

# UHD magazine

Spring 2018



**Gator Grit**  
Ready to Change the World





## A Gator Eclipse

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“Never thought I would see  
Day and night in the same day...  
To admire the moon parade  
in front of the sun  
For a few summer minutes stay.”

— Frank Clay  
*Excerpt: “THE SOLAR ECLIPSE of 2017”*

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COLLEGE OF PUBLIC SERVICE UH D University of Houston DOWNTOWN



# From the President's Desk

Welcome to the latest issue of UHD Magazine.

Since joining this extraordinary institution, now more than nine months ago, I've discovered that the University of Houston-Downtown is a gleaming example of what I like to call Gator Grit.

This issue, aptly themed Gator Grit, features stories about our UHD Heroes—the dedicated Gators in IT, facilities, UHD Police, our communications team, and many other offices and departments—who bravely faced and helped turn back the brunt of Hurricane Harvey. The magazine highlights how future teachers in our Urban Education Department are pursuing classroom experiments with NASA that are aimed at bolstering students' interest in STEM. In Gators Connect, you are invited to meet one alumna who has dedicated her life through intentional acts of kindness, and two HISD principals educating our future. We would be remiss in not spotlighting our exceptional transfer students who are ready to take on the world. We also celebrate Dr. Chris Birchak, dean of University College, who has served at UHD for more than 30 years. Indeed, Dr. Birchak embodies the spirit of UHD Gator Grit. And finally, let's not forget our magazine cover stars who offer insight into what Gator Grit really means to them.



The fall was a challenging time for Houstonians and the University, but we all endured the hardships of Hurricane Harvey and emerged a stronger and more determined community...a family. Our students showed their resolve...their Gator Grit...to remain focused on their educational goals even while assisting family and friends recover from the storm. I experienced firsthand the crews that lived on campus throughout the storm to make sure our campus was ready to receive the fall 2017 class. In 2017, UHD conferred more than 2,000 undergraduate and graduate degrees.

Our Gator Grit and drive to excellence is undeniable. UHD is home to unshakable students who dream, discover and push the boundaries of possibilities; dedicated faculty that empower students with real-world experiential education; a tireless staff that never loses sight of our mission to ensure UHD students receive a high-quality education; and our robust alumni of more than 47,000 who are reshaping Houston's workforce.

The stories at UHD are endless and so is our Gator Grit.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J.S. Muñoz'. The signature is stylized with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Dr. Juan Sánchez Muñoz

**President, University of Houston-Downtown**

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## An Exhibition of Survivors

By Sheryl E. Taylor

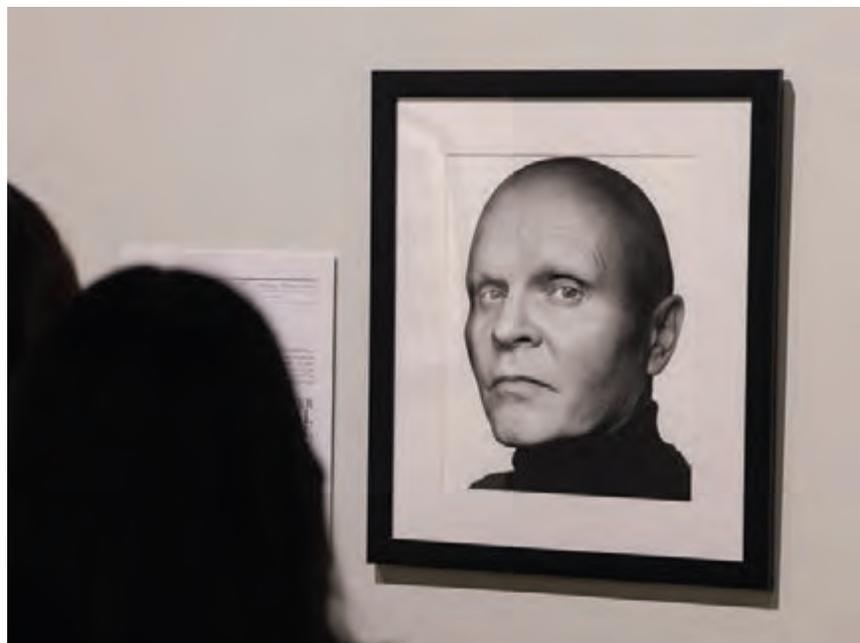
UHD's O'Kane Gallery collaborated with the Holocaust Museum Houston (HMH) to exhibit photographer Mark Seliger's black and white images, "When They Came to Take My Father," of Holocaust survivors.

Featured alongside Seliger's photographs was HMH's "The Butterfly Project," which featured a selection of handcrafted butterflies that were donated to the Museum in memory of children who were killed during the Nazi era.

This exhibition served as a complement to UHD's 2017 Freshman Common Reader—the book by Jennifer Teege, "My Grandfather Would Have Shot Me: A Black Woman Discovers Her Family's Nazi Past." Teege, who was adopted at an early age, later discovered that her biological grandfather was a notorious commandant in a Nazi concentration camp.

Seliger is best known for his celebrity portraits, including more than 100 covers photographed for Rolling Stone magazine. The native Texan's interest in the Holocaust began with visits to Three Brothers Bakery in Houston where he met the bakery's owners, the Jucker brothers, who are Holocaust survivors. His photographs of survivors, like the Juckers, captured the complexity of their lives at once full of painful memories, but also unveiling a human nobility.

The hundreds of butterflies acquired through HMH's Butterfly Project reminded viewers about the children who did not survive. The butterflies—crafted in a variety of materials, including fabric, wood, paper, and colored glass—celebrate the diversity of personality and spirit of the children they memorialized. [UFD](#)





*Dr. Duchess Harris*

## Hidden Figures, Hidden Voices

By Sheryl E. Taylor

UHD's Center for Critical Race Studies (CCRS), the Scholars Academy, and the College of Sciences & Technology joined forces for the 2017 Race, Politics and Culture Symposium.

The inaugural event, Hidden Figures, Hidden Voices, featured a public talk and Q&A with author, academic and legal scholar Dr. Duchess Harris, professor and department chair of American Studies at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota. Harris co-authored "Hidden Human Computers: The Black Women of NASA," which tells the story of her grandmother, Miriam Daniel Mann, and other black women who made it possible for John Glenn to orbit Earth in 1962. Harris' book served as an impetus for the movie, "Hidden Figures."

"We wanted to illuminate and bring to consciousness the intersection of race, gender and the sciences," said Dr. Vida Robertson, associate professor of English and director of CRSS. "We must articulate the cultural politics of science. In order to negotiate it, we must have an open and honest conversation about it.

"There are multiple and overlapping identities," Robertson added. "Dr. Harris' book shows how these women's humanity was being denied—because they were women and because they were black—even as they intellectually operated in the most privileged spaces in science and technology. Dr. Harris is interested in uncovering the way in which those systems of race and gender are working inside this institution we call science." 

# Town Hall for Dreamers

By Natalie Petrie

With questions, concerns and deadlines looming in the wake of President Donald Trump's announcement to roll back protections granted by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, the University of Houston-Downtown (UHD) partnered with ABC13 KTRK and Univision 45 KXLN to host a DACA Town Hall Meeting.

To educate and inform Houstonians on the topic, students had the opportunity to have their voices heard by addressing the panel live; many also opted to submit their questions anonymously before the event.

"Great universities bring great conversations to their campus," Dr. Juan Sánchez Muñoz, UHD President remarked after the event. "They organize intellectual expertise to weigh in on those conversations."

