

THE MAGAZINE OF SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

# seasons

FALL 2024

*A GAME CHANGER  
FOR SAMFORD*





# Contents



16

## Freshman Retreat

More than 900 Samford freshmen gathered at the start of the academic year for the annual Freshman Retreat, which in recent years has grown to become a "mass movement" for faith-centered connections.



20

## A Game Changer for Samford

Samford celebrated the opening of its 165,000-square-foot Campus Recreation, Wellness and Athletics Complex, an \$85 million facility that combines world-class fitness amenities with communal spaces for students and employees.



32

## Alumni of the Year

During Homecoming Weekend, Samford celebrated its 2024 Alumni of the Year recipients: Andrew Brasher, Brent Fielder and Katherine Rodgers.

2	From the President	13	Experiencing Advocacy on a Global Scale	32	Alumni of the Year
3	Samford Celebrates 16th Year of Record-Setting Enrollment	14	Her 360-Degree View of Japanese Culture	36	The 1991 Football Team and a Super Bowl Champion Headline the 2025 Samford Athletics Hall of Fame
4	News and Notes	15	Serving the People of Ecuador, Where a Professor's Passion Meets Purpose	37	Class Notes
6	Prayer Over Perfection	16	Freshman Retreat	39	Future Bulldogs
8	Beeson Divinity School Names Timothy Tennent New Methodist Chair of Divinity	20	A Game Changer for Samford	40	In Memoriam
9	Faith in Action	26	As Samford Makes a Splash in Esports, Meet the Coach Who's at the Controls	42	The 1841 Society
10	Bulldog Investment Fund Reaches \$4 Million, Emphasizes Experiential Learning in Business	28	A Gift from the Heart	43	Student Bikes Across the Country
11	Small Changes, Big Impact	29	From Puerto Rico to Homewood	44	Harmonious Legacy
12	Alumna Haley Sue Evans Gains Olympic Experience with NBC Sports	30	Celebrating Homecoming 2024	45	Medieval Manuscript Donation Sparks Student Research

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Your donation today can provide students with scholarships, resources and opportunities for the coming academic year.

Go to ***samford.edu/give/seasons.***



# *From the President*



## A World-Class Residential Campus

**Since its founding in 1841**, Samford University has invited students into a nurturing residential community. Today's student wants to be surrounded by peers, mentors and the other resources needed to thrive spiritually, intellectually and physically.

The Samford Horizons development plan, launched in 2023, envisions the facilities and amenities that will elevate Samford as the school of choice among national, comprehensive, Christ-centered universities. It elevates experience over activity, relationship over presence, and community over individualism. In order to achieve our compelling vision, Samford must provide spaces that invite students to learn, live, worship and play together.

Samford's new Campus Recreation, Wellness and Athletics Complex, which opened in October, is a critically important addition to our growing campus. What a joy it was for me to watch students experience the new facilities for the first time. This followed the historic news of *The Wall Street Journal* awarding Samford three top-10 national rankings in character development, career preparation and student/alumni recommendations.

With all the enhancements of Samford Horizons unfolding, we're just getting started!

**In the Samford spirit,**

Beck A. Taylor, PhD  
President



# Samford Celebrates 16th Consecutive Year of Record-Setting Enrollment

by Allan Taylor

**Fueled by another record-breaking class of first-year students and a historic student retention rate, Samford announced its largest-ever total enrollment with 6,101 students for fall 2024. This marks the 16th consecutive year of record enrollment for Samford, a period of sustained and strategic growth that has raised the university's national profile.**

"We are elated to once again report our largest total enrollment in university history—a remarkable 16-year trend that's increasingly unique in higher education," said Jason Black, vice president for enrollment management. "Our academic programs continue to attract students, and those students continue to stay engaged by the rewards derived from a Christ-centered Samford education."

The 93% freshman-to-sophomore retention rate represents an all-time high for Samford and far exceeds the latest nationwide retention average of 76%, according to the National Student Clearinghouse. Samford's 4,210 undergraduate students also marked an all-time high. The university welcomed 1,087 first-year full-time students, building upon the previous benchmark of 1,080 from 2023.

"Never before has Samford been positioned as well as it is today, and we're thrilled to see the members of the class of 2028 begin their Samford journey," said President Beck A. Taylor. "These students are passionate, they are driven, and they're going to put their stamp on Samford."

## A snapshot of Samford's enrollment for 2024:

- 45 states and Puerto Rico are represented in the overall enrollment, along with 16 countries.
- 3,668 students come from outside Alabama (60% of total enrollment).
- 833 first-year students come from outside Alabama (77% of class).
- Samford welcomed 245 transfer students, including 151 from Birmingham-Southern College, which closed in May.



The trajectory of historic enrollment growth demands ambitious infrastructure commitments, which are being addressed through the Samford Horizons strategic plan. Central among the early phase construction projects is the Campus Recreation, Wellness and Athletics Complex. Taking shape nearby are new residence halls for first-year students and Greek life that will add more than 650 beds upon opening in fall 2025. Projects also include a 550-space parking deck on the north side of campus.

"These vital projects are needed to serve a growing campus, and I'm thankful for our Board of Trustees having the courage, foresight and vision to prioritize tackling these initiatives," Taylor said. "The future of Samford University has never been brighter. Our best days are ahead." ▮



## News and Notes

### Samford Earns Three Top-10 National Rankings

As a part of the College Pulse Survey for 2025, *The Wall Street Journal* ranks Samford:

**#2** in the nation for the quality of character development of its students.

**#8** in the nation for the quality of career preparation provided to its students.

**#10** in the nation for the most highly recommended college or university by students and recent alumni.



### New Residence Halls and Parking on the Horizon

Construction continues on campus as new residence halls will open in 2025. The new residential complex features two buildings—Audrey L. Gaston Hall for females and Marvin L. Mann Hall for males—offering 513 beds for first-year students. Two smaller residence halls, totaling 140 beds, are under construction for upper-division students, as well as a new parking facility on the north side of campus.



### Families Serve Together Through Ecuador Hunger Relief Project

As a part of Family Weekend, 293 students and their family members packed more than 32,500 meals for vulnerable communities in Ecuador through the Ecuador Hunger Relief Project, an initiative facilitated in collaboration between the Office of Parent and Family Engagement and the Office of Community Engagement.

### Nursing Graduates are Career Ready

Moffett & Sanders School of Nursing announced that its fourth consecutive cohort achieved a 100% first-time pass rate on the NCLEX-RN licensure exam. Additionally, the school's most recent class of nurse anesthesia graduates also achieved a 100% pass rate on the National Certification Exam.





