Dear alumni and friends,

Much has changed in the College since our last issue of Pathways was published last year. We are no longer the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, but rather the College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources. This name better reflects the programmatic diversity that exists in the College today and the important role we now play in health promotion. In addition, we have added another academic department, the Department of Kinesiology, at the request of the Kinesiology faculty and the campus administration. As a college, we were pleased to welcome our new colleagues. Their academic and research programs in physical therapy, exercise science and athletic training nicely complement our existing programs in Nutrition and Allied Health Sciences.

In September, we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Cooperative Extension System. More than 300 faculty and staff, volunteers and friends gathered together for a dinner to celebrate 100 years of service to Connecticut. A short video was developed, narrated by Andrea Dennis-LaVigne, CAHNR alum and UConn Board of Trustee member, highlighting our legacy of service to Connecticut citizens. Both Senator Blumenthal and Congressman Courtney joined us for this signature event, and Connecticut Commissioner of Agriculture Steven Reviczky read a resolution from Governor Malloy recognizing the contributions of UConn Extension. This event was also used to kick off a campaign to raise funds for Cooperative Extension so that we can better serve Connecticut over the next 100 years.

This fall, our undergraduate enrollment continued to grow although at a slower pace than recent years. The College did experience a significant increase in graduate enrollment. Our partnerships with select Chinese universities continue to flourish and we have turned our attention to exploring opportunities for stronger international engagement in Africa.

These are exciting times for our college and UConn, and I know all of you are as excited about the future as I am.

Dean Gregory Weidemann

Due to the costs of printing and mailing Pathways, CAHNR will be discontinuing the use of print material as a primary method of communication. To read news and information about the teaching, research and extension outreach programs and activities of the University of Connecticut’s College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources, visit our blog at naturally.uconn.edu.
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PATHWAYS
Fall 2014

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PATHWAYS is published annually by the College of Agriculture, Health & Natural Resources and sent to alumni & friends of the college.

WHO ARE THEY?

Gregory Weidemann, Dean of the College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources, and Rineicha Otero ’12 (Nutritional Sciences), UConn Extension Specialist for CT 4-H FANs IM, attended the Extension Centennial Celebration. Here, they pose with life-size cut-outs of two historical figures. Do you know who they are? Read more on page 8.

ON THE COVER:
From this undated photo of an auction at Farmer’s Week to our geospatial programs of today, UConn Extension programs have tied research to real life for a century. Photo credits: UConn Extension’s Center for Land Use Education (full page photo) and the UConn Extension Archives at the Dodd Center (inset).
UConn Extension Celebrates 100th Anniversary of Smith-Lever Act
by Jenny Riggs and Mike O’Neill

On September 19, 2014 over 300 guests gathered to celebrate a century of leadership and service by UConn Extension. Dedicated Extension volunteer Jennifer Riggs and Gregory Weidemann, Dean of the College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources, co-hosted the evening’s events. Guests were treated to dinner featuring locally sourced wine, cheese, vegetables, seafood and poultry.

Congressman Joe Courtney and Senator Richard Blumenthal provided remarks prior to dinner. Videographer G. Morty Ortega (son of CAHNR faculty member, I. Morty Ortega) created a short documentary highlighting UConn Extension’s contributions around the state. The evening also included a congratulatory video from U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack and a Proclamation from Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy. Dinner concluded with Centennial Caramel Crunch ice cream, an award-winning flavor created specifically by the UConn Creamery to recognize UConn Extension’s 100th birthday.

President’s Message

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the alumni of the Department of Kinesiology to the College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources. I would also like to congratulate our newest UCAHNRAA members, the UConn CAHNR Class of 2014. Welcome to our alumni family—we look forward to seeing you at our events throughout the year.

UCAHNRAA has been busy this past year, participating in a number of recurring events and new events. As always, UCAHNRAA was pleased to support a variety of annual programs including Career Night, student scholarships, alumni, faculty and staff awards and opportunities for alumni to engage with each other. In addition, we were excited to participate in the 41st annual Suncoast picnic in Sarasota, Florida.

On Sunday, September 21, UCAHNRAA held its annual auction as part of Cornucopia. The event was extremely successful and I would like to thank the alumni, faculty, staff and friends of the College for their support and auction contributions. This is a major fundraiser for UCAHNRAA and it provides the necessary funds for all of the student and alumni activities and scholarships we support throughout the year.

This past year we were also pleased to sponsor new alumni networking opportunities at the ASLA Annual Meeting and at the New England Grows Conference, both in Boston. In February, in collaboration with the Schools of Engineering, Education and Business, CAHNR hosted a pre-game reception prior to the women’s basketball game against USF in Tampa. Each of these events allowed us to support our alma mater in unique ways.

This fall we are excited to partner with the College’s Academic Programs Office in outfitting the CAHNR seniors in sweatshirts as we continue to welcome future alumni.

In closing, I invite all alumni to be a part of UCAHNRAA activities, whether it’s once a year or once a month. Please think about how you can make a difference in our organization, as our group will be stronger with your assistance. Opportunities are available for obtaining donations for the Cornucopia Auction or participating in student activities such as Career Night, Senior Picnic, career advising or networking with other alumni.