The Obama Administration established DACA to address immigration enforcement against those illegally residing in the U.S., but who were largely raised in this country. DACA recipients with current status are able to obtain valid driver's licenses; enroll in college; legally secure jobs; and pay income taxes.

The nonpartisan community event, moderated by anchors Elissa Rivas (ABC13) and Osvaldo Corral (Univision), included panelists: Houston Independent School District Superintendent Richard Carranza; United We Dream community organizer and DACA recipient Oscar Hernandez; BakerRipley managing attorney Jill Campbell; St. Frances Cabrini Center for Immigrant Legal Assistance (Catholic Charities) program director Zenobia Lai; and director of UHD's Social Work Program Dr. Dawn McCarty.

The Town Hall meeting marks UHD's third community forum presented in partnership with ABC13 and Univision. 



*DACA experts assemble for a Town Hall hosted by KTRK & Univision.*

# Naming of the Shrew

By Mike Emery

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**W**ant to know where to locate shrews at UHD? Start with Dr. Amy Baird, associate professor of biology. She doesn't necessarily have live shrews roaming through her office. Instead, she has frozen specimens, which were recently discovered to be two new shrew species. Using UHD's genetics laboratory, Baird and her students extracted DNA samples, conducted Polymerase chain reaction tests, and sequenced genes.

The result was the discovery of *Cryptotis mcarthyi* (named for shrew expert and scientist Timothy J. McCarthy) and *Cryptotis celaque* (named for the region in Honduras where these samples were discovered). The research also yielded the article, "Molecular Systematics and Biodiversity of the *Cryptotis Mexicanus* Group: Two New Species from Honduras Supported," which was published in the science journal, *Systematics and Biodiversity*. Additional authors of the paper include UHD student Joselyn Valdez, Timothy J. McCarthy, Robert G. Trujillo, Tuan Kang, Mehdi Esmailiyan, and Neal Woodman.

Among the contributing authors to this paper is Baird's father, Dr. John Bickham, who had previously given his daughter a collection of frozen specimens which contained the two new shrews.

"It was really by chance that we happened upon two previously undiscovered species," Baird said. "I wasn't expecting to make a new discovery, but it happened with the assistance of our students. This project not only yielded a scientific discovery, but it also helped students discover the research process by learning that there is a specific path to reach the right answer." [UHD](#)



*Dr. Amy Baird*



## Academic Initiatives Earn Honors

By Mike Emery

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In 2017, UHD was definitely making the right moves as evidenced by two prestigious Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) honors.

In July, the University's Supplemental Instruction (SI) program earned THECB's Recognition of Excellence. Based in UHD's University College, the SI Program connects groups of students with peers, or SI Leaders, who reinforce class lessons through interactive exercises, workshops, and mentorship. These Leaders are assigned to specific courses and support faculty instruction in and out of the classroom.

A few months later, UHD's Gateway Course Innovation Initiative emerged as a recipient of the THECB's Star Award, which celebrates the contributions of higher education institutions that are distinguished in promoting student success. Finalists and winners were honored during the Texas Higher Education Leadership Conference in Dec.

Led by the University's Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence, this initiative is aimed at improving students' performance in gateway courses or required entry-level classes that provide the academic foundations for selected majors. Strategies for this initiative include: reading guides or interactive online video lectures to help students prepare prior to attending class; team environments in which students collaborate with one another and SI Leaders; and classroom problem-solving activities.

"Receiving a Star Award from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board is an absolute honor for our institution," said UHD President Dr. Juan Sánchez Muñoz. "It reflects the diligence of our faculty and staff and their commitment to helping our students succeed during those crucial first semesters at our University. I thank everyone who contributed to our Course Innovation Initiative and who continue to develop new programs aimed at enhancing our Gators' learning experiences."

The Gateway Course Innovation Initiative also earned the University of Houston System Board of Regents Academic Excellence Award during the Board's May meeting. 

## Invest In Blue...UHD Here, We Go!

By Sheryl E. Taylor



**I**t was an exciting year for the University of Houston-Downtown (UHD)—a new president, a historic \$10 million naming gift, and the planning of a new academic building are transforming the University into a bigger, bolder institution of higher learning.

So, what do you do to commemorate all this good news?

A celebration like no other, of course.

The University community recognized all these recent successes and its vision for the future during “Invest In Blue.” The weeklong festivities in October brought the Gator Family and Houstonians together for a variety of events centered on UHD pride and progress.

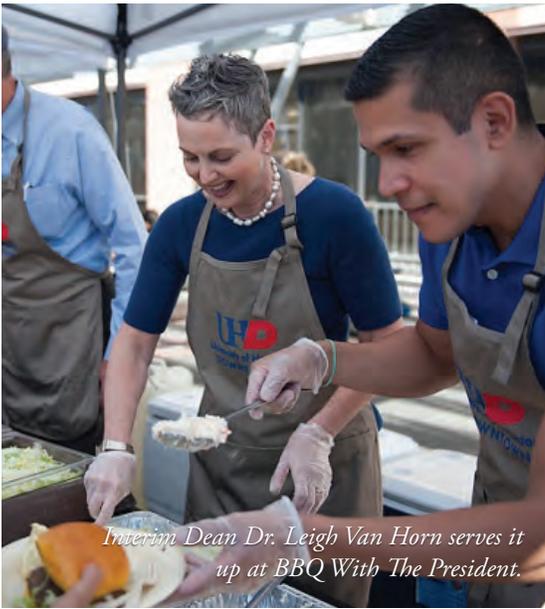
“Invest In Blue offered community members the opportunity to learn about this great institution and to be a part of its growth,” Dr. Juan Sánchez Muñoz, UHD President said. “We reflected on the University’s successes while setting new goals as well as welcoming Houstonians to our campus for events that spotlight UHD’s excellence in academics, community service and research.”

### Open House & The Main Street Experience

The festivities kicked off with UHD’s annual Fall Open House, which hosted prospective students and their families. These future Gators explored campus through student-led tours; engaged with faculty and current students; learned about the admission process; and discovered financial aid and scholarship opportunities.

To keep the momentum going, students, alumni, faculty and staff made their Gator Pride known as they entered the fourth year of UHD Homecoming Week.

This year’s theme, “The Main Street Experience,” recognized Downtown’s primary thoroughfare, Main Street, as the gateway to Houston’s central business district, Fortune 500 headquarters, and the city’s second largest University. The event celebrated all things UHD with food, fun and games that included a barbecue lunch hosted by Muñoz and a Homecoming Pep Rally; P3 Paint Dance Party; Tail-Gatoring cook-off contests; Gator Mixers; and Club Sports volleyball and basketball games.



*Interim Dean Dr. Leigh Van Horn serves it up at BBQ With The President.*



*2017 Homecoming P3 Paint Dance Party*



*President Muñoz serves his guests.*



*UH Tailgating: Dr. Muñoz & son Amado; UHS Regent Chairman Tilman Ferrita; UHS Chancellor Renu Khator & Muñoz's wife Dr. Zenaída Aguirre-Muñoz*



*UH D Women's Soccer Team celebrates Homecoming 2017.*



# UHD HERE, WE GO.

JOIN THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-DOWNTOWN

## The First Address

Before the University's sixth president gave his first President's Report to the UHD community, 50 longtime friends—former employees—who served 20 years or more at UHD returned to campus for a special Retirees Luncheon in their honor. In attendance at this event was former UHD President Dr. Max Castillo.

Immediately following the annual luncheon, guests were invited to Robertson Auditorium for what will be the first of many addresses to faculty, staff, students, and community members by President Muñoz.