## Article Speaks to Samford's Emphasis on Faith in Hiring

Writing in *Christian Scholar's Review*, Bryan Gill and Michael Hardin evaluate Samford's emphasis on hiring Christian faculty who are highly qualified academics, showing it is possible to support faith and learning integration without infringing on academic freedom. Read the full article, "The Praxis of Faith and Learning" at [christianscholars.com](https://christianscholars.com).

## Cumberland Creates New Pipeline to Law School

Cumberland School of Law announced the inaugural Cumberland Connection Law School Immersion Program, which will be held in May 2025. Designed to motivate and inspire first-generation law students, the immersive week on campus will expose undergraduate college students to life in law school and help them gain substantive insights into various legal subjects.



## World Premiere Opera, Dragon's Breath, Wins National Recognition

***Dragon's Breath***, an original opera that the School of the Arts commissioned and performed as part of its 2023-24 season, received national recognition as the recipient of the 2024 American Prize in Composition in the opera/theater/film/dance professional division.



## President Taylor Speaks on Christian Scholar's Review Podcast

In a recent episode of the podcast, *Saturdays at Seven*, President Taylor spoke of the need for humility in restoring civil discourse and recognizing that others have experiences that lend themselves to new insights. Listen to the full episode at [christianscholars.com/saturdays-at-seven-conversation-series](https://christianscholars.com/saturdays-at-seven-conversation-series).



# Prayer Over Perfection

*From pastor's kid to psychologist to provost, Dave Cimbora has learned to embrace struggles.*

*by Allan Taylor*

Dave Cimbora, Samford's new provost and vice president for academic affairs, possesses a PhD in clinical psychology, a black belt in Jiu Jitsu, and an engaging transparency that makes him the most wide-open of books. In a deep-dive conversation for *Seasons*, the administrator, who started at Samford in July, reflects on a quarter-century in Christian higher education, martial arts, his instant synergy with President Beck Taylor, and the peskiest of internalized pressures—a lifelong battle with perfectionism.

That last trait is derived, in part, from being a pastor's kid. "I tried to stay in that frame where we need to support Dad, don't act out, don't run in church, be super polite," he said. It bled over into academic pursuits, with

Cimbora obsessing over winning each professor's favor and being terrified about not making an A.

What surfaced was a works-based philosophy, which he described as almost pharisaical. "As a kid raised in

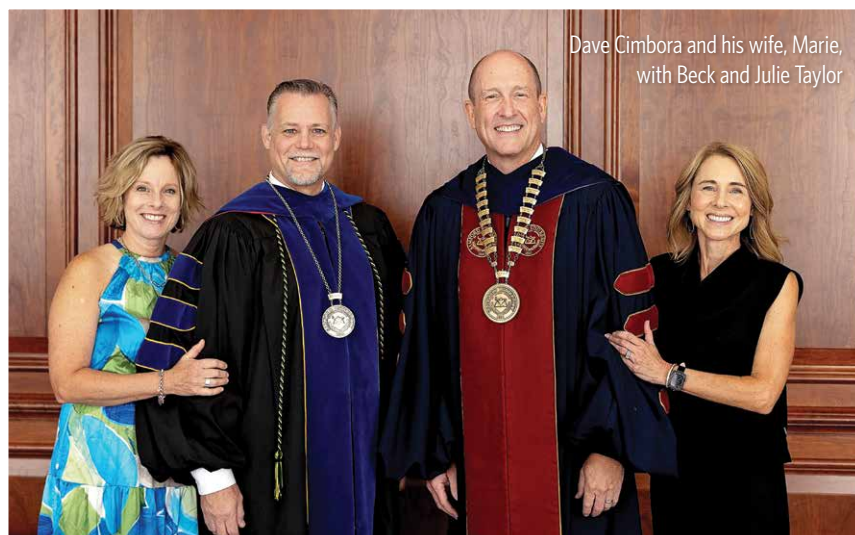
that, I believed I had to do the same with God. I had to keep up the appearances with God, that God expected perfection, which meant struggles couldn't be discussed very easily," he said.

Finally, there came a breakthrough in his mid-30s, when a mentor's advice sparked a reset in Cimbora. "You have stamina to prove yourself to God. How about you have stamina to prove that you're not good enough for God—that you're a sinner? How about you work on stamina in a different direction and embrace the fact that you're not perfect?"

By that juncture, Cimbora was a Christian husband and father, had been in Christian youth ministry most of his life, and was even teaching at a Christian university, Biola. "Yet it's probably only then," he admits, "that I discovered the Gospel in the most impactful way."

Another life lesson that colors his approach to joining Samford is his humility in leadership. He points to a Jiu Jitsu analogy, whereby a black belt wisely puts aside accomplishments in order to maintain a white belt curiosity, guarding against unintentional pride.

"There needs to be the ability for leaders to say, 'I'm not sure about the best way to proceed here. I need to



Dave Cimbora and his wife, Marie,  
with Beck and Julie Taylor





think about it, pray about it,” he said. The responses that served Cimborra at Biola, and more recently at George Fox University, might not warrant duplication at Samford.

“Most people,” he said, “don’t like the new person who comes in and says, ‘We’re just going to make this into what I used to have somewhere else.’ This is a new place to me, a new culture, a new group of people. So, I’m walking into this community saying, ‘Hey, teach me.’ I’m a sponge. This whole semester is unique for me. How fun is that?”

Part of the fun is mingling with

students, which includes reassuring those who grapple with their own fear of failure. During Cimborra’s first few weeks on campus, several students invited him to lunch at The Caf. One asked the new provost to become his mentor.

Cimborra aims to strengthen the positive momentum Samford is experiencing and to be an active supporter of the university’s mission under President Taylor’s leadership. He’s aspiring to equip Samford’s extraordinary faculty and staff in their commitment to support the growth of students.

Ultimately, Cimborra says, campus leaders should self-evaluate based upon a single question: “How will the students know that you love them?” ▶

*“Dr. Cimborra is just the right person to lead Samford’s comprehensive academic program to new heights, and I warmly welcome him to the Samford family.”*

**Beck A. Taylor, president**

Scan the QR code to  
read the complete  
interview.







# Beeson Divinity School Names Timothy Tennent New Methodist Chair of Divinity

by Neal Embry

**When Beeson Divinity School announced it was bringing aboard Timothy Tennent, who served 15 years as the president of Asbury Theological Seminary, as its Methodist Chair of Divinity, one administrator likened the move to “hiring Nick Saban as your assistant coach.”**

Such was the impact of landing a scholar with vast global experience.