As president of UCAHNRAA, I look forward to hearing from you and getting to know more of you during the coming year. Please feel free to contact me via email at jencushman@aol.com.

Find us on Facebook!

Sincerely,

Jennifer (Elman) Cushman, ’07, ’08, ’12
President
UConn Extension Celebrates 100th Anniversary of Smith-Lever Act

by Jenny Riggs and Mike O’Neill

On September 19, 2014 over 300 guests gathered to celebrate a century of leadership and service by UConn Extension. Dedicated Extension volunteer Jennifer Riggs and Gregory Weidemann, Dean of the College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources, co-hosted the evening’s events. Guests were treated to dinner featuring locally sourced wine, cheese, vegetables, seafood and poultry. Congressman Joe Courtney and Senator Richard Blumenthal provided remarks prior to dinner. Videographer G. Morty Ortega (son of CAHNR faculty member, I. Morty Ortega) created a short documentary highlighting UConn Extension’s contributions around the state. The evening also included a congratulatory video from U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack and a Proclamation from Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy. Dinner concluded with Centennial Caramel Crunch ice cream, an award-winning flavor created specifically by the UConn Creamery to recognize UConn Extension’s 100th birthday.
I wish UConn Extension were not the best-kept secret in the state. Congress passed the Smith-Lever Act that established the Extension System in 1914. It helped communities grow better crops and plants, use land more wisely and provide safer food. It began by engaging youth through 4-H, their parents through adult education and farmers through training in cropping systems and business management. Those concepts still hold today but it has gone beyond rural agriculture and into urban audiences. These are “university” students in the community who are interested in learning about growing food in a variety of ways, still have concerns about how we use our land, and now more than ever, want information about food safety and nutrition. A recent analysis found eleven or more UConn Extension programs are delivered in every single town throughout Connecticut. Over one hundred UConn Extension faculty and staff deliver 282 established programs that are grouped into four broad topic areas: food production, healthy living, environmental sustainability and youth development/leadership. Here are a few examples of how UConn Extension has touched my life and is making a difference in the lives of others:

• Ten years ago I became a Certified Master Gardener through UConn Extension. It opened my eyes to the impact that suburban homeowners have on polluting streams and waterways with fertilizer runoff, herbicides and pesticides. We changed our landscape management practices dramatically and we’re now far more sensitive to reuse — recycle, to protect our environment and its limited resources.

• Earlier this year, while preparing for a Farm Tour to benefit Extension, I met with a farmer who spoke with deep appreciation and respect for his UConn Extension specialist. He helped the farmer implement techniques that reduced land erosion and production costs and increased crop yields. Keeping farmers prosperous and productive makes our state a better place to live.

• Ever since volunteering in a program to feed the homeless, I’ve been sensitive to the thousands of people in our state who live with food insecurity (not knowing when or where they’ll get their next meal). In 2013, UConn Extension helped research and publish a town-by-town analysis that provides those
who run meal programs with much-needed data to battle hunger in their towns. UConn Extension also directly helps families receiving government food assistance. Expanded Food & Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) specialists teach people how to stretch food assistance dollars with healthy food choices and tasty meals.

The scope of 4-H has expanded since I was a member of a 4-H club in Pennsylvania more than 40 years ago. Today over 17,700 Connecticut youth are enrolled in traditional clubs, and urban clubs located in towns like Bridgeport, Danbury, New Haven and Hartford. Just as they did years ago, 4-H still emphasizes learning by doing and nurtures leadership and citizenship skills important to creating strong, capable, future adults. The urban 4-H clubs provide after school programs that educate youth while keeping them safe and off the streets.

UConn Extension delivers learning off campus in places as diverse as high-tech greenhouses, coastal estuaries, elementary school gardens, community centers for high risk teens and municipal town halls. Programs enhance small businesses and the economic and physical well being of families and offer opportunities to improve the decision-making capacity of community leaders. The eight regional Extension Centers, the Sea Grant program at Avery Point, the 4-H Education Center at Auerfarm, the Home and Garden Education Center and the UConn Extension office in Storrs all collaborate to tie research to real life for Connecticut citizens.

Remember, UConn Extension has 282 programs, plus thousands of electronic and written resources designed for consumers like you and me. Many services are free, low cost or priced at very affordable rates to defray costs. Our federal and state tax dollars along with over $6.8 million in external grants obtained by Extension educators enable UConn Extension to be accessible and offer relevant information for the needs and concerns of today’s Connecticut. Explore the hundreds of services and programs available through your UConn Extension! Find out more by visiting www.extension.uconn.edu
Pictured with Dean Weidemann and Rineicha Otero are Senator Hoke Smith of Georgia and Representative A.F. Lever of South Carolina. Together, Smith and Lever introduced the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, a federal law which provided funding for outreach programs at the land-grant universities founded by the Morrill Act of 1862.

In 2014, UConn Extension is celebrating the Smith-Lever Act, which established the Cooperative Extension Service, a unique educational partnership between the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the nation’s land-grant universities that extends research-based knowledge through a state-by-state network of extension educators. For 100 years, the Smith-Lever Act has stimulated innovative research and vital educational programs for youth and adults through progressive information delivery systems that improved lives and shaped a nation.