Senior Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs and Provost Ed Hugetz, who served as event host, introduced the President.

"When I first met Dr. Muñoz, I was convinced of one thing...that he had UHD in his heart," said Hugetz. "His spirit, background, and life experiences are so intertwined with UHD...it's like he was born to be president of this University. I see nothing but a better future with his presidency. His presence over the past months is very much like the agenda for "Invest In Blue"...it's all about bringing everyone together through his enthusiasm, energy, and a desire to connect."

Since taking the reins in April, Muñoz applauded how the University community came together and responded during and after Harvey. He also expressed his gratitude to those who contributed funds that assisted students, faculty and staff. [See UHD Heroes Emerge During Harvey, page 16.]

"At UHD, we're more than just faculty, staff, students, and alumni," said Muñoz. "We're a community...a family, which was most evident during Harvey.

"Thank you to the men and women who spent time away from their own homes and families during the storm to ensure we could return to work and provide our students with a high-quality education," Muñoz added. "These individuals have what I refer to as 'Gator Grit'—a toughness, a resolve to get the job done... a dedication to our institution and others."



*Community members come together with UHD President Muñoz.*



*UHD student Diana Plataz*



*Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner*



*UHS Regent Paula Mendoza & President Muñoz*



*KTRK Channel 13's Cynthia Cisernos; Dr. Laura Murillo of Hispanic Chamber Commerce; President Muñoz & Univision's Grace Olivares*

He expressed excitement about the future of UHD—from the new College of Sciences & Technology Building to commemorating an institution milestone with the official signage for the Marilyn Davies College of Business.

“Marilyn’s gift was finalized on the day I was confirmed as UHD President,” he said. “We are grateful for her belief in UHD.”

Muñoz noted that the University had experienced its most successful fundraising year—more than \$13 million—which serves as the foundation for the institution’s capital campaign, “UHD Here, We Go.”

“These gifts have put us on track for an ambitious, yet attainable capital campaign—our first in nearly 20 years,” Muñoz said. “Our campaign goal of \$25 million by 2020 will support student success, faculty development, community engagement, and campus expansion. All are vital to our mission.”

Muñoz encouraged faculty and staff to realize that the entire Gator community plays a part in this effort and makes an investment in UHD and the students.

“Whatever your role is at UHD, continue it with pride,” he said. “Whether you’re engaged in scholarly research or help keep our campus clean, your hard work makes a difference as we move toward this goal.”

According to the President, investment in UHD goes beyond the walls of the institution thanks to state and federal agencies and organizations that are investing in our faculty. He remarked that in the first six weeks of Fiscal Year 2018, our faculty brought in more grant dollars than all of Fiscal Year 2017. Muñoz also applauded the faculty for their research efforts.

Muñoz stated that the institution’s progress over the past year wasn’t limited to fundraising and research efforts. In the areas of retention and graduation rates, he noted that both are the highest in UHD’s history.

“UHD has made unprecedented gains with regards to both of these areas,” Muñoz noted. “Our next strategic focus will be to increase enrollment. We have the resources, personnel and programs to make this happen through the new Gator Gateway orientation program. Our students are excited to be here, ready to learn, and prepared to take their education and lives to new levels.”

Gator Pride is what Muñoz said he felt when UHD’s Supplemental Instruction Program received a Recognition of Excellence from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and with the University of Houston System Board of Regents recognition of the University’s Gateway Course Innovation Initiative with its Academic Excellence Award. The initiative also received the THECB’s STAR Award. [See “Academic Initiatives Earn Honors” on page 9.]

“It is high praise when the state’s authority on higher education and the Board of Regents jointly recognize your institution,” Muñoz said. “Clearly, UHD is moving in the right direction.” In closing, he praised faculty, staff, students, and a supportive external community, which has made a difference at UHD.

“As I conclude my eighth month as president of the University of Houston-Downtown, much has happened in that time,” he said. “Your unwavering commitment to UHD, our mission and success, has helped us overcome challenges, such as Harvey, and earn the admiration of legislators, leaders in higher education, and many more. That’s the product of talent and true Gator Grit.”



*The Davies Family joins Dean Michael Fields & UH President Muñoz.*



*Michael A. Olivas; Marilyn Davies; Taylor Davies & Dean Fields*

## The Future Looks Bright...Gator Blue

In February 2017, the College of Business received a \$10 million endowment from Houston entrepreneur Marilyn Davies. To commemorate Davies' unprecedented gift, signage was revealed on the Shea Street Building—denoting the College's new name—as the Marilyn Davies College of Business. Former UHD Interim President Dr. Michael A. Olivas returned to campus for the unveiling.

After the reveal, guests joined Muñoz at the Vision & Welcome Event where he addressed community leaders, donors and friends of the University about the institution's future growth and stature in the city, state and nation and how they can play a part in the "UHD Here, We Go." fundraising campaign.

University of Houston System (UHS) Regent and UHD alumna Paula Mendoza opened the event by introducing Muñoz and the ambitions of UHD.

"I am convinced that he is the right leader at the right time for UHD," said Mendoza ('95, MBA '17), who is also the chair of the UHS' Academic and Student Success Committee. "His personal commitment and passion for UHD students, his belief that they will succeed, and his dogged determination to ensure that they have the tools to succeed are key to this University's future."

Following Mendoza's introduction, Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner delivered remarks and offered his admiration for UHD. He noted that the University is a cornerstone of the community and that he was proud to be in attendance for this special event.

Muñoz thanked Davies and her family for the gift that will further position the Davies College of Business for even greater success because of her investment and vision for UHD.

Although she did not attend the University, Davies' son and brother are UHD alumni. She recognized the difference UHD made in their lives and wanted to pay it forward for future students. She offered words of encouragement to those who may consider following in her philanthropic footsteps.

"First, you learn, then you earn ... then you return," Davies said.

The President also stressed the importance of UHD embarking on the capital campaign, "UHD, Here We Go." to continue the University's transformation to a nationally recognized leader in urban higher education. He invited guests to lend their support and "Invest In Blue" to prepare UHD students for success as professionals and community leaders who are making a difference in our city, state, and country.

"Ultimately, this campaign is about our students," Muñoz said. "I know there are other great Houstonians in our community, like Marilyn, who know someone who has earned a quality education from UHD...or how our University is contributing to the city of Houston...or they simply want to help hardworking Houstonians from modest backgrounds with Texas-sized ambitions, succeed."

## Until Next Year

The celebrations concluded with its final events—Pizza With a Purpose and the UHD Alumni Fall Social Series.

The first event brought together students, faculty, staff and alumni for camaraderie and a slice of pie for a community engagement project aimed at making blankets for Houstonians in need.

Alumni joined President Muñoz for an evening of art and conversation in UHD's O'Kane Gallery for the Alumni Association's annual Fall Social Series. **UFD**

# Perseverance

## UHD Heroes Emerge During Harvey

By Mike Emery

The halls of the University of Houston-Downtown buildings became eerily silent at 1 p.m., Aug. 24.

UHD closed early on that Friday in anticipation of Hurricane Harvey. The storm was expected to make landfall far south of Houston, but the city would soon feel the force of its winds and rain.

As staff members departed, a group of UHD Police officers gathered on the third floor of One Main Building to secure the campus.

Outside, the sky darkened, and Harvey's first rain bands began to soak the city.

That night, Harvey came ashore destroying homes in Rockport, Texas, and surrounding areas. Houston escaped Harvey's winds, but the worst was yet to come.