“I can think of no one better in the world than Tim Tennent to serve as Beeson’s next Methodist Chair of Divinity,” said Dean Douglas A. Sweeney. “He is a world-class scholar in the fields of Christian mission and global Christianity. He is a leading Methodist churchman, beloved by Wesleyans and others worldwide. And his time at the helm of Beeson’s sister school, Asbury, will serve us all well as he leads our Wesleyan program to new heights.”

For Tennent, serving as Asbury’s president was a “wonderful chapter in my professional journey,” but he said he felt a deep desire to return to the classroom

and “spend the next stage of my life focused on mentoring the next generation of Christian leaders.”

“I have long admired the grand historic and interdenominational vision of Beeson Divinity School,” said Tennent, who began his ministry as a Methodist pastor in Georgia and later taught at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. “I have loved Beeson’s commitment to mentoring students. I am delighted that I can now help strengthen the mission of Beeson.”

Wesleyan students at Beeson are in a position to understand the “wonderful distinctives” of the Methodist movement, which are best seen within the larger context of the “grand ecumenical and historic vision of the church,” Tennent said.

In the wake of the split within the United Methodist Church, which led to the founding of the Global Methodist Church (GMC), Tennent anticipates a growing number of Global Methodist students joining Beeson, which was approved by the GMC to train future denominational ministers in March 2023.

“We are stepping into an unparalleled moment in the history of the Wesleyan movement in North America and around the world,” Tennent said. “The emergence of the Global Methodist Church has the opportunity to renew and refresh the Wesleyan movement in many new ways. I am well-connected throughout the Wesleyan world, and I hope to use those connections to strengthen the ties of Beeson to the larger Wesleyan world.”

Tennent will begin teaching classes in January 2025. ▀

# Faith IN ACTION

*1 Peter 4:10 grant embraces service and compassion*

*by Megan Winkler*

**Since its founding, the School of Health Professions has been committed to service, rooted in the verse, 1 Peter 4:10. "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."**

Earlier this year, the school took this commitment a step further by establishing the 1 Peter 4:10 Service Grant, which intends to create and sustain meaningful service opportunities for its faculty and students.

"Our school needed a way to support our faculty and students that reflects our commitment to the call to use our gifts to serve others," said Alan Jung, dean of the School of Health Professions. "The goal is to train students' heads for knowledge, hands for professional skills and hearts for empathy and compassion."

The grant was made possible by a generous donation from Mary "Beth" Stukes, longtime supporter and a member of Samford's Board of Trustees, and it will enable faculty to provide training, mentorship and experiences that embody the call to serve others and deliver God's grace.

For Jung, Stukes is a valued partner in living out the mission of the school. "Beth is enthusiastic about supporting students as they learn and serve," he said. "Together, we want to honor the shared values of family, community, relationships, faith and service that



Physical therapy and speech-language pathology students participate in Baby Lab, a hands-on experience in pediatrics, assessing babies of employees, alumni and other Birmingham locals.

inspire both her gift and our school."

In addition to creating new opportunities to address local and global needs, the grant's funding will support multiple ongoing initiatives, including enhancements to the physical therapy clinic at Cahaba Medical Care and the school's interprofessional medical mission trip to Ecuador.

It will also boost on-campus service-learning activities like Bright Ideas Camps for traumatic brain injuries and Baby Lab for early movement and speech development. The grant aims to provide direct care in underserved areas, support students from these regions and facilitate engagement with vulnerable



Dean Alan Jung with  
Beth Stukes

populations.

"This initiative will help maintain a Gospel-centered approach to service by focusing on tangible ways to support individuals and communities. I am confident that as we commit this donation and our work to the Lord, He will faithfully establish His plans through us," Jung said. ▀





# Bulldog Investment Fund Reaches \$4 Million, Emphasizes Experiential Learning in Business

*by Morgan Black*

**The Bulldog Investment Fund in Brock School of Business teaches students the intricate art of investment management by collaborating to tackle real market issues. Known for its hands-on application, the class allows students to analyze real stocks and invest real dollars from the university's endowment. The fund—managed solely by students—recently reached a milestone value of approximately \$4 million.**

More than 15 years after the program's launch, current students are continuing the success and legacy of the program and broadening their personal and professional horizons. As fund managers, students make regular presentations to Samford's executive leadership team, participate in community outreach projects and hear from industry professionals who provide outlooks on the current economy. Students can travel to local and national conferences where they engage with top economic strategists, present their findings to investment professionals and teach others about investing.

Senior economics and finance double major Davis Mobley is the president of the Bulldog Investment Fund for the fall semester. He said, "I firmly believe the Bulldog Investment Fund is one of the most preeminent experiences a student can partake in while at this illustrious university. The hands-on application of real-world skills using real dollars gives students the opportunity to take what they learn in the classroom and apply it in a way that allows them to be ready for whatever career they step into."

In addition to this immersive experience, student involvement in many other Brock School of Business programs is essential to practical learning. The sports business programs, the real estate, risk management and insurance concentrations, the data analytics programming, and the Samford Startup student business incubator all provide hands-on learning that prepare students to become market-savvy.

"Our faculty have done an outstanding job of creating curriculum and programs that allow our students the opportunity to set themselves apart because of the things they've done while still in college," said Chad Carson, dean of Brock School of Business. "It's not every day you hear of a young college graduate saying they've managed a sector of a \$4 million investment fund. We're very proud of the opportunities our students have but are even prouder of them for seizing the moment and taking advantage of those opportunities so they will be ready to hit the ground running in any career path they choose." ■

# SMALL CHANGES, Big Impact

*Samford study reveals how carrots can transform your health.*

*by Alison Ingle*

**Mary Harper Simmons, a Master of Science in Nutrition student in the School of Public Health, has shed light on the powerful impact of a simple dietary change. Presenting at Nutrition 2024, the annual meeting of the American Society for Nutrition in Chicago, Simmons' research explored how consuming baby carrots just three times a week can enhance skin carotenoids—a marker of overall health—especially when combined with a multivitamin containing beta carotene.**

Simmons, guided by Suresh Mathews, chair of the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, conducted a four-week study involving 60 young adults. Participants were randomly assigned to consume either Granny Smith apple slices (control), baby carrots, a beta carotene multivitamin, or a combination of baby carrots and the multivitamin. Using a noninvasive Veggie Meter spectroscopy instrument, Simmons' team measured skin carotenoid levels before and after the interventions. The findings were striking: skin carotenoid levels increased by 10.8% in those consuming baby carrots and by 21.6% in those combining carrots with the supplement. However, those who consumed only the supplement or were in the control group showed no notable changes.