During 2013, UConn Extension provided

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<tr>
<th>282</th>
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<td>282 formal outreach programs</td>
<td>567 presentations</td>
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Supported the community with

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<td>23,500 hours of community service donated by the Master Gardeners with a value of $664,110</td>
<td>5,500 youth mentoring sessions</td>
<td>7,500 hours of community service donated by 650 4-H members</td>
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Engaged citizens through

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<th>17,790</th>
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<tr>
<td>17,790 youth enrolled in county-based 4-H programs</td>
<td>2,537 downloads of the Rain Garden App</td>
<td>4,870 commercial growers received IPM training</td>
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Improved knowledge of healthy, nutritious eating for 11,297 school children

www.extension.uconn.edu
2014 Augustus and Charles Storrs Award Recipient

Nancy Weiss officially retired from the College in 2003, but the effects of her work for the College both before and after retiring continue today.

Ms. Weiss earned a BA in political science from UConn and an MA in English from Eastern Connecticut State University. Following completion of her BA, she taught high school English in upstate New York, then worked at the Northeastern Connecticut Regional Planning Agency. After coming to the College in 1973, Ms. Weiss served in a range of roles: assistant 4-H club agent, assistant program leader and instructor, assistant director and associate professor in the Cooperative Extension Service. She started Connecticut’s wildly successful 4-H Double Dutch program in the 1970s. She also proposed, created and implemented the College’s development office, and as the College’s first director of development, tirelessly worked to raise millions of dollars in support of College programs, including construction of at least three major buildings. With her leadership, the College was the first to reach its goal in the University’s first capital campaign.

As director of development, she was also at that time responsible for alumni relations. Former Dean Hugo John credited her with reviving UCANRAA (now UCAHNRAA) and helping it become the University’s most active and engaged alumni association. She initiated the College’s annual alumni awards banquet and worked with UCAHNRAA on creating the University’s first endowed alumni scholarship.

After her retirement, Ms. Weiss continued to work part time in development for the College and assumed yet another role: writer. She wrote articles for the College’s print newsletter, the CANR Journal. She was one of three authors, along with Nancy Bull and Anne Rideout, of Education in Action: A Story of Commitment, Challenge and Change: Connecticut Cooperative Extension System, 1960-2008. She writes on agricultural, environmental and other issues for a variety of publications, including Edible Nutmeg, a magazine celebrating Connecticut food and agriculture, the Villager newspapers of northeastern Connecticut and the Putnam Traveler, in which she often profiles the area’s growers, producers, eateries and small businesses. She also writes articles on the College’s teaching, research and extension programs for Naturally@UConn, the College’s blog.

Ms. Weiss and her husband, Jim Weiss, are generous supporters of the College and UCAHNRAA and are members of the Charles Lewis Beach Society.

Ms. Weiss is a champion of Connecticut agriculture, natural resources and open space. She lives on an 18th century farm in Pomfret, which she and Mr. Weiss have preserved as open space by making a gift of 80 acres to the Connecticut Audubon Society. She was a charter member of Pomfret’s Conservation Commission. She served as development consultant on Ken Simon’s documentary Working the Land and is a development consultant for the Connecticut Farmland Trust.

With her energy, optimism, excellent analytical and writing skills, her gifts for communicating and connecting people engaged in similar or complementary pursuits and her desire to serve the public good, Ms. Weiss’s influence extends well beyond the programs she is specifically involved with. Her curiosity and fascination with nature and science—the realm of the College—coupled with her deep and abiding interest in people from all backgrounds and circumstances made her a natural at inspiring enthusiasm in prospective donors to the College. Now she uses these same qualities to continue to spread the word in her lively articles for a diverse audience on the program and activities of the College faculty, staff and students.

UCAHNRAA Distinguished Alumni Award

James Hsiao received his PhD in Agricultural Economics from the University of Connecticut in 1968 and has since made notable contributions to academia and industry in Connecticut and on the national and international levels. Dr. Hsiao was the founder and dean of the School of Business at Southern Connecticut State University. Under his leadership, student enrollment at the school increased from 100 to 1,300 between 1979 and 1983. He also served there as professor of economics and management science, as visiting scholar at Yale University, as visiting professor at UConn and as a member of the visiting faculty at the University of Chicago.
For his contributions, Dr. Hsiao was recognized by the Legislature of the State of Connecticut (1985) and the Board of Trustees of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities for outstanding contributions to the state (1984).

In the 1990s, Dr. Hsiao was one of the six original founders of Inframat Corporation, a start-up company that focused on nanotechnology and originated with the guidance of UConn Professor Emeritus Peter Strutt. In 2005, Dr. Hsiao, in collaboration with three other leading scientists, established Cross Ocean Labs, Inc, an emerging high-tech company focusing on cosmetics and sensor technology. In addition, Dr. Hsiao has authored and co-authored numerous books and articles. He has been a consultant to the Rockefeller Foundation, the United Nations Development Program and Future Group Inc. He was also a panelist at the World Economic Forum Regional Conference at Beijing in September 2003.

Throughout his career, Dr. Hsiao has enthusiastically promoted technological innovation and a commitment to cultural exchange. His contributions to academia and to industry have had an impact in Connecticut, nationally and internationally.