Harvey circled back through Texas as a tropical storm, and that's when problems arose for Houstonians. More than 50 inches of rain fell on the city in a matter of days—usually the amount Houston receives in one year. Unprecedented flooding destroyed cars and homes and took lives.

In spite of Harvey, Houstonians stayed strong, particularly members of the UHD Community.

"Harvey tested our resolve, but the Gator Family remained focused," said Dr. Juan Sánchez Muñoz, UHD President. "There were many challenging moments for our University, but our faculty, staff, students and alumni came together to help UHD and one another."

### Riding The Storm Out

The University's official Ride Out Team remained on campus. UHD Police Department (UHDPD) officers stayed at the One Main Building to ensure its safety. During the storm, UHDPD's first floor headquarters was among the facilities that took on significant amounts of water. Officers were forced to take refuge on the second level of the Girard Street Building Garage. Other facilities affected during Harvey included the first level of the Jesse H. Jones Student Life Center.

When the waters subsided and the rain tapered off, UHD team members took action. President Muñoz visited campus to assess the damage, and the Facilities Management staff began working around the clock to ensure a Sept. 5 opening.



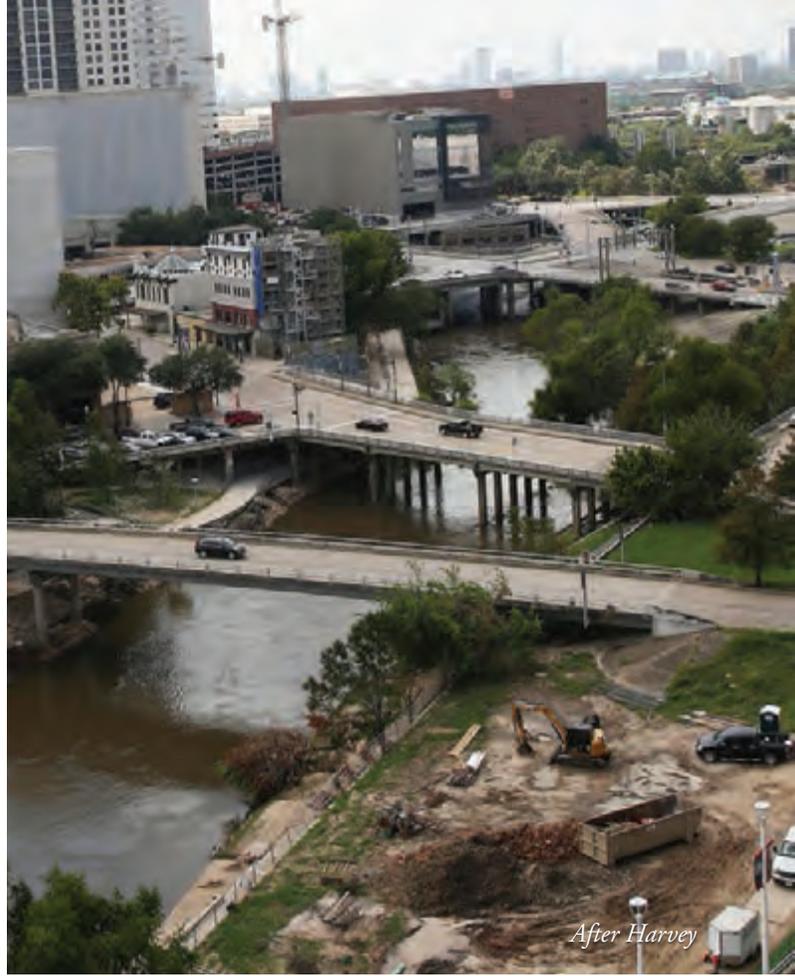
*During Harvey*



*After Harvey*



*During Harvey*



*After Harvey*





*Texas Sen. Borris Miles & UHD leadership tour campus.*



*UHDPD Chief Michael Beneford, President Muñoz & UHD Police Officer Lisa Barajas during Harvey recovery*

## Social Media To The Rescue

Harvey also disrupted the University's website and other online services, leaving few options for direct communications with the Gator Community. The temporary loss of UHD email access complicated matters, but the University Relations team used social media, the UHD News website, and email (when it was restored) to provide the University community important messages and updates.

As the Information Technology (IT) staff, led by Hossein Shahrokhi, associate vice president for IT, worked to restore the website and other digital services, the UHD community came together through the "Gator Family Check-In" Facebook group created by Liza Alonzo, director of UHD Alumni Relations.

"During Harvey, I was worried about UHD and our University Family," Alonzo said. "I saw some people posting on Facebook about how they fared, and I thought, 'what about the people who aren't my Facebook friends?' I wanted to know if they were okay too...especially our students."

## We Are Family

Through social media channels, such as "Gator Family Check-In," the UHD community was able to find out if friends were safe or needed assistance. A video of Honors Program student Thomas Canny's apartment ceiling caving in attracted attention from his fellow Gators. Faculty members Dr. Gene Preuss, associate professor of history, and Dr. Mari Nicholson-Preuss, director of the Honors Program, saw the footage and quickly took Canny into their home.

"We realized that his home was uninhabitable, so we reached out to him immediately," said Preuss. "Mari and I are very close to many students here at UHD, so we had no second thoughts about helping him. This is a very unique institution in which faculty and students develop connections, not unlike family members. We're there for each other."

Gators stick together, but they also are committed to the community at large. Students volunteered at shelters throughout Houston. Canny, himself, headed to the George R. Brown Convention Center to volunteer with fellow Honors Program students. UHD's Student Government Association also jumped into action by hosting a Gator Relief Donation Drive to collect school supplies, baby items, toiletries, and other donations.

Others, such as sophomore social work student Abigail Murillo, applied their talents to helping lift the spirits of community members and their families. Murillo and fellow students donned their super hero costumes as part of the group, Cosplay for Kids, to bring smiles to families who took shelter at Copperfield Church. Cosplay for Kids continued helping those affected by Harvey throughout the fall semester, including a Halloween event at a Harvey shelter at Anderson Elementary School.

"These children lost homes and their entire neighborhood; so a simple event like trick or treating was not possible," Murillo said. "Bringing them Halloween fun provided a sense of normalcy."



## Gator Aid

As the Gator community came together to help, UHD launched the Gator Relief Fund. Alumni, faculty, staff, fellow students, corporate partners, and others contributed to this fund to support students who remained enrolled through the fall semester. Contributions, from as far away as Massachusetts and San Francisco, poured in as Harvey's rains continued to plague the city. The Employee Gator Relief Fund provided staff and faculty with modest cash stipends to deal with immediate needs related to Harvey's devastation. In total, over 350 students, staff and faculty were assisted.

The University also supported students by providing one-on-one assistance to support their return to school. Refurbished computers were provided at a nominal cost to those who lost laptops and computers. Stipends were provided to those who lost textbooks. As many students struggled to regain footing following the storm, UHD advisors contacted students who indicated they planned to drop out of school. No student withdrew until they had a conversation with an advisor who could explain the impact of withdrawal on financial aid, graduation plans, and other issues. As a result, many students dropped a course or two, but remained enrolled. Faculty members worked with students to ease them back into the fall semester, providing flexibility related to assignments, coursework, and exams, where possible.

## Help Pours In

**Return to UHD**, an initiative to provide scholarship, work-study, case management support, behavioral healthcare and other needed support, was provided to approximately one-third of the 160 students who withdrew from UHD due to personal impact from the storm.

