USI Faculty Recognition Award and the 2013 recipient of the Sydney L. and Sabelle Berger Faculty Community Service Award.

**Teresa "Terry" Rizen '75**, elementary education, of Evansville, died September 27, 2023. She was a retired social worker having worked at Easter Seals Rehabilitation for over 25 years. Terry dedicated her career to improving the lives of families and children. She enjoyed reading and going to the beaches of the Gulf Coast where she spent many years with her husband and family.

**Jonathan "Jon" Hartz '76**, elementary education, of Tell City, Indiana, died November 29, 2023. He started his banking career in January 1977 as Management Trainee for Citizens National Bank of Tell City and advanced his career with Citizens National Bank to Chairman of the Board and CEO in January 2001 for Tell City and Rockport. Jon was a member of Hoosier Heights Country Club, Knights of Columbus, Moose Lodge and Exhausted Roosters. Jon served on the Board of Perry County Memorial Hospital, Tell City Revolving Loan Fund Board and was a past member of the Perry County Development Corporation.

**William "Bill" Harvey '76**, business administration, of Evansville, died November 11, 2023. He served in the U.S. Air Force and spoke passionately of his time flying jets. Bill was a true salesman and always had a joke or funny saying to share. In the community, he was known as the "Thank You Guy," because he always appreciated even the smallest gestures.

**Harold Hensley '76**, elementary education, of Evansville, died June 6, 2022. He was a U.S. Army veteran and worked for Universal Scientific for many years before returning to college to earn his degree. Harold was a Deputy with the Knox County Sheriff Department and a Police Officer with the Vincennes University Police Department, serving as Chief of Police for 11 years. He taught law enforcement classes at Vincennes University and later served as the Knox County Veterans Affairs Officer for over 15 years.

**Michael Schaefer '76**, elementary education, of Sheridan, Indiana, died January 13, 2024. He loved teaching and family.

**Mary Beth Simon '76**, dental hygiene, of Evansville, died February 21, 2024. She was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, enjoyed Bible study group, drinking coffee and eating out with her girlfriends. Mary also was an avid reader, loved walking for exercise, playing dominoes and crafting. She had a servant's heart. Her generosity lives on through her gift of organ donation.

**Grant Heithecker '77**, elementary education, of The Villages, Florida, died December 8, 2023. He worked for a cable and television company for more than 30 years and moved to Florida in 2020.

**Harris Roach '77**, sociology, of Evansville, died November 7, 2023. He retired from the U.S. Air Force in 1975 after serving his country for 22.5 years. Harris was a Vietnam War Veteran, serving in Vietnam from 1967-1968. Harris loved Asia and lived in Japan, Vietnam and Taiwan, serving as U.S. Air Force Provost Marshal for six years in Taiwan. After retiring from the Air Force, he worked at several places in the U.S. before retiring from CSX Railroad after 10 years.

**Bernard "Bernie" Montgomery '78**, accounting, of Newburgh, Indiana, died November 21, 2023. He was a proud Veteran of the U.S. Air Force. Bernie worked as a CPA, owning and operating his own business for many years until

his retirement. He was a member of St. Lukes Lutheran Church, Chairman of the Republican Party of Warrick County for several years and an avid reader who also enjoyed watching movies.

**Deryle Miles '82**, management, of Evansville, died September 24, 2023. He was an engineer working for Henderson Union and with the military, had a passion for helping others and was adventurous and bright. Deryle was an avid golfer (known to play golf in the snow) and was often seen driving his red convertible around in the winter with the top down.

**Donald "Don" Mullis '84**, art, of Lafayette, Indiana, died October 5, 2023. He proudly served his country in the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam era and primarily worked as an insurance agent for Allstate. Don took pride in serving his clients well, was an artist who enjoyed painting and an avid Chicago Bears fan.

**Julie Meadows '85**, psychology, of Evansville, died September 12, 2023. She worked for the Division of Family Service as a state eligibility consultant for 32 years and was married to alum **Joe Kendall '74**, sociology. Julie enjoyed reading, playing board games, watching old movies, British comedy and traveling—especially to a beach where she could put her feet in the sand.