UCAHNRAA Excellence in Teaching Award
Thomas Hoagland, Department of Animal Science

Thomas Hoagland, professor in the Department of Animal Science, has taught almost every major course in the department and continues be a very valuable teaching asset. Dr. Hoagland is an enthusiastic teacher at all levels, and his passion is reflected in highly positive and complimentary student evaluations. His teaching load demands a great deal of flexibility based on the various academic levels of the classes and the diversity of the material he teaches. He is committed to enhancing students’ hands-on experiential learning, critical thinking and academic success.

Dr. Hoagland’s primary emphasis is on teaching his students critical thinking by using quantitative skills and focusing on engaging students through his own passion and interest in the courses he teaches. He updates his courses frequently and uses activities that increase student participation. Dr. Hoagland requires his students to use data, critical evaluation and integration of material to make logical and convincing arguments.

Dr. Hoagland is an active and caring academic advisor and advises three extracurricular student organizations, including UConn’s oldest student organization, the Block and Bridle Club. He is active on graduate student committees, is a strong team member on numerous research projects and also serves the University on the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee. Dr. Hoagland really cares about his students and makes himself available to discuss their needs, often going out of his way to ensure that his students succeed.

UCAHNRAA Outstanding Staff Award
William Sciturro, Department of Animal Science

William Sciturro, manager of the Creamery in the Department of Animal Science, is responsible for the production of UConn Dairy Bar ice cream and the maintenance and sanitation of all its production equipment and freezers. Mr. Sciturro has been at the University of Connecticut since 2007, and in that time, ice cream production has increased 45 percent. This is a result of improved efficiency, production redesign and strategic planning that he implemented beginning in 2008. In addition, he has implemented two comprehensive programs to help maintain production and quality of the product. One of these is a preventive maintenance program to reduce unexpected production interruptions and/or product loss. The other included overhauling the sanitation program to bring the Dairy Bar in line with best practices for dairy food production. During multiple power outages over the last several years, Mr. Sciturro also participated in planning and implementing steps to preserve the integrity of the Dairy Bar ice cream.
UCAHNRAA Outstanding Staff Award
Edan Tulman, Department of Pathobiology and Veterinary Science

Edan Tulman has been a research associate in the Center of Excellence for Vaccine Research since 2004. Mr. Tulman brings a wealth of experience and knowledge in virology, molecular biology and bioinformatics to UConn. He has been instrumental in conceiving hypotheses and assisting with writing proposals, all of which have been critical for success in obtaining extramural federal research funds. In the past five years, his contributions have been directly responsible for success in obtaining awards from the Nations Science Foundation, the Binational Science Foundation, Department of Homeland Security, National Institutes of Health and the Defense Threat Reduction Agency.

Mr. Tulman is organized, thorough and possesses maturity of vision. He has the ability to identify research questions and to develop effective strategies to address them. He is highly sought after for advice and training by faculty and students within the department, and he is excellent at instructing students and faculty on complex procedures. He goes far beyond expectations and represents the laboratory in a positive and professional manner.

UCAHNRAA Holds Annual Auction
The UConn Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources Alumni Association (UCAHNRAA) held its eighteenth Annual Cornucopia Alumni Auction on Sunday, September 21, 2014, in conjunction with the College’s Cornucopia Fest. This year the event raised $9,000. Using proceeds from the auction, UCAHNRAA has built a permanently endowed scholarship in the UConn Foundation. Over the last seventeen years, UCAHNRAA has donated more than $90,000 in auction proceeds to CAHNR for undergraduate scholarships, for faculty and staff recognition and for activities and programs that support the staff and students of the College.

UCAHNRAA would like to thank board members, volunteers and donors for contributing to the outstanding success of this year’s auction. We look forward to seeing you there next fall. For more information about the auction, contact Pam Chudzik at pamela.chudzik@uconn.edu.
ALUMNI IN THE NEWS

Pirro Named to 40 Under 40
Erin Pirro ‘00 BS (Resource Economics), ’06 MS (Agricultural Economics) was selected as part of the Hartford Business Journal’s 2014 “40 Under 40.” As a farm business consultant for Farm Credit East, Pirro leads the Agricultural Retail Benchmarks Program, where she works to analyze financial and operational metrics to set industry standards. She then uses that information to help clients focus their strategic planning. Pirro serves on several boards, including the Granby Agricultural Commission and the Connecticut Farm Bureau Board of Directors and as the Chief Financial Officer for the American Society of Agricultural Consultants. Pirro raises sheep with her family, and markets Connecticut grown lamb and wool products. For fun, Pirro rows at Riverfront Recapture.

Gephard Receives Appointment
Stephen R. Gephard ’76 MS (Natural Resources) has been appointed as Commissioner of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization. Congressman Joe Courtney stated, “Stephen Gephard will be a strong voice for conservation on the national level, as he has been for nearly two decades working for the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. His broad experience and deep knowledge of biology, conservation, and government’s role in protecting our resources will make him an excellent commissioner, and I look forward to working with him in his new role.” Prior to this appointment, Gephard has served the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) in various roles since 1995. He also served in the Peace Corps in Lesotho in 1976.