Simmons emphasized that the results suggest the body's absorption of carotenoids may differ significantly between whole foods and supplements, underscoring the value of whole foods in boosting nutrient levels. "Our research indicates that a modest simple addition to one's diet like snacking on baby carrots can have a notable impact on skin carotenoid accumulation which is linked to reduced risk for chronic diseases," Simmons said.



Mary Harper Simmons presenting her research at Nutrition 2024, the annual meeting of the American Society for Nutrition in Chicago.

Mathews praised Simmons for her rigorous research and the recognition it has received. "Presenting at Nutrition 2024, the leading conference in the

field, and garnering widespread media attention is a testament to the quality and significance of Harper's work," Mathews noted. The research reinforces the broader message that incorporating specific carotenoid-rich foods like baby carrots into the diet can offer substantial health benefits.

The findings sparked interest across media platforms such as Fox News, CNN and BBC, highlighting Samford's contributions to nutrition science. Simmons plans to continue exploring the mechanisms behind these results, and through future studies, will investigate the effects of other carotenoid-rich foods, such as sweet potatoes and leafy greens. ▀



# ALUMNA HALEY SUE EVANS GAINS OLYMPIC EXPERIENCE WITH NBC SPORTS

by Gunnar Sadowey

Haley Sue Evans '22, a journalism and mass communication alumna, took her career to new heights while working with NBC Sports at the 2024 Paris Olympics. Evans, who began working with NBC in 2022 during the return of the United States Football League (USFL) to Birmingham, never imagined her role would lead her to one of the biggest sporting events in the world.



"I've learned to say yes when God opens a door," she said. "When my boss called to offer me the position, I was jumping up and down. He told me, 'Don't thank me—you earned this.'"

Evans served as a production assistant at La Défense Arena, the venue for Olympic swimming. Working closely with announcers Rowdy Gaines and Dan Hicks, she was part of a team that included producers, directors and assistant directors responsible for getting the show on air. One of her key responsibilities was helping craft the format of the broadcast, ensuring everything ran smoothly once swimmers were in the pool.

From meeting celebrities like Snoop Dogg and Michael Phelps to witnessing Team USA win gold, Evans said the experience was unforgettable. She credits her success to the preparation she received at Samford, particularly from faculty in the Department of Communication and Media in Howard College of Arts and Sciences.

"They taught me so much more than just the curriculum," said Evans. "They showed me that I don't have to compromise my values for any job, and I am so thankful for that."

Looking toward the future, Evans remains committed to working with passion and purpose. Referencing Colossians 3:23 as her guiding principle, she said, "This experience has shown me that nothing is too big if I continue to love those around me and work my hardest."

Evans currently works as a production coordinator and stage manager for NBC Sports. ▀

# Experiencing **ADVOCACY** *on a Global Scale*

***Cumberland School of Law launches  
new study abroad program in Scotland.***

*by Kerry McInerney*

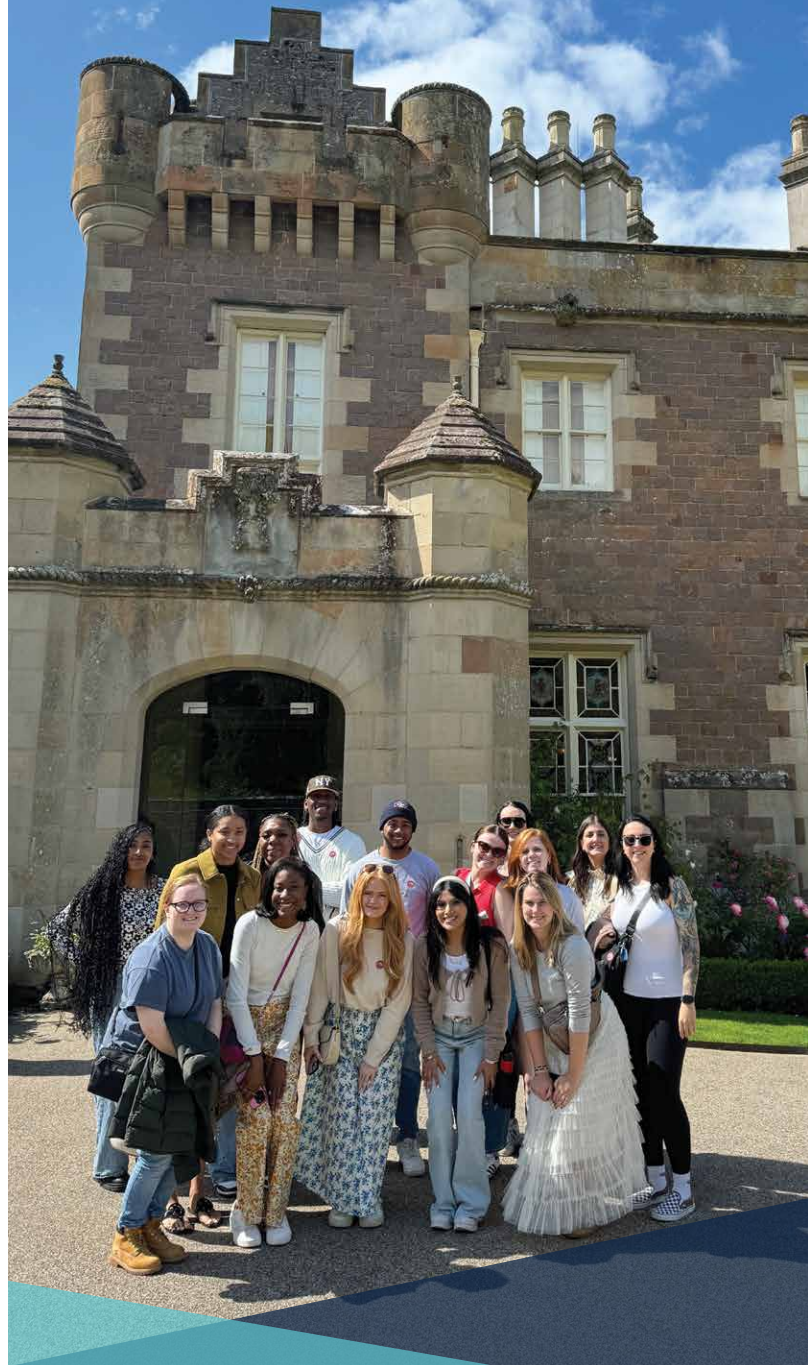
**For more than 15 years, Cumberland School of Law students have enjoyed summer studies at Cambridge University in England. As a complement to this long-running program, Cumberland launched a new program in June 2024 at the University of Edinburgh, in Scotland, emphasizing persuasion as an essential advocacy skill.**

"As someone with public speaking anxiety, participating in this program was out of my comfort zone," said Sydney Moore, a third-year law student. "But it pushed me to discover a talent and deeper passion for advocacy that I did not know existed within myself. Our professors truly put their all into showing us how advocacy really is an art form—in a beautiful, welcoming country with their own longstanding traditions of legal advocacy."