**The Hurricane Harvey Relief Fund**, managed by the Greater Houston Community Foundation, was established by Mayor Sylvester Turner and Harris County Judge Ed Emmett to provide help for those in Harris County and the Greater Houston area, including Fort Bend County. The following organizations also contributed to helping the Gator Family in recovery efforts after Harvey:

**Strada Education Network**, **Mayor Sylvester Turner** and the **City's Office of Education** awarded a grant of \$100,000 administered through the Greater Houston Community Foundation to support UHD students adversely impacted by Harvey.

**Communities Foundation of Texas** contributed \$25,000 to the Gator Relief Fund.

**The United Way of Greater Houston Hurricane Task Force** awarded UHD a Community Disaster Grant of \$10,000 to continue the work of the Disaster Recovery Assistant.

**American International Group, Inc.**, contributed \$10,000 to the Gator Relief Fund

## Back To School

By Sept. 5, UHD was ready to reopen for classes. The first floor of the One Main Building was still in recovery mode due to flooding, but classrooms and other facilities were in solid shape. A strong



*UHD Vice President David Bradley & Texas Rep. Carol Alvarado survey campus post-Harvey.*



*Texas Sen. Eddie Lucio, Jr. & UHD President Muñoz*



*Texas Sen. John Whitmire visits UHD after Harvey.*

student population returned to campus that day, and more Gators began coming back as the weeks progressed.

Not long after resuming classes, President Muñoz announced the hiring of a Disaster Assistance Specialist to guide faculty, staff and students through the process of securing federal assistance and other support following Harvey. Ruama Camp joined the UHD team to counsel Gators.

“I was told specifically by the President of this University to help its people,” she said. “And that’s what I am going to do.”

## Opportunities for Discovery

The storm is now history. Houstonians, however, continue to rebuild their lives and their homes. At UHD, Harvey continues to create learning opportunities for students.



*UHD student  
Jacqueline Tarango  
collects water samples.*

During the fall semester, Dr. Poonam Gulati Salhorta and Dr. Maria Gabriela Bowden—both associate professors of microbiology—led students on a project analyzing bacterial levels in Houston’s waterways following Harvey. Collaborating with students from the University of Houston, led by professor Dr. Dan Price, UHD students retrieved water samples from area bayous, creeks and reservoirs. Mostly from UHD’s Scholars Academy, students gathered samples from Houston-area waterways and submitted them to researchers at the City of Houston Health Department’s Bureau of Pollution Control and Prevention.

Now, Gulati and Bowden are partnering with Dr. Mian Jiang, associate professor of chemistry, to discover the long-term effects on bacterial communities; the chemistry of the water; and how traumatic incidents, such as Harvey, produce more and different contaminants.

“It’s empowering for students to realize that they are using science to answer questions that benefit society,” Gulati said. “Our students also benefit because they are part of a major community study that will contribute to science as a whole and help Houston in the event of another hurricane.”



*UHS Chancellor Renu Khator &  
President Muñoz visit a UHD lab.*

## Looking Forward

Emerging from Harvey as a stronger institution, the storm presented the University and its Gator Family with many challenges, but Gator Grit prevailed.

Community leaders from Houston visited the campus to offer support and observe its recovery. Visitors included Texas Representatives Carol Alvarado and Armando Walle; Texas Senators John Whitmire, Borris Miles, and Eddie Lucio Jr.; and University of Houston System Chancellor Renu Khator.

According to President Muñoz, the worst situations will bring out the best in a community. That was certainly the case for the faculty, staff, students and alumni at UHD.

“Everyone came together during Harvey. There was no shortage of heroes during this storm,” Muñoz said. “From the Ride Out Team to those who volunteered at shelters, the resilience of our Gator Community played a critical role in the recovery of our University and our city.” **UHD**

## Future Teachers Look to the Stars

By Mike Emery

**A**stronaut Joseph M. “Joe” Acaba is weightless, bobbing up and down in the International Space Station (ISS). He’s floating next to fellow astronaut Pasolo Nespoli and about to take questions from earthbound students during a Facebook Live event.

Hosts Kirk Shireman, manager for the ISS Program, and Brandi Dean, NASA public affairs specialist, present the first question, which comes from a UHD Urban Education student.

“How can teachers help their students get a better understanding of the nature of science in the classroom?” Dean asked.

“We’re working with the preservice teachers there in Houston,” Acaba said with a smile. “I think one of the important things we can do for the students is to make things important and tangible. I’m hoping that the work we do together will prove that. These preservice teachers will come up with ideas for their classrooms and share them with us.”

Acaba and Nespoli show a clear, inflatable globe floating nearby with multicolored candies inside.

“There’s lots of things you can do in your classroom with things as simple as this,” Acaba said. “We hope to take advantage of the resources on this space station and your great ideas to help inspire students.”

### Out of This World

Acaba’s message resonated with UHD Urban Education students from the College of Public Service who were already hard at work developing classroom experiments aimed at bolstering students’ interest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) topics.

Their efforts were part of an out-of-this-world partnership between the University’s Department of Urban Education and NASA’s Johnson Space Center Office of Education.

During the fall semester, aspiring educators in the University’s Science Methods course created science experiments under the guidance of Dr. Franklin Allaire, assistant professor of science education, and adjunct lecturers Xandra Williams-Earlie, Adrienne Miles, and Dr. Celestin Ntemngwa. The steps of these experiments were emailed to Acaba who selected a few of them to perform aboard the ISS and send feedback via video to UHD.

Students worked in groups to develop these experiments, including an effort that compared different objects’ masses using tools, such as a slinky and small weighted blocks.

“I hope that astronaut Acaba selects this experiment,” said UHD student Miriam Garza. “I’m thinking that the results will be much different on the ISS.”



*Dr. Allaire & preservice teachers prepare a STEM experiment for astronaut Joe Acaba.*



NASA Astronaut Joe Acaba  
Photo: NASA

## Sharing The Inspiration

One of Garza's classmates, Melissa Kreipe, who is already an educator and has recently started a STEM Academy at Null Middle School in the Sheldon Independent School District, relished the opportunity to deepen her experience in preparing science lessons.

"I'm bringing some of these ideas back to my school, so I can show and share with my fellow teachers how we can further connect with our students," Kreipe said.

Kreipe's experiment was focused on learning whether mass would change the rate at which water could be expelled from a balloon. She and her classmates would fill balloons with water and poke a small hole that would release the fluid.

"I kept thinking what this would be like if they performed it in space in a microgravity environment," she said. "This has definitely been a fun experience. Sometimes, I think that we forget that science is fun."

Other student experiments focused on static electricity, motion (using a pendulum and spring), and surface tension.

## UHD Distinction

The UHD-NASA partnership is part of the space agency's STEM on Station initiative, which connects classrooms with astronauts and educators aboard the ISS. Extensive space walks by Acaba and his colleagues affected scheduling, so the experiments have yet to be attempted by Acaba.

"STEM on Station is very inspirational," said Allaire. "Many of our students dream of going into space or participating in the process, but they don't know how to get involved. This collaboration provides an avenue for them to do great science with NASA and its astronauts. It's definitely a great experience and the opportunity of a lifetime."

Acaba is scheduled to speak to UHD students from the space station during the ISS In-Flight Education Downlink. During this



Expedition 53-54 Prime Crew: Acaba; Alexander Misurkin of Roscosmos; NASA Astronaut Mark Vande Hei  
Photo: NASA

interactive event, a satellite transmission will link Acaba to the University community to answer questions from space during a video teleconference. UHD has the distinction of being the only Texas institution to host an ISS Downlink in 2018.