**Darrel Uhde '86**, mechanical engineering technology, of Evansville, died November 10, 2023. He worked as Senior Project Engineer for George Koch Sons and was an integral part of their team for 37 years where he contributed immensely to their shared success. Darrel also was an Eagle Scout and 4-H Member, and he later served as a Cub Scout Leader and Webelo Leader. He enjoyed collecting coins and banner stones, too.

**Debra "Debbie" Bryant '89**, social work, of Patoka, Indiana, died November 18, 2023. She worked as a social worker with troubled children and foster placement for 26 years. Debbie served as a juvenile probation officer for seven years. Most recently, she worked as a secretary for Vincennes University's College of Health Science and Human Performance.

**Todd Duncan '90**, general science, of New York, New York, died October 5, 2023. He specialized in general dentistry and practiced at locations in Beacon, Hyde Park and Troy, New York.

**Tom (Tommy) Nottingham '90**, finance, management, of Jasper, Indiana, died



August 13, 2023. He was a member of Phi Delta Theta Fraternity and had a career in finance as a controller for various companies. Tommy was passionate about basketball and began coaching when he was 19 and continued to coach his kids and their friends throughout his life.

**Elizabeth "Betty" Lockyear '95**, business, of Evansville, died November 10, 2023. She was a loving and dedicated mother, sister, grandmother and friend. Betty can best be described as hard working in the service of others through her personal, professional and volunteer work. Also, she loved line dancing.

**Debra "Debbie" (Estes) Payne '95**, psychology, of Odon, Indiana, died July 29, 2023. She received her master's degree in divinity from the Presbyterian Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and was the current pastor at Odon United Methodist Church and Edwardsport United Methodist Church. Debbie never met a stranger, always had a meal ready for those in need, loved to travel and was always in search of her next adventure.

**Candace Bevers '96**, nursing, of Evansville, died August 29, 2023. She worked at St. Mary's Hospital in Nursing Education on the Surgical Unit for more than 30 years. Candace enjoyed games and social media, had a strong faith and centered her world on her grandchildren.

**Clara (Hobbs) Wigand '96**, nursing, of Evansville, died October 12, 2023. She spent her entire nursing career serving patients in Evansville. Clara was a very active member of Forest Hills Wesleyan Church, where she worked in the youth ministry and the Praise Team for many years.

**Matthew "Matt" May '97**, communications, of Newburgh, Indiana, died February 1, 2024. He was Senior Vice President and CIO at Liberty Federal Credit Union, and Cub Master for Pack 369 at Castle Elementary. Matt enjoyed traveling with his wife to a beach, golfing with his brother and friends, cheering the Indianapolis Colts with his son Aaron and listening to music with his other son Isaac.

**Joseph Potts '99**, general science, of Evansville, died August 2, 2023. He was the superintendent of the Water and Utilities Department for the City of Bloomington, Indiana. A man of many interests, Joseph loved nature and being outdoors, enjoyed basketball and going to concerts for 1980s music. He was known to be a kind and thoughtful person who always took time to help others.

**Melissa (Schroering) Barthel '00**, accounting, of Haubstadt, Indiana, died October 27, 2023. She worked as a CPA at Vowells and Shaaf, LLP and was a member of St. James Catholic Church. Melissa was dearly loved and will be missed beyond measure.

**David Purcell '02**, political science, of Evansville, died June 22, 2023. He believed in education and obtained several degrees, worked and taught in political science and print media as well as other positions. David had a passion for music, songwriting and guitar, and was a gentle, kind, funny and generous man by nature.

**Andrew "Andy" Bradley '03**, business administration, of Owyhee, Nevada, died July 30, 2023. He worked for the Tampa Bay Rays baseball team after graduation and was teaching Business at Owyhee Combined School in Nevada. Andy was an avid runner who had just completed his 27th marathon in Anchorage, Alaska.