Keith Elected Vice President for ACSM
NiCole R. Keith ’99 PhD, was elected Vice President for the American College of Sports Medicine. Keith is currently associate professor, Department of Kinesiology, at Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis and research scientist at the Indiana University Center for Aging Research in the School of Medicine. She is a member of several organizations, including the Society of Behavioral Medicine and the American Kinesiology Association Diversity Task Force. She also serves the YMCA of Greater Indianapolis in several roles.

Candelaria Releases Video
Ivan Candelaria ’00 BS (Sports Science) has released a video documenting his training relationship with Cincinnati Bengals wide receiver Mahamed Sanu. The video, Cincinnati Bengals: Mohamed Sanu, explores the relationship between Sanu and Candelaria, a renowned sports rehab therapist. Candelaria is currently the director of Sports Rehabilitation at Peak Performance Rehabilitation in Staten Island, NY. He is also owner and founder of RAD Radical Athletic Development Consulting and has worked with players from the NFL, NBA, WNBA and MLS.

Sylvina Rollins ’86 BS (Landscape Design) was included in Southwest Art Magazine as part of their “Women in Art” feature. Her painting “Moonlight” was the first piece to be pictured. Rollins, a self-described “cow paparazzi,” loves all animals and nature and works in oil to express her life’s passions and wonders.
By any measure, Nate Wojtyna is an exemplary student. He recently began his junior year, working toward two majors: Horticulture with a minor in agricultural biotechnology, and resource economics with a concentration in international development and a minor in environmental and economic policy.

This past summer, Wojtyna was one of 19 students from across the country participating in a paid internship with the Plant Genome Research Program at Cornell University’s Institute of Biotechnology. Nate was investigating micro-algal biofuels. But how Nate originally found himself at UConn is a story unto itself.

As a junior at Storrs’s E.O. Smith High School focusing his studies on biology and biotechnology, Wojtyna attended a motivational lecture given by his chemistry teacher, William Green.

“Dr. Green gave me a jump start thinking about my future,” Wojtyna says. He decided to head over to the College’s Department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture in search of a professor to mentor him. While wandering the halls, he ran into graduate student Alice Zelman, who then spoke to Gerry Berkowitz about the possibility of Nate’s working in his lab.

“Any student with as much enthusiasm and earnestness as Nate deserves a few doors to open,” says Berkowitz, professor of horticulture.

During his last two years of high school, Wojtyna spent afternoons in Berkowitz’s lab. Says Zelman, “Nate was the first student I mentored at UConn. When Nate worked with me as a high school student, I was struck by his enthusiasm for science, but also by his patience and maturity. He was a quick study, and also came up with very interesting projects and ideas. He was a joy to mentor, and everyone in the Berkowitz lab came away impressed from their interactions with him.”

During his senior year of high school, Wojtyna applied for a position with Agrivida at their Storrs campus location and was hired as a greenhouse and laboratory assistant, a job he still does during the school year.

“Nate is one of those students who challenge you as a professor to continually provide stimulating coursework,” says Berkowitz. “He’s intelligent, has a good attitude and cares about doing a good job.”

When asked about his work ethic, Wojtyna says, “I love to learn. It drives me to take more difficult courses. I don’t like to turn in sloppy work. I always want to be better than before.”

Wojtyna plans to pursue a master’s degree and PhD. He hopes to one day teach in the field of international development and dreams of assisting people living in other parts of the world, particularly India and South America.

He says, “I’d love to be there right now, on the ground, working. But I know there is power behind the science. I have a lot of knowledge to gain.”

Wojtyna was recently hired by the UConn Writing Center, where he will assist students with scientific writing. In his spare time, he plays piano and practices martial arts. Wojtyna holds a black belt in tae kwando and was a member of the UConn team during his freshman and sophomore year. Most recently, he has agreed to serve as the student representative to the UConn Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources Alumni Association Board of Directors.

Meanwhile, he is enjoying his time as a student in the College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources. “I like the people at the College,” he says. “It’s a very diverse student body with a passion for what they are doing.”
Growing up in Nairobi, Kenya, 2014 Commencement speaker Steven Were Omamo ‘88 MS always knew he would be a farmer. His father owned a successful commercial farm in Western Kenya and his family was full of farmers. “I just grew up around this idea that farming is what people did,” Were says. “It was part of my upbringing.” In hopes that he would take over the family business, Were’s parents sent him to study agricultural science at California State University, Fresno. But in college, rather than becoming a farmer himself, Were gravitated away from agricultural science and toward agricultural economics and policy and decided to study them. Eventually, though, he became a commercial farmer. Upon his father’s death in 2010, Were inherited a segment of the family farm on which he grows sugarcane, cassava, cereals and legumes.

Upon the recommendation of a friend who told him that UConn had a strong program in agricultural economics, Were applied and was given a research fellowship to pursue a master’s degree. While at UConn, Were coached the undergraduate rugby team—he still stays in touch with some of his former players—and enjoyed the camaraderie of his fellow students. “The grad dorm was a really special place,” Were remembers. “I made a lot of friendships that have lasted. It was a golden moment—no real responsibilities, but real personal growth.”