## Esteemed Educator

As the first person of Puerto Rican heritage to serve as an astronaut, Acaba is an educator and hydrogeologist who has served as the Mission Specialist Educator with the crew of STS-119 that traveled to the ISS in 2009. He returned to the station in 2012 as a crew member with Expedition 31-32. Acaba embarked on a recent five-and-a-half-month mission on ISS in September 2017 for Expedition 53-54 on the Russian spacecraft Soyuz MS-06.

"Working with an esteemed educator and astronaut such as Joe Acaba is an honor for our institution, and for me personally, having known him for more than 20 years," said Acaba's longtime friend Dr. Juan Sánchez Muñoz, UHD President. "His interactions with the UHD faculty and its Urban Education students will further inspire their careers as teachers and provide them with invaluable insights and world-class pedagogy that they will then impart in their respective classrooms." **UFD**

## Transfer Students' Thirst for Success

By Sheryl E. Taylor

When thinking of the traditional college student, what usually comes to mind is the freshly minted high school graduate walking the halls of their soon-to-be alma mater. If you take a look at UHD's student population, you may be surprised to learn that 68 percent of its student body start out as transfer students. Why? The University understands that as the second largest four-year institution in Houston, it needed to create seamless pathways for more students from all walks of life to earn a UHD degree for this burgeoning population that continues to grow. How? UHD, along with Houston Community College (HCC) and Lone Star College (LSC) leadership, expanded its partnerships by adding strategic admission models, degree maps and advising teams at their campuses to help students avoid taking unexpected detours from their academic pursuits. In fall 2017, more than 1,800 students transferred to UHD. Meet two stellar transfer students who are making the grade.

### Anissa Veal

Earning a college degree was on her bucket list.

Raised by her grandparents, Anissa Veal grew up in Saint Francisville, Louisiana—a little over a 100 miles from New Orleans and 35 miles north of Baton Rouge.

With an ambition to become an ER nurse, she earned a significant amount of college credits, mostly in the sciences, from three universities in Louisiana—Southern University, Southeastern University and University of New Orleans. Veal was accepted into nursing school at Southern.

But life offered a bit of a detour after the birth of her second son. So, she took a break from school to raise a family.

In 1994, Veal entered the business world where she worked in the federal land acquisition and relocation program to help relocate families. After 17 years in the industry and relocating more than 500 families, she was laid off.

A year later, she was diagnosed with Stage 1 breast cancer. She remembers the moment she received the diagnosis as if it were yesterday.

"On December 20, 2011 at 8 p.m., my doctor called. I knew it wasn't good news," said Veal. "After the call, I went into my closet and cried. I said my prayers and said to God if this is what we have to do, you lead and I will follow."

After a lumpectomy in February of 2012 plus 16 rounds of chemotherapy and 36 days of radiation—all while two of her three sons were in high school—Veal was still ready to take on the world.

"I tell people all the time that it's all about your attitude," she said. "I wasn't going to let it stop me from living. Some days, I would get my morning dose of chemo and attend my son's basketball or baseball games the same day."



Anissa Veal

Now with three grown sons—ages 25, 23, 22—she decided to revisit her bucket list.

After meeting with a LSC-Kingwood counselor, Veal learned that her previous college credits were still viable and that she was only four classes away from earning an associate's degree. In January 2016, she started at LSC-Kingwood and earned an Associate of Arts degree in August of the same year.

Four months later, she transferred to UHD with only 30 hours to graduate.

"You always have to have a game plan," Veal said. "My plan was to get it done in a year."

During her final semester at UHD, Veal took five classes and worked three jobs—a subcontractor for the Houston Airport System

handling federal land acquisition; her real estate company, AMV Realty (motto: Seal Your Deal With Anissa Veal); and property manager for 16 individual businesses and a multi-sports facility.

“My experience with LSC and UHD was wonderful,” she said. “Everything was great...my advisors and professors...the transition was smooth...the cost...no loans...and the online classes were so convenient.”

Veal’s UHD degree represented so much more than an array of future opportunities.

“I’m a single mother of three black men, and I believe that it’s important to walk the talk,” she said. “My sons see me as an example of what they can achieve with an education.”

2017 offered a double dose of celebration for Veal. In addition to earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Interdisciplinary Studies (with a minor in Business Administration), she also celebrated five years of remission—one day after her 49th birthday.

“This degree is just the beginning...the sky is truly the limit,” she said smiling.

## John Jordan

He’s a self-described marketer and an out-of-the-box thinker.

In fact, his love and passion for internet marketing—at one time he was responsible for 700 websites—got in the way of attending Houston’s Bellaire High School. So, he left after one year.

For John Jordan being diagnosed with a rare condition changed the course of his life forever.

In late 2007, he was diagnosed with dysautonomia—a disorder of the autonomic nervous system. Even though his illness delayed him for a year from getting a high school diploma, he eventually earned it in 2009 via home-schooling. In the summer of that same year, he enrolled at HCC, where he earned two degrees—an Associate of Applied Science in paralegal technology and an Associate of Arts.

“My illness imposed a sense of urgency and changed my motivation in what I wanted to do moving forward in my life,” said the native Houstonian.

While experiencing another relapse, Jordan began reading everything from history to philosophy to law. Through it all, he discovered the complex world of law. Fueled by this newfound passion, he pursued a Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences-Applied Administration within UHD’s University College. After graduation, he plans on attending law school followed by working in a private practice that specializes in constitutional and criminal law.

“I feel good when I’m helping people,” said the 27-year old. “So many people need a good attorney, and they don’t have access to one. There are so many cases at this moment with laws that can be challenged but haven’t been.”



*John Jordan*

The love of law runs in the family. Jordan’s mother has an associate’s degree in paralegal technology, like her son, with aspirations to become a family law attorney.

Since entering UHD in spring 2016, it’s been “all gas and no brakes” for Jordan. In fact, in his first year at UHD, he received the University’s Academic Award as “Outstanding Senior.” Bestowed by faculty members from each of UHD’s five colleges, the award recognizes students who have achieved distinction through their stellar academic performance.

Thanks to the transfer pathways established by HCC and UHD, Jordan was able to transfer all of his previously earned college credits without repeating any courses—only 42 hours was needed for him to earn a bachelor’s degree from UHD in December 2017.

“It wasn’t all me,” Jordan said. “So many people were involved in my success...the advisors, coordinators, professors and staff were above reproach...exceptional. There are so many memorable experiences that will stay with me.”

Jordan’s advice for anyone considering a second-act in their academic pursuits:

“If you don’t like your present situation... do something about it,” he said. “The more you second-guess yourself...you won’t do it. There’s no right or wrong way to do it.” **UHD**

# Gator Grit Defined

## “What does Gator Grit mean to you?”



**Melvin Rivas**

UHD Student & Future 6th Grade Math Teacher

“Gator Grit is an earned honor and is symbolic of all the obstacles that I have overcome to be who I am today...a pride that I will carry for the rest of my life.”

**Michelle Turek**

Principal, Herod Elementary

“When I think of Gator Grit, I think about my personal journey in becoming a leader in education. I was always determined to do what is best in educating our children, and I used that to drive my career to where I am today.”

[Read Michelle’s story on page 29.]



**Tuyet "Snow" Huynh**

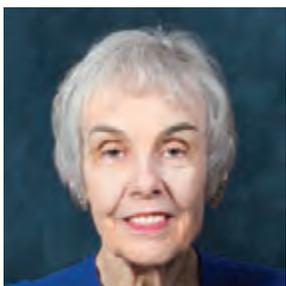
Contract Supervisor, UHD Facilities Management

“The determination and commitment to living life as a giver of kindness and compassion to others...the willingness to help students be prepared for the real world through training and mentoring. My motto during Harvey’s restoration. Even if the situation is bad, your attitude doesn’t have to be.”