In addition to expanding the global legal education opportunities available to Cumberland students, this experience allowed them to immerse themselves in Scotland's culture. Students explored sites of historical significance including the Edinburgh Castle, Scottish Parliament, Stirling Castle and the Signet Library, the original law library in Edinburgh which is a still-working library for advocates representing the British Crown.

The Cambridge and Edinburgh student cohorts united for an excursion to Brussels, Belgium, exploring governmental operations of the European Union. The tour was led by Loreta Raulinaityte, JD '98, coordinator of the Parliamentary Dimension of the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and head of Unit for Translation and Interpretation for the Lithuanian government.

"The life-changing opportunity to study abroad in Scotland and forge connections with another culture and other Cumberland students is something I will carry with me forever,"



said second-year law student Autumngrace Page. "Scotland proved to be unforgettable in allowing me to be exposed to another culture. It also invited me into the way the law operates elsewhere and how it differs from the American legal system I am so accustomed to."

The Edinburgh program concluded with The Art of Advocacy, the law school's first international continuing legal education (CLE) conference for U.S. and U.K. attorneys. It featured experiential sessions devoted to persuasive advocacy, rather than traditional lectures. Garnering rave reviews, attendees shared that the event was "The best CLE I've ever attended" and "What is the date for next year so I can put it on my calendar?"

As a result of its success, the school will host the second Art of Advocacy conference June 29-July 1, 2025, in Edinburgh. See [samford.edu/law/study-abroad](https://samford.edu/law/study-abroad) to learn more and register. ■



# Her 360-Degree View of Japanese Culture

*Eri Taguchi begins her two-year stint as an ambassador at Samford.*

*by Allan Taylor*

**Mere days into her two-year placement at Samford University, Eri Taguchi is filling up her activities calendar and devising ways to deliver cross-cultural experiences with students. A coordinator with the Japan Outreach Initiative (JOI), she's excited to be teaming up with SamfordGlobal.**

"Japan is kind of famous for anime, movies and food, so I would like to provide more of a 360-degree view," Taguchi said. "Underneath all those things, there's culture, history and society. I want to provide that perspective for students."

Samford is one of 16 current JOI sites, joining universities such as Arizona, Oklahoma and Creighton. Previous exchanges included Wake Forest, Nebraska, Michigan State, Virginia, Mississippi State, West Alabama, Troy and the University of Alabama.

"While SamfordGlobal would like every student to study abroad, this is not always possible. JOI brings cross-cultural experiences to campus," said Jordan Cummings, assistant director of SamfordGlobal. "It's a chance to engage with Japanese culture and will hopefully inspire further cross-cultural interest and learning."

Japanese-owned manufacturers in Alabama have generated billions across the past quarter-century, with Honda, Toyota and Daikin leading the way. One hope is programs such as JOI will foster a new generation of economic ties.

Taguchi understands the importance of learning about other cultures and the impact it can have on a student. As a 13-year-old from Kumamoto, in southern Japan, she made a weeklong sister-city exchange trip to Rome, Georgia. The kindness and curiosity of her host family sparked an interest in global relations. It also prompted Taguchi to bridge the language gap: upon returning to her Japanese high school, she sought out the English-speaking teachers.

"Almost every single lunch break, I'd go and talk with them, and that's when I saw my English starting to pick up," she said. By the time she attended university in Fukuoka and



Eri Taguchi shared about Japanese culture with students during a sushi class she hosted this fall.



began working at Abercrombie & Fitch—a company with English-only communications—she became fluent.

She majored in international relations, studied in England for 10 months, and later interned at the U.S. consulate before a bit of happenstance led her to the JOI program. While strolling into the Fukuoka subway with her mother, Taguchi noticed a recruitment poster. "It was right in front of the ticket gate, and I saw that my local JOI event was scheduled for the next day," she said. "I'm so lucky I noticed it."

So far, Taguchi's impressions of Samford have been positive. "People are really kind, and it's a really large campus compared to how things are in Japan," she said. "My role is a cultural ambassador, and I think I can reach out to people and make grassroots cultural exchanges. Even though I know it's going to end in two years, I hope it's something that carries on." ■

# SERVING THE PEOPLE OF ECUADOR, Where a Professor's Passion Meets Purpose

*Raised as a missionary kid, Kara Chism, an Orlean Beeson School of Education professor and alumna, continues to live out her calling to serve.*

*by Kameron Brown*

**In the 1980s, in a small town in Ecuador, the roads were not paved, and the underprivileged community did not possess watches or clocks. So, Kara Chism and her parents drove around the dusty roads with a microphone and speaker calling the community to church on Sunday afternoons.**

"I couldn't wait for Sundays when I had the chance to teach young children at our church," she said. "I always looked forward to the opportunity to be in a classroom."

Chism spent most of her childhood in South America, serving alongside her parents as they shared the Gospel and their hearts with Ecuador's indigenous communities. Education has always been her passion. As a child, she created lesson plans and taught the neighborhood children how to read, write and do math, with dreams of becoming a teacher already growing in her heart.

"I was a missionary kid," Chism recalled. "I had no concept of life in the United States until I enrolled at Samford University. Even then, the plan was to return to the mission field and apply my education there."

Despite experiencing culture shock as a freshman at Samford, Chism quickly realized this was where she was meant to be.

"I fell in love with Samford for the relationships, the academic challenge and the spiritual growth," she said. "I loved it so much, I never really left."

Chism holds five degrees from the university (the most of any faculty member at Orlean Beeson School of Education), and today, she serves as the director and assistant professor for the instructional leadership program and as the school's character leader in residence. Her plans for returning to the



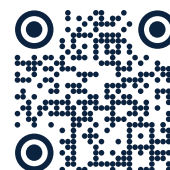
(Left) Kara Chism lived in Ecuador from 1985 to 1992. (Above) She traveled with Samford's inaugural spring break mission trip to Ecuador earlier this year.



mission field were put on hold as the Lord called her to serve others at Samford.

Then in 2024, Samford's Office of Parent and Family Engagement began hosting a yearly spring break mission trip to Ecuador, uniting students, families, employees and alumni to serve in the South American nation. This initiative allowed Chism to blend her passion for education and missions, leading her back to where her journey began. "I'm grateful to Samford for the opportunities to use teaching and missions to point others to God's Kingdom," she said. 📌

**Chism plans to return to Ecuador with the Samford family during spring break, and you can join her. Scan the QR code to learn more.**







# FRESHMAN RETREAT

*A "mass movement" for faith-centered connections*

*by Allan Taylor*

Logan Bryant had just experienced Freshman Retreat, an overnight getaway to Shocco Springs where around 900 Samford University newcomers mixed praise and worship with rock climbing and Spikeball. As 18 charter buses loaded up for the 45-minute ride back to campus, Bryant, a freshman from Clinton, Mississippi, needed to phone home.