**Derek Barton '06**, history, of Oatsville, Indiana, died December 21, 2023. He was a beloved and respected music and history teacher at Fort Branch Community School for over 35 years and was an inspirational choir director at Broadway Christian Church for 24 years. Derek served his community through participation on the Red Ribbon Committee, Gibson County Arts Council, Pride in Princeton, Princeton Area Betterment Bureau, as a Sunday School teacher, groundskeeper for Mt. Tabor General Baptist Church and as its cemetery caretaker.

**Stephanie (Brown) Chase '06**, early childhood education, of Evansville, died August 21, 2023. She was a talented and passionate educator of special needs children, an avid member of Newburgh Civitan and dedicated Special Olympics volunteer. Stephanie worked for Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation's Culver Family Learning Center and Evansville Arc, Incorporated. Her love and kindness extended beyond her classroom to her colleagues, creating lasting bonds and lifelong friendships.

**Bryn (Boren) Dant '09**, dental assisting, of Poseyville, Indiana, died August 5, 2023. She loved playing softball and was known for her contagious laugh and happy attitude. Bryn was the office manager for a dental practice.

**Samuel Kirtman '09**, computer information systems, of Evansville, died September 18, 2023. He was an IT Specialist at Boonville-Warrick County

Library and was married to **Laura (Lamkin) Kirtman '09**, psychology, for 12 years. Samuel also was an avid sports fan who loved watching his children play Buddy Ball and ride horses.

**Nathaniel Goble '10**, radio and television, of Tell City, Indiana, died February 22, 2024. He was a broadcast producer at WEHT Channel 25 News. Nathaniel enjoyed music, video games, playing with the USI pep band and his time spent with family and friends.

**Lisa Ziliak '11**, food and nutrition, of Evansville, died November 28, 2023. At the age of 14, Lisa was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes, but she never let that stop her from doing the things she loved, such as skydiving over the Grand Canyon. She was a faithful fan of the St. Louis Cardinals, loved spending time outdoors, was an avid reader of books and collected rocks from the places she traveled to. When Lisa was home, she loved to take care of the chickens.

**Travis Brooks '13 M'21**, economics, accounting, of Newburgh, Indiana, died September 30, 2023. He was Financial Analyst at CountryMark Oil Company in Mount Vernon, Indiana, and a member of the Jerusalem Masonic Lodge No. 9 in Henderson, Kentucky. Travis enjoyed duck and goose hunting with his father and attending St. Louis Cardinals Baseball games with his family. He enjoyed socializing with his friends, attending comedy shows and going to the movies with his wife, Brittny.

**Drake Cloin M'21**, project management, of Indianapolis, Indiana, died December 31, 2023. He enjoyed skateboarding, fishing, ultra running, making art and photography. Drake loved being outdoors, with family and cooking. He was married to alumna **Whitney (Weir) Cloin '12 M'15**, Spanish studies, social work. Drake was loved by many and will deeply be missed.

**Elizabeth "Lizzy" Seng '21**, marketing, of San Francisco, California, died December 9, 2023. She will always be remembered for her glowing smile, shining spirit, affection for horses, running spirit and peaceful demeanor. Lizzy had a passion for art, photography and travel. She used her talents to capture the beauty in all people, places and things and to create many true masterpieces. Her final days were spent doing some of her favorite things—traveling, experiencing beauty and exploring the country and culture of India.

## Retiring (continued)

**Janet Johnson 'M95**, Director Emerita of Alumni Engagement and Volunteer USI  
23.5 years

**Peggy Mahrenholz '81**, Lifelong Learning Supervisor  
16 years

**Rita Ricketts**, Payroll Manager Emerita Human Resources  
20 years

**Sally Noelle**, Bursar Assistant  
16 years

## In Memoriam

**Janet Freeman**, Professor Emerita of Education (22 years), retired, died August 15, 2023.

**Phyllis Maddox '75**, Assistant Professor Emerita of Dental Hygiene (35 years), retired, died November 4, 2023.

**Ruth Orman**, Custodial Worker (11.5 years), retired, died November 16, 2023.

**Robert "Johnny" Small**, Associate Professor Emeritus of Education (25 years), retired, died September 25, 2023.

He dreams of rotisserie chickens.