**David Deleon**

Assistant Chief, UHD Police

“It means that we must never give up. Life is full of challenges and we must face them with discipline to overcome any challenge to Finish Gator Strong!”



**Dr. Chris Birchak**

Dean, UHD University College

“Maintain a “can do” attitude that overcomes barriers encountered and engenders resilience. The determination to fulfill short-term and long-term goals while balancing multiple responsibilities and facing the vicissitudes of life.” [Read Birchak’s story on page 30.]

## Love Is Her Arsenal

By Sheryl E. Taylor

She didn't have a childhood ambition or a dream career. But she knew she had a calling to do something.

"All I knew was that I needed to get a degree and do something," said Wendi Johnson-Turner ('03). "That's really all I knew."

She also knew that her pursuit of higher education required a more intimate, "non-traditional" campus experience.

"I wasn't made for the 'traditional' university experience," said the 45-year-old. "When I visited UHD, I knew this was it. I saw my reflection on campus—returning student, single mom working full-time. UHD was the best fit for me."

The UHD formula worked. Johnson-Turner finished her degree in two and a half years with a 3.96 GPA. After graduating *summa cum laude*, she made what she called a forced career choice and became a teacher. However, as a fifth-generation educator, she knew deep down that it wasn't her true calling.

"It (teaching) just didn't fit," she said.

But it was one particular school year that caused a major shift in her life while talking to a fellow teacher, who told her not to forget: "if you've met one (student), you've done your job."



Her response?

"Instinctively, I said that it's never enough for me," Johnson-Turner said. "One is never enough...the world is hurting. It ignited a fire in me that has never been smoldered. It angered and eventually propelled me to where I am today."

And that was just the beginning of a commitment to change lives as well as her own.

She describes it as a divine revelation that changed her life in July 2016. It, literally, began with a sign (10 x 20) that said on one side, "Hope Over Hurt," and the other side, "Your Life Matters." Much to the chagrin of her family and friends, Johnson-Turner embarked on a solo cross-country journey in a car filled with 26 care packages for the homeless, \$300, and a few articles of clothing with a mission to deliver and extend hope, benevolence, and kindness.

Johnson-Turner traveled through 18 states, 26 cities—more than 6,300 miles in the summer of 2016. During this sojourn mission, she met with Mothers Who Fight for Justice (founded by the mother of slain teen Trayvon Martin) in Miami and members of the Muslim Political Action Council. She visited the projects in Chicago and met with residents who experienced recent gang violence, served the homeless in front of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, and had other memorable moments.

"I was never the same again," she said. "I knew from that experience that we, as a collective, can make a difference."

With the tagline, "Love is Our Arsenal," Hope Over Hurt (HOH) was born.

In February 2017, the U.S. government recognized HOH as a "non-profit organization striving to enrich the quality



of life for individuals in need through empowerment, outreach, and service in communities throughout the world."

Now more than 300 days old, HOH has extended its reach to six continents and 20 countries and is translated in three languages—Arabic, French, and Spanish. The organization is home of HOH Hope Warriors—who are ambassadors in cities across the U.S.—New Jersey, Detroit, Atlanta, The Carolinas, Virginia, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

"Our mission and vision is to make connections...to empower and provide the hands and feet to make a difference," she said. "Through HOH there are no random acts of kindness. HOH is intentional acts of kindness."

The city of Houston recognized the organization with a special proclamation, Hope Over Hurt Day on June 9, 2017 from Mayor Sylvester Turner.

During the recent devastation of Harvey, HOH provided resources to more than 5,000 hurricane victims, which included everything from clothing to diapers and formula to school supplies/backpacks to food to medical and psychological services to shelter assistance to monetary donations.

Thanks to the real-time reach of social media, HOH broadcasts—five days a week—its mission of service, empowerment, and outreach through Instagram, Facebook, and Livestream.

When all is said and done, how does she want to be remembered?

"She stopped at nothing to love." **UFD**

## A Matter of Principals

By Mike Emery



*Leigha Curry*

UHD produces many teachers and administrators serving school districts throughout Greater Houston and the state of Texas. Two alumnae whose passion for teaching led them to their positions as principals for Houston Independent School District (HISD). Principals Leigha Curry and Michelle Turek are prime examples of “Gator Grit” in action.

### Leigha Curry

Leigha Curry’s favorite aspect of her UHD education?

According to Curry, the best part of her time at the University was that the professors “kept it real” in the classroom.

“There was pedagogy, but our Urban Education professors offered us insight on what it’s like to be in a classroom and what to expect,” said Curry, principal of Elrod Elementary School. “It prepared me for things that I actually experienced as a teacher and now as a principal.”

Curry graduated from UHD’s College of Public Service with a bachelor’s degree in 2006. Before graduating, she told her favorite professor, Dr. Leigh Van Horn, that she would make her proud. As a principal for HISD, she’s done just that.

“Leigha’s success is a tribute to her devotion to becoming a strong educator, and now, an instructional leader to others,” said Van Horn, interim dean of the College of Public Service. “All of us at UHD are so very proud of her.”

Curry was raised in Galena Park and graduated from North Shore Senior High School. She found her way to UHD for her undergraduate degree, then earned a master’s degree at Texas Southern University, where she’s now, completing her doctorate. She’s passionate about education and is committed to sharing this love of learning with the students at Elrod.

“I want to be an agent of change,” Curry said. “I want our students to have lifelong classroom experiences that they’ll never forget.”

At Elrod, through an emerging medical scholars Magnet program, she works with students from a variety of backgrounds, including English Language Learners who are new to the United States. Although many of these students are learning a new language and adapting to a new culture, Curry is there to encourage them.

“They need to know that they can do anything,” she said. “They have unlimited potential. I want them to realize that. One of our student mottos is: ‘Be the change you want to see in the world.’”

Such encouragement also extends to Elrod’s faculty as she has committed teachers to the motto: “Let love lead.”

Leading a school is no easy feat, and she is quick to credit her supportive family for her success.

“My whole family has been influential throughout my career,” Curry said. “Finishing school was a challenge, but they were there for me. And it’s been tough with my work schedule . . . but without them, I couldn’t do it.”

With her family behind her, Curry taught at different schools in the area, including Gray Elementary School (Aldine Independent School District), Codwell Elementary School, Garcia Elementary School, and Mading Elementary School (where she also served as interim principal). Her journey has been nothing short of enlightening, and she is grateful that UHD helped her along the way. Three years ago, she took the reins at Elrod.

“I thank UHD for my education,” Curry said. “I had some amazing professors of UHD. I felt like they really cared about my success.”

## Michelle Turek

Michelle Turek graduated from high school in a class of just 32 students. The Moulton, Texas native had a completely different experience when she attended UHD’s commencement ceremony. In fact, she described her graduation in one word.

“Mind-blowing,” said Turek, who earned a bachelor’s degree in interdisciplinary studies from the College of Public Service. “Being in Minute Maid Park left me in awe. I was a small town girl with big dreams. Sitting in that stadium made me feel like I had truly made it.”

Turek has served as Herod Elementary School’s principal for more than a year and credits UHD for putting her on the path to this position. After taking classes at the University of Houston-Victoria, she found her way to Houston. A UHD billboard caught Turek’s eye. She eventually looked into the institution and was met by friendly faces during her visit to campus.

“On my first visit, I was shown around by very nice people. I didn’t have an appointment,” she said. “I enrolled on the spot.”