"Mom," he said, "I cannot wait to tell you about this weekend."

The retreat's impact penetrated so deeply he couldn't delay reporting back to his family. Bryant needed to convey how the small group discussions compelled classmates to share about God, and how comforted he felt in his new surroundings.

"If your parents went to college, they know what it's like to feel alone for the first time and feel isolated," Bryant said. "But hearing that I had found a community, and that I had an absolute blast getting to know people, my mom could feel my excitement through the phone."

Such outcomes are exactly what Bobby Gatlin envisioned when he became Samford's campus pastor

in 2019. Back then the retreat was drawing about 200 freshmen, and Gatlin aspired to grow appeal by repackaging the event to make it something more freshmen would want to attend, especially more of the male students.

"I have been working with students my entire career," Gatlin said, "with tons of opportunities to create retreats and experiences for large groups, so I felt confident in what would attract these 18-year-olds to participate. I wanted the retreat to be a place where students could get excited about their faith and being at Samford while also having space to connect with others and continue finding community. So, we designed an environment and picked a location where students can actually have a good time."

Now the retreat has grown four-fold, fueled in part by the Shocco Springs recreational amenities that include an aqua park, water slides, basketball and putt-putt golf. The play-and-pray vibe is yielding results. With most of the freshman class attending the past two years, Gatlin is witnessing the retreat become “pretty much a mass movement,” where students kick off their college careers with spiritual momentum.

Another aspect of attendance growth involves older students volunteering to serve as small group leaders, which Gatlin calls “the secret in the sauce.” The 100 or so upper-division students undergo training that prepares them to guide discussions at the retreat, but it’s their intrinsic ability to build trust—often through sharing about their own struggles—that makes them crucial. They become built-in mentors for the freshmen with the ability to forge long-term connections.

“When the small group leader sees those freshmen in sorority and fraternity recruitment, or when they see them at the Caf, they can ask, ‘How are you doing?’ And they can sit down and talk about some things,” Gatlin said. “It’s creating relational pathways that, in the best-case scenario, help freshmen acclimate and gives them someone to talk to, because

you feel like fish out of water when you first get here.”

Because Gatlin’s own children attended Samford, he understands the importance of older students pouring into freshmen.

“You want your kids to meet the caliber of student that you hope they will look up to,” he said. “These are individuals you want freshmen to emulate. You want your child to have a Samford story like theirs, a faith walk like theirs, and an involvement pattern like theirs.”

## Electric Environment

Gatlin could envision expanding to a two-day retreat, though for now his team is content packing a revelatory experience into 24 hours. Amid the sermons, testimonials, and the student worship band performing, students feel galvanized from the outset.

“There’s something really electric about 8 o’clock that Friday night,” Gatlin said. “The leaders are excited, the band is excited, and the freshmen come in really energetic about that first worship environment of their college time at Samford. They’re at this university that they’ve been looking forward to, and now they see the heartbeat behind the place.”

The retreat typically lands one week after the







start of fall semester classes, a purposeful date aimed at helping newcomers make immediate connections.

"It's exciting for us as a team to see this is the start of a new year, and we're going to ask God to really move, to really speak, and to really help create relational opportunities," he said.

The retreat offers students an out-of-the-gate reminder that faith needn't be compartmentalized at Samford.

"It begins the process of normalizing that at Samford, it's OK to talk about your faith and to be outspoken about how things are going," Gatlin said. "It's a new experience for students coming from public high schools to see that we pray in our classrooms. They're adjusting to this new environment, where it's OK to talk about God and Jesus."

Among the most touching moments are when students undergo a salvation experience or a recommitment. Small-group leaders frequently host one-on-one conversations late into the night with freshmen who are wrestling with turmoil or facing deep questions. Some students take the opportunity to share personally how they're seeing God work.

"It's not always beautiful. Some of the stories are tragic and painful, yet God has redeemed and healed some of that," Gatlin said. "We all need to realize that God is still working in all of us. He's in the process of

bringing us to a place that He wants us to be and working the good into our lives that He has planned. It's not always the easy path, but He's always faithful. He's always there. As we talk about those things out loud, it's helpful for students who have a preconceived notion that they're supposed to put on this shell of Christianity to show that everything's great in my life. We're here to be honest, to be vulnerable, and to put some people into your life that you can look up to."

## Faith on Fire

Bryant, the freshman from Mississippi, not only marveled at the soul-stirring nature of the retreat, but at the circumstances that steered him to Samford in the first place.

As part of a soccer family—his father founded the Brilla soccer ministry, and his older brother was a standout midfielder for Davidson College—Bryant grew up dreaming of playing in college.

His grandparents had attended Samford, but the school wasn't initially on Bryant's radar because Samford doesn't field a men's soccer team.

"Then I woke up one morning last year and literally felt the Lord tell me, 'You're not supposed to play college soccer.' That felt so weird, because that's all I ever wanted to do," Bryant said.

Over the following week, when a series of people





randomly mentioned Samford's sports marketing and data analytics program, it didn't seem random at all. Bryant realized he could use his degree to grow his family's soccer ministry as a business, and Samford became his top choice. Paying for Samford became his next obstacle.

"Quite honestly, my family could not afford this place without the financial generosity of the school," he said. "I just felt the Lord telling me, 'It's OK, I'm calling you there.' But I wondered how it would happen?"

When his first scholarship package last December was not enough, Bryant tried to stay faithful. In January he missed out on a series of business scholarships, and Bryant asked, "God, is this where I'm supposed to be?"

Then came February, when his home church conducted a daily prayer initiative called "P28"—praying for one thing for one minute at 1 p.m. every day during the month. Bryant focused his prayers on Samford and on Feb. 28 he received a text from his admission counselor.

"She said to check your application status page, and there it was: four scholarships I had no idea I was in the running for. I jumped up and down for joy," he said.

On Feb. 29, Bryant was accepted into the sports marketing program. In March, more leftover scholarship money found Bryant. "It was down to literally the

last cent that I needed to be able to come to school here without taking out a loan," he said.

By the time Bryant joined his freshman classmates at the retreat, waves of gratitude engulfed him. "I looked up during worship and saw a campus that was going to be on fire for the Lord," he said, "and I was so excited I get to be here for the next four years with these people."