Were went on to earn a PhD, also in agricultural economics, from Stanford, and to pursue a career as a research economist. From 2006 to 2012, Were worked with the United Nations World Food Programme, eventually becoming the director of the Addis Ababa office and representative to the African Union and UN Economic Commission for Africa. Then, in 2012, Were left the UN to become the director of policy and advocacy for the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), which was created in 2005 as a joint project of the Rockefeller Foundation and the Gates Foundation to advocate for less government regulation and lower taxes for African farmers.

To read Omamo’s Commencement address, go to naturally.uconn.edu and search “omamo.”
Walking around the UConn campus this past July, you might have noticed a group of young teens eating in the dining halls, staying in the dorms, attending classes and doing field work. This past July, 22 high school students from throughout Connecticut spent a week in Storrs as part of the Natural Resources Conservation Academy, where they learned about topics related to natural resources and the environment. Units of study, all with a geospatial foundation, included climate, water, forests, wildlife, soils, landscape ecology and habitat protection. Students had the opportunity to learn from UConn professors, USGS scientists, undergraduate and graduate students and each other. The objective was to have these high school students connect—or reconnect—with nature.

The program began when John Volin, professor and head of the Department of Natural Resources and the Environment, was asked what he would do with a donation of $20,000–$50,000 for the department. “I proposed an idea that I then discussed with my department, our extension faculty and other people whose expertise I respected, and we developed the Natural Resources Conservation Academy,” explains Volin.

A potential donor was enthusiastic about the plan as well. Working with the University of Connecticut Foundation, this anonymous donor pledged funding for NRCA through 2016, and depending on the success of the venture, the funding could extend to ten years. In large part due to that anonymous funding, the Natural Resources Conservation Academy opened its doors in 2012; this past July, the third NRCA program was held. Laura Cisneros, program coordinator, explains, “Even if students are not interested in pursuing a career in or related to natural resources, they will become informed citizens, and we involve them in fun activities so they see that science is interesting.”

The academy doesn’t end when the participants leave campus. Students are expected to create a community partnership and then design and complete a conservation-related project in their respective communities. Projects focus on land use and range from monitoring wildlife habitat to studying soil and salt to mapping invasive species. Throughout the seven-month project, students are provided ongoing guidance from NRCA faculty and staff, and the experience culminates in March when attendees reunite at UConn to present their community project posters at the Connecticut Conference on Natural Resources.

Once participants have completed the intensive one-week field training and the community project, they submit their projects in order to graduate from the program and become recognized as Connecticut Conservation Ambassadors. This unique program provides high school students with an understanding of the importance of conservation in daily life and in the future, and aims to create lifelong advocates for natural resource protection.

To date, 67 students have attended the Natural Resources Conservation Academy, and more than 30 community projects have been completed and 22 are currently underway. Countless advocates have been created. It all started with an idea and an anonymous donor.
Physical Therapy White Coat Ceremony
Honors Class of 1954
by Pam Chudzik

When the first physical therapy class was graduated from the University of Connecticut in 1954, they designed a pin to commemorate their accomplishment. It is unlikely they could predict the history their design would hold. “We decided to design the physical therapy pin because we were the first graduating class in physical therapy from UConn and I think we wanted to leave something tangible by which to remember us,” explains Barbara Ashford, a member of that first class. That pin has stood the test of time. In the sixty years since the original design, the pin has changed only twice—once in 1972 when the School of Physical Therapy became the School of Allied Health, and again for just one year in 2009. The pin used currently is the design created by the class of 1954.

Last spring, the class of 2014 became UConn’s 60th physical therapy class and the most recent recipients of the pin. In June, members of the class of 1954 returned to campus to celebrate the 60th anniversary of their graduation from UConn. As part of their reunion, they attended the Doctor of Physical Therapy White Coat Ceremony for current physical therapy students. This annual ceremony is a recognition event held between the students’ first and second year, and each student is presented with a white coat to commemorate the beginning of clinical rotations.

As part of this year’s White Coat Ceremony, participants also celebrated that original UConn physical therapy class, as current students re-pinned the members of the class of 1954. And the pin looked just the way they remembered it.
Montique Cotton Kelly, one of the nation’s leading alumni relations professionals with nearly two decades of service, has been appointed as the University of Connecticut’s assistant vice president for alumni relations and executive director of the UConn Alumni Association. Her appointment began June 13, 2014.

A veteran alumni relations leader, Cotton Kelly comes to UConn from Bowling Green, where she served as executive director of the alumni association and director of alumni affairs since 2007. Prior to that, she held a number of positions there, including assistant and associate director of alumni affairs. Cotton Kelly began her career at Bowling Green as a counselor in the office of admissions.

With more than 18 years of alumni relations experience, Cotton Kelly has extensive experience in strategic planning, budget management, board development, program development and fundraising.

“Montique is exactly the kind of alumni leader that UConn needs at this transformative period in our history,” said Herbst. “Her engaging style and charisma, combined with outstanding knowledge of her field and higher education in general, will be so critical in generating excitement among our alumni about all that is happening at their alma mater.

“The best universities in America have passionate alumni bases who want to be involved in the life of their University, and UConn and our alumni certainly fit that bill,” she added. “I’m confident Montique will help develop new ways to grow and forge those relationships on a broad scale.”