**J**az Rochon, a cockapoo, was born in Kentucky and came to live with USI's President Ronald Rochon, his wife, Lynn, and their children, Ayinde and Nia, 13 years ago. He is known for his loyalty to friends, being a bit of a jokester and single-minded when it comes to food—he lives for and dreams of meat. We recently interviewed Jaz to find out what life is like as a member of the Rochon Family.

#### Describe your perfect day.

My perfect day—which is an everyday occurrence—includes relaxing during the day on Mom's favorite rug, getting my belly rubbed whenever I turn over and being hand-fed Kibble wrapped in pieces of rotisserie chicken. I like to top my perfect days off with a delicious dinner followed by a long walk with Baba (that's what I call Dad). I like to walk with him at the end of the day, because if I get tired, he will scoop me up and carry me home.

Don't tell him,  
but boy, do  
I have him  
trained!



He loves to play catch with a lacrosse ball.

#### If you could have a conversation with anyone (any species, alive or dead), who would it be?

I would enjoy a stimulating conversation with Mr. Ed—the talking horse who had his own television show in the 1960s. He had wise and insightful ideas on how to help humans. He was always giving advice to his person, Wilbur Post, and I think he could provide some insights on how I could better communicate with my family, especially Baba, so I could help him in his role as President.

#### If you could choose an occupation, what would your profession be?

I would be a therapist, specifically a therapy dog. I would love to visit children in hospitals and older people in care facilities. It would be mutually beneficial for all of us, as dogs are well known for uplifting the spirits of others and humans love to rub dog bellies. I would let them rub it as long as they wanted because it would be crucial to their well-being, and I am, by nature, self-sacrificing in this way.

#### Do you prefer the company of people or other dogs?

I love both for different reasons. From my family and other humans, I get belly rubs and treats, but with my doggy friends I can really be myself. When I go to doggy daycare, I romp around with all kinds of dogs. I don't discriminate against pure breeds or mutts. All dogs are equal to me. I wish humans thought more like dogs when it comes to loving fellow humans.

#### What is your favorite thing to do when you have the house to yourself?

Whenever they all go away, I always hope they forget to close the bathroom door. I love to get

in there and pull the toilet paper off the roll and carry it all over the house. What fun! The family does not care for me doing this, but it sure brings me joy.

#### Which family member do you listen to the most? Why?

Baba thinks I listen to him the most because he has the most serious and stern voice, but I really listen to him because he gives me the most Kibble wrapped in pieces of rotisserie chicken.

#### Who do you prefer to go on walks with and why are they a better walking partner?

I particularly enjoy walking with Mom. She is not in a hurry and lets me meander and sniff any and everything for as long as I want when we walk together. She never tries to make me walk past a mailbox without giving it a good, long sniff. After all, you never know who's been lurking around until you give it all a good sniff. As the family member in charge of dog patrol, it is my duty to know who's been in the neighborhood.

#### What do you do that your family wishes you wouldn't, but you continue to do so anyway?

I enjoy joining Baba for his business Zoom meetings. I'm a very friendly guy and love to say hello to everyone. Sometimes, however, they are discussing subjects I know a lot about and I try to give my input. Unfortunately, humans don't understand dog language, and have no idea what I'm trying to tell them. This is where a conversation with Mr. Ed would be beneficial.



He had eye lenses implanted after cataracts clouded his vision.

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*Spirit and Heart of USI*



**USI's Solarpalooza event welcomed more than 5,000 students, faculty and visitors to campus to celebrate the April 8 total solar eclipse with food trucks, live music and retired NASA astronaut, Joan Higginbotham. During the three-plus minutes that the total eclipse could be safely viewed, glasses were removed to witness the breathtaking spectacle.**

*Visit [USI.edu/spiritheart](https://www.usi.edu/spiritheart) for submission guidelines.*