Bryant estimated he shared his testimony more during the first four weeks on campus than he had done in his time at home. Looking back, he wished he would have been more comfortable sharing in his earlier years, but the Lord is just moving here in deep, intentional conversations.

"I think it's easy to get caught up in cultural Christianity, like putting a quote on a website or your Instagram bio or on a T-shirt," he said. "But when you walk the walk and get together as a freshman class, you start off with the mindset of, 'Hey, we're all in this together.' We all want to get to know each other better, and then walk together in our faith journey. Every morning, I wake up feeling beyond blessed, and I know there are a lot of those Samford stories." ▀







# A GAME CHANGER FOR SAMFORD

The sprawling new Campus Recreation, Wellness and Athletics Complex is a massive step in enhancing the university's residential experience.

by Allan Taylor

Samford University celebrated the debut of its 165,000-square-foot Campus Recreation, Wellness and Athletics Complex—an \$85 million facility that combines world-class fitness amenities with communal spaces for students and employees.

"This proudly stands among the best such facilities in the nation," said Samford President Beck A. Taylor during the Sept. 20 ribbon cutting ceremony. "It's a game changer for Samford."

The massive four-story complex features basketball, racquetball and pickleball courts, along with studios for spin classes, yoga, Pilates, Zumba and barre core. There are tonal strength stations, free weights, cardio and circuit training, turf areas, billiards, an elevated







*"We hope this building speaks not only to the wellness of our students, but also to our commitment to a well world."*

Beck A. Taylor, president

jogging track, a coffeehouse and 24-hour market. There's also an esports studio designed to launch the university's new video gaming program.

"This is the first building block of a very ambitious plan to continue elevating Samford as a top residential university in the country," said Taylor, only weeks after the university announced a 16th consecutive year of record-breaking enrollment. "Our students and families are choosing Samford in record numbers, because we're all about residential experiences.

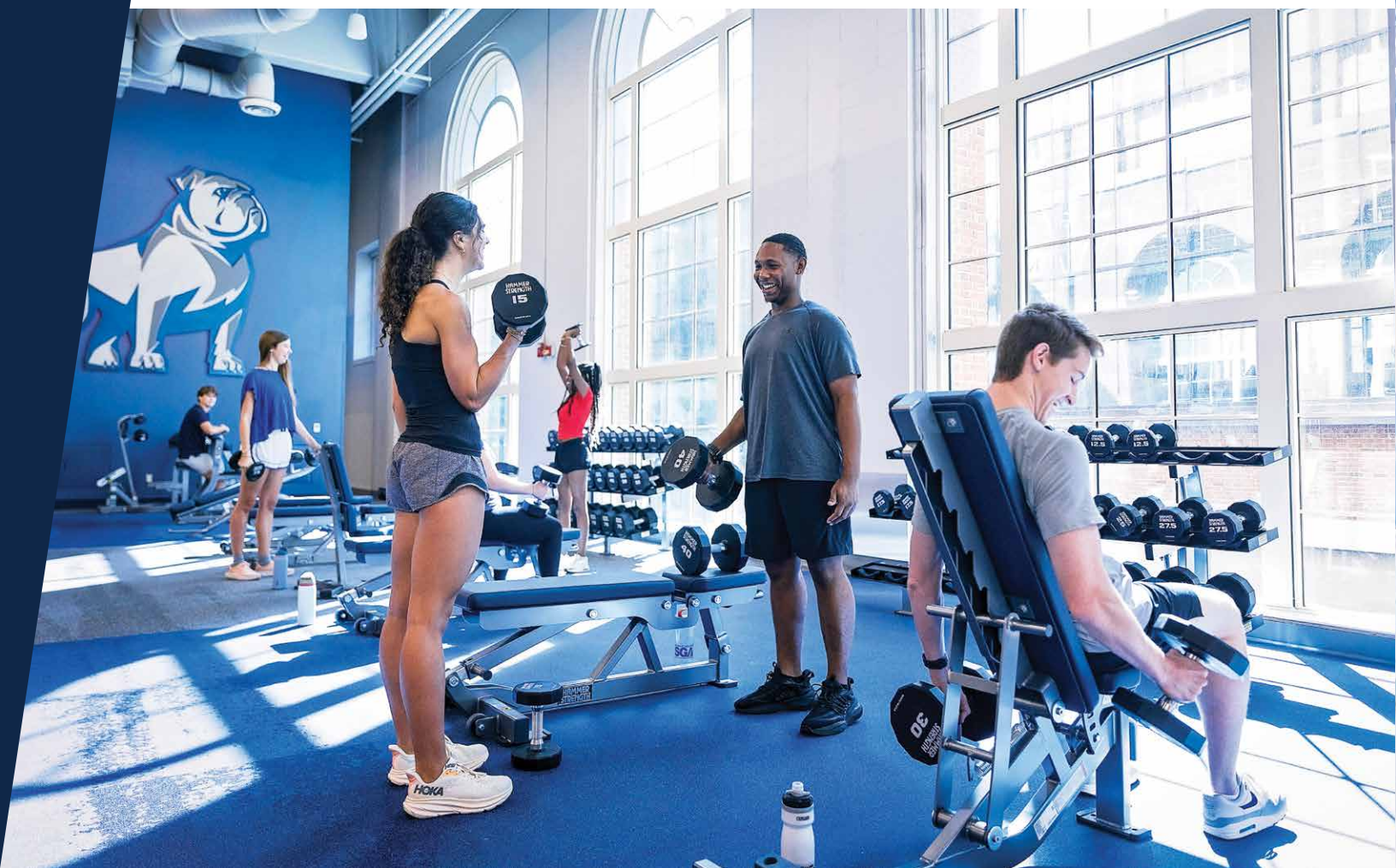
"Above all, this complex is a place for community. Obviously, students will

use the equipment, but they'll have the opportunity to run into each other, to encourage one another, and to study for an exam between an intramural game. This is going to be a real hub in the west campus area."

Karon O. Bowdre, chair of the Samford University Board of Trustees, recalled how nearly two years ago Taylor and trustees began shaping a vision to enrich campus life. That master plan, known as Samford Horizons,







includes a reimagined dining experience, four new residence halls scheduled to open in 2025, a 550-space parking deck, and the debut of the high-end recreation and wellness facility, which coincided with Samford's annual Family Weekend.

James Jefferson, Samford's student government president, toured the expansive complex and proclaimed it a milestone moment. "Years from now," he said, "we will remember this day and how we felt with the new possibilities opening for us."

Nick Madsen, executive director of campus recreation, was part of a leadership team that evaluated recreational facilities at more than 20 major universities to inform Samford's design.