Cotton Kelly received both her BS and MEd from Bowling Green. She is an active member of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE). She and her husband, James, have a son, Lincoln (6), and daughter, Kenya (2).
According to the Connecticut Department of Public Health, as of January 2014, there were 10,474 people in Connecticut diagnosed as living with HIV disease, 33 percent of them intravenous drug users.

Since 2002, Michael Copenhaver, associate professor in the Department of Allied Health Sciences and principal investigator at the Center for Health, Intervention, and Prevention (CHIP), has been involved in health promotion research that evaluates evi-
dence-based behavioral treatment interventions for high-risk drug
users.

Currently, he is engaged in a five-
year study funded through the
NIH National Institute on Drug Use
(NIDA). The project is designed
to evaluate an adapted version of
the CDC Holistic Health Recovery
Program for HIV+ drug users. The
adapted version was developed
by Copenhaver as a cost-effective,
community-friendly model that
can be integrated into real-world
settings, such as drug treatment
programs.

During his postdoctoral studies,
Copenhaver was part of a team
at Yale University that tested the
original intervention program,
which Copenhaver calls the "gold
standard." He developed the
adapted intervention program,
entitled Holistic Health for HIV,
because the original was so
comprehensive, it was found to be
overly complicated and too costly
for the average clinic to properly
utilize.

Where the first program required
participants to complete twelve
two-hour sessions over six months,
the adapted version requires four
weekly group sessions, lasting 50
minutes each. In addition, the long
program covers many psycholo-
gical issues unrelated to HIV and
drug use. The short version focuses
specifically on steps to reduce risky
behaviors and encourage HIV medi-
cation adherence.

The program is being tested at the
APT Foundation of New Haven, a
private substance abuse treatment
clinic. Participants are HIV-infected
opioid-dependent drug users re-
eceiving methadone treatment. Brian
Sibilio, research assistant at CHIP,
is the project director. Professional
counselors facilitate the program.
Participants are interviewed before
and after completing the program
and at three, six and nine months
into the program. The goal is to pre-
vent HIV transmission and improve
the quality of life through behavioral
intervention that teaches healthy
habits. Using the IMB (information,
motivation, behavioral skills) model
of change, participants are encour-
aged to move from where they are
in their life, to where they want to
be with their health or their family
relationships or simply to improve
their life.

Counselors motivate participants to
reduce their risky behavior through
various learning modes including
PowerPoint presentations, video
clips and discussions. They are
taught specific skills such as safer
needle use and negotiating con-
dom use with partners, as well as
ways to improve adherence to their
medication protocol.

Copenhaver says, "In most instanc-
es, strict adherence to HIV medi-
cations reduces the HIV viral load
to very low levels. There is good
evidence that this reduces the
likeliness of transmission. To reduce
the risk of rapidly transmitting the
virus into the community, it's vital to
reach this population."

A third of the way through the
project, the team has recruited ap-
proximately 75 of their goal of 250
participants, and those in the pro-
gram are very motivated. Follow-up
assessment retention rates are at 87
to 91 percent, which is considered
excellent.

"Changing behavior is a slow and
difficult process," says Copenhagen.
"But we are seeing change, even
if it is incremental. There is hope
for wide-scale improvement in
HIV transmission. Small individual
changes can save many lives. That's
what motivates me."

In another project funded through
an NIH Career Development Award,
Copenhagen is mentoring graduate
and postdoctoral students, nation-
ally and internationally, who are
involved in HIV-prevention research,
assisting them with research and
grant writing. "It's a nice way to get
the next generation up and running
with community-based research
wherever there is the greatest
need," he says. "I'm working with
them so that they can land their own
grants."

Copenhaver was also involved in a
recently completed five-year multi-
state project funded by the NIH,
evaluating HIV prevention in prison
settings across the nation, both
adult and juvenile. The Connecticut
portion of the study was a collabora-
tive effort between the courts;
corrections; juvenile justice; state
agencies for substance abuse treat-
ment; UConn Department of Allied
Health Sciences, School of Social
Work and School of Medicine; and
Yale University. The project com-
bined multiple evidence-based
practices to ensure better treatment
and outcomes among drug-in-
volved prisoners, including post-re-
lease treatment.

"We were looking at changes that
need to be made organizationally
to make sure it filters to inmates and
those same individuals following
incarceration," Copenhagen says.
"We need to determine what needs
to be in place when they transition
from prison to the community. This
could lead to important policy
changes within the criminal justice
and health care system." Copenhagen
has incorporated his
research expertise into his lead-
ership role as chair of the Allied
Health Sciences committee devel-
oping a new PhD program in health
promotion science. "This is an ex-
citing time for our department and
a critical opportunity for us to do
even more to promote health and
well-being," Copenhagen says.
Graduate Student Brings Experience as a Practicing Vet to her Efforts to Reduce Salmonella in Poultry

by Francesca Crivello

Indu Upadhyaya has been involved with the animal sciences since long before coming to UConn as a PhD student. Originally from Pondicherry, India, Upadhyaya received a doctorate in veterinary medicine from the Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Veterinary Education and Research. After finishing her DVM program, she worked for eight months as a practicing veterinarian in India. In addition to providing veterinary services and counseling to pet owners and farmers, she volunteered in large animal and poultry vaccination campaigns, because these activities offered excellent opportunities to interact with farmers and understand the challenges and problems they face. During her internship in college, she had worked at various large and small-scale chicken farms, during which time she developed an interest in poultry safety. As her interest in poultry health and food safety continued to increase, she decided to pursue a PhD in food microbiology and food safety.