The College of Public Service’s Urban Education Program was a perfect fit, and a career working with students was her destiny.

“I knew I wanted to help others,” Turek said. “As a kid, I was always known as the person who would volunteer to show new students around school. I knew that teaching was going to be very special to me.”

After graduating from UHD in 2009, Turek earned a master’s degree in academic leadership and supervision from The University of Texas at Arlington. In Houston, she taught at Sam Houston High School, and then stepped into an administrative role at Deady Middle School. Her passion for leadership then took her to Roberts Elementary School as an assistant principal. Soon after, she found her way to Herod.



*Michelle Turek*

The school just happens to be in Turek’s neighborhood. She and her husband, Michael, would play with their son Cam at the nearby park.

During each park visit, she’d look at its campus and think that the school would be a perfect place to work. The position of principal opened up, and the rest is history for both Turek and Herod.

“It was fate,” she said. “From the first moment I stepped into its hallways, I felt at home.”

Although she’s a long way from Moulton, Turek is back in a community where people know one another and treat neighbors as family. Each day on the job, she feels the same sensation as she did in Minute Maid Park—the small town girl who has made it.

“UHD prepared me for life as an educator,” she said. “For that, I am truly grateful. Being a principal in HISD is my dream come true.” **UHD**



## Dr. Chris Birchak: Lifelong Educator & An Original Trekkie

By Sheryl E. Taylor

It was spring 1985 when Dr. Chris Birchak arrived on campus as an adjunct lecturer of English. Now, 30-plus years later, the professor and dean of University College recently announced her retirement for 2018.

The native Houstonian attended Stephen F. Austin High School in the city's East End; graduated from the University of Houston with a bachelor's and a doctorate in English; and earned a master's degree in English from Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan.

During her time at UHD—13 years of which was spent serving as a dean—Birchak has taught 16 different writing courses ranging from British literature to studies in fiction to feature, environmental, science, business, and technology. She also served in a myriad of roles at the University—assistant chair of the English department; director of the Professional Writing Program; and associate dean of the College of Humanities & Social Sciences. Birchak's indelible mark also has included playing an integral part in securing millions of dollars in grants and proposals for UHD.

### Childhood ambition?

I was always fascinated with theatre and Helen Hayes (American actress) was my idol.

My mother taught high school English in HISD for almost 50 years. I always told her that the one thing that I would not be is an English teacher, which she found quite amusing in my later adult years. (Birchak taught for three years at Houston's Westbury High School.) I eventually realized that no matter what I chose to do... I wanted to work with people.

### Proudest moment?

My marriage of 54 years.

### Inspiration?

My mother. After my father's death when I was five or six years old, my mother raised me as a single parent.

### If you could trade places with anyone, living or dead, for a day, who would it be?

Judi Dench. She's someone who I think has handled the mature years so successfully and continues to be a wonderful role model and actress...I've always admired her. And, I like Maggie Smith too.

### Most treasured possession?

My mother's house—filled with great memories—a cottage near Rice University that we still use for family gatherings and as our private bed and breakfast.

### Favorite book?

My first choice would be the book I did my dissertation on: Henry Fielding's "Tom Jones." I also love science fiction... I've been a 'Trekkie' since the original "Star Trek" TV show.

### The perfect day?

Experiencing I-45 running smoothly both ways. And, a sense at the end of each day that I've made a positive contribution.

### Who is your real-life hero?

My husband, a physics Ph.D. from Rice University, is retired from a career in industry. Since retiring, he continues to conduct research and is always learning and growing, which I admire and greatly respect.

### Words of wisdom you live by?

Actively listening and appreciating those you may encounter throughout the day...there is so much more beyond the surface.

### What trait do you most value in yourself?

A collaborative spirit.

### If you couldn't be an educator...

I would definitely be an actress. In high school, I played seated, aging characters, like Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth.

### UHD enabled me...

To never stop learning. I remember a colleague saying to me that "we don't say, I'm going to work; we say, I'm going to school." It's important to keep learning not just from the research we're doing or from our colleagues, but also from our students. In academia, we get to be lifelong learners. We're not only teaching or sharing ideas; we're also learning.

### First thing you will do after retirement?

My husband has a lot of scientific research projects for me. Read a lot of sci-fi. Never stop contributing to the community. 

# View From the Bayou

## Picture Perfect

By Sheryl E. Taylor



**H**is first “real” camera was the Yashica TL Electro X (still available on Etsy and ebay). And no, he doesn’t remember the first photograph he took.

UHD’s very own photographer, Thomas Shea, really loves photography. His love affair began at an early age.

“I wasn’t a very good student,” he said. “So, I figured after winning a couple of photography awards that I should pursue it in high school.”

He even built a dark room in his family’s bathroom.

“My brothers weren’t so thrilled,” Shea said, laughing. “Photography was different than today...you had to manually focus, set exposures, develop film, and make prints...it was more of a craft. I’m sure I’ve rolled over a thousand rolls of film before digital photography.”

Before making his way to UHD, Shea earned an associate’s degree in radio, television and film from Pennsylvania’s West Chester University where his dad taught political science. Following graduation, he worked three jobs—a Rainbow Cab driver for senior citizens who could ride anywhere in the county for 50 cents, a photographer during the day, and a bartender at night. He went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in photojournalism from Rochester Institute of Technology in New York.

Without a job, he decided to make a move to the Bayou City in 1993. The first job he landed was as a video script writer on safety, followed by working at a camera store; teaching photography and art at two high schools for four years; a digital photography manager for Catch The Moment; four years at the Pasadena Citizen as a photographer then two years at The Courier newspaper; a freelance photographer for six years; 12 years as a photographer at the University of Houston....and now in UHD’s Office of University Relations.

**Dream job?** “Pilot. I love to fly...but my vision wasn’t good enough.”

**If you weren’t a photographer, what would you be?** “A homicide detective.” (In fact, he tried to be a Houston police officer.)

**Greatest achievement?** “My twin girls.”

During Harvey, one of Shea’s photographs was one of the first images that went around world and was featured above the fold (a very big deal) in The New York Times.

“I knew I needed to get the right image that told the story of what Houstonians were going through,” he said.

Shea’s entrance into the wide world of sports began in high school and hasn’t stopped. For four years he was the team photographer for the Houston Dynamo. Since 2006, he has been a freelance photographer for USA Today Sports and Getty Images.

“For sports, you try to get the safe photo first and then the unique one,” he said.



Shea’s sports images have been featured in Sports Illustrated, National Geographic, People Magazine, EA Sports, USA Today, ESPN, The LA Times, Houston Chronicle, Rolling Stone, Fortune Magazine, The Dallas Morning News...just to name a few.

**His favorite photographic memory?** “Definitely Game 4 of the 2017 World Series. It was amazing. I shot over 5,000 images—using a camera that shot 12 frames per second—during that game. It was such a great triumph for the city after Harvey. I was honored to be a part of history.” **UHD**

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# WHAT CAN YOU DO FOR UHD?



## A Master's Degree Pays Off

You've worked hard balancing your busy life, and now it's time to do something that will help you accomplish your dreams and jump-start your career. Earning your master's degree will help you gain the competitive edge you need to stand apart.

- ◆ Master of Business Administration
- ◆ Master of Science in Criminal Justice
- ◆ Master of Science in Data Analytics
- ◆ Master in Nonprofit Management
- ◆ Master of Arts in Rhetoric and Composition
- ◆ Master of Arts in Security Management
- ◆ Master of Arts in Teaching
- ◆ Master of Science in Technical Communication

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