"We were seeking to understand what those schools liked, what they didn't like, and what they wished they had in their facilities," Madsen said. "We researched a lot of different universities to see what they had, and we wanted ours to be the best. We want this to be a showcase, and it is the best around the Southeast. This facility is going to bring students here."

The complex will employ 100 student workers, Madsen said, doubling the student staff from the previous recreation center.

One emphasis was constructing studios large enough to accommodate Step Sing groups that previously staged some of their practices off campus. "This facility has a ton of space, and it's smartly designed with multiple workout areas," Madsen said. "We wanted to give everyone the opportunity to find that little pocket area where they feel comfortable. Sometimes facilities just have one huge workout space, which can be very intimidating."

Encompassing intramural sports, events and lounge spaces, along with renovations to the Samford CARES counseling facilities, the complex reveals a purposeful blueprint encouraging the holistic wellness of Samford students in mind, body and spirit.

"By Samford really investing in a wellness district with facilities and resources, we are sending a message to students that their health matters and the best health is integrated health," said April Robinson,









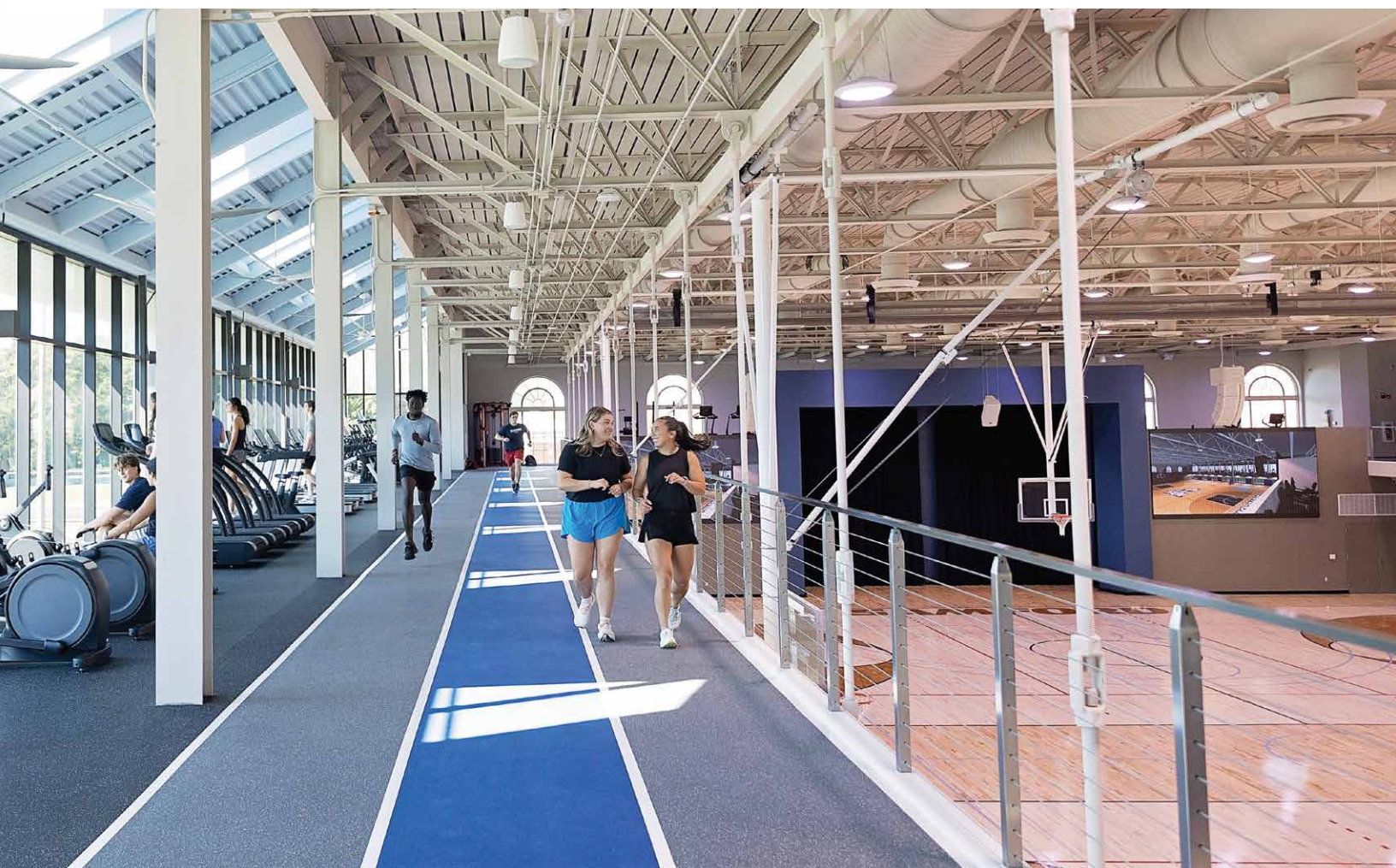
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*"By Samford really investing in a wellness district with facilities and resources, we are sending a message to students that their health matters..."*

April Robinson, assistant vice president  
of student development  
and support

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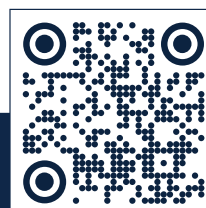
assistant vice president of student development and support. “Samford’s mission is to nurture persons, and we are committed to nurturing the whole person.”

Numerous Birmingham-based and national firms participated in the construction project, including Davis Architects, a firm that has guided Samford’s campus design since the 1950s. “Davis Architects created a dynamic plan that integrates the old and the new into our campus aesthetic while transforming the interior of the buildings to meet the needs and desires of our students,” Taylor said.

In an effort to manage energy consumption, reduce water usage, improve indoor air quality and improve environmental performance, Samford is pursuing LEED

certification for the Campus Recreation, Wellness and Athletics Complex. “We hope this building speaks not only to the wellness of our students, but also to our commitment to a well world,” Taylor said. “It will be a few months before our certification is confirmed, but we are saving a place right inside the front door for Samford’s new LEED plaque.”

Every inch of the new facility is purposeful, including a stunning new footbridge attached to the complex that spans the north end zone of the Pete Hanna Stadium. The bridge, named in honor of Samford graduate, Buddy Larry Thorne '58, offers a new pedestrian connection between central and west campus. ▶



**SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH A VIDEO FROM THE RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY.**





## AS SAMFORD MAKES A SPLASH IN ESPORTS, MEET THE COACH WHO'S AT THE CONTROLS

by Allan Taylor

**As a freshman in college, Michael French noticed a local *Super Smash Bros.* community floundering and decided to start