“I wished I could do a little more than just treat animals. I was hoping I would be able to research some of the prevalent diseases ... to actually find strategies to cure them,” she says.

Upadhyaya’s PhD research investigates the potential of several plant molecules for reducing egg-borne transmission of Salmonella Enteritidis (S. Enteritidis) in chickens.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Salmonella can cause diarrhea, fever and abdominal cramps in humans. The bacterium primarily colonizes the intestinal tract of animals and birds. It is commonly transmitted to humans by consumption of contaminated foods including beef, chicken, milk and eggs. In addition, other products, like Salmonella-contaminated fresh produce, can cause foodborne illnesses. Between January and September of 2014, there were eight outbreaks of Salmonella in the US, two of them from poultry and poultry products.

S. Enteritidis is responsible for major losses to the poultry industry; the annual loss from Salmonella-contaminated eggs is approximately $370 million.

S. Enteritidis is commonly found in the intestinal tract in a variety of birds, including chickens and turkeys. In layer hens, S. Enteritidis not only inhabits the intestine, but the systemic spread of the pathogen causes contamination of the egg shell and yolk as well. However, not all chickens are infected and not all eggs laid by S. Enteritidis-infected chickens carry the pathogen in their yolk or on their shell. When S. Enteritidis is inside the egg, it is undetectable to the consumer. Standard industry processing can disinfect the shell to reduce S. Enteritidis transmission, but this method will not affect in-ovo or yolk transmission of the bacteria.

Reducing the S. Enteritidis in the intestines can trigger certain physiological responses that diminish the likelihood of bacterial contamination. A decrease of S. Enteritidis in the intestinal tract can lower the amount of bacteria in their fecal matter, which could reduce contamination of the eggshell. Furthermore, decreasing S. Enteritidis can abate the systematic spread of the bacteria, including its colonization of the reproductive tract, which is where in-ovo and yolk transmission would take place. Therefore, Upadhyaya is choosing to focus her research efforts on reducing S. Enteritidis in layer chickens, in order to reduce contamination of yolk and eggshell.

Upadhyaya’s lab works with a variety of natural plant compounds that are deemed safe for food consumption by the FDA. “These compounds also have antibacterial properties,” she says. “So we are feeding these compounds to the chickens to observe their efficacy in reducing yolk contamination of S. Enteritidis in the eggs.” So far, the research results have been promising.

“We have seen it work, both in vitro [in studies performed outside the living host animal] and in vivo [in the living host animal]. In vitro, in order to understand the underlying mechanism, we subjected these plant compounds to sub-inhibitory concentrations (SIC), very low concentrations of S. Enteritidis that do not kill the bacteria but changes their genetic mechanisms, rendering them less pathogenic. We observed that these bacteria had low attachment and invasion (critical for their survival and growth in host cells) when subjected to the SICs of natural molecules,” she says.

Upadhyaya hopes her research will yield new strategies for dealing with Salmonella contamination in the poultry industry. A solution to the problem would benefit the poultry industry and improve egg safety. Since her research employs natural, safe and environment friendly compounds, it would be useful to the organic industry as well.
From the Office of Academic Programs

Over the past year, the College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources has experienced positive change and growth. The Office of Academic Programs saw a three percent increase in freshmen and transfer students for Summer Orientation 2014 compared to the previous summer. As of Fall 2014, the total enrollment for the College at the Storrs campus increased by seven percent and the Ratcliffe Hicks School of Agriculture had a jump in enrollment of 23 percent compared to Fall 2013. The College not only increased in size, but also in the number of majors offered. In the spring, the College gained its first Bachelor of Arts degree, in Environmental Studies. CAHNR also welcomed the Department of Kinesiology over the summer, which houses the Athletic Training and Exercise Science programs. The College now offers 17 Bachelor of Science degrees and one Bachelor of Arts degree.

The College Ambassadors continued to help the Office of Academic Programs with its recruitment and retention efforts. First formed in 2009, this group of student leaders is now starting its sixth year of work. The Ambassadors visit local high schools, call accepted students in the spring and work recruitment events on all UConn campuses. The Ambassadors are undergraduate students who are highly involved and successful in their studies. If you would like to read stories written by current Ambassadors about their experiences with study abroad, internships, research and more, check out the Ambassador Blog at CollegeAmbassadors.uconn.edu/blog. The Ambassadors also recently participated in the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge with Dean Gregory Weidemann, which you can watch online at http://ow.ly/CkruX.
Thanks to the Donors

Our College and ultimately the University of Connecticut began with a gift of $5,000 and 170 acres from Charles and Augustus Storrs to establish an agricultural school. In honor of this initial gift the Legacy Circle honors donors who have made a lifetime commitment of $5,000 or more to the College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources. Thank you to the many donors who generously support the College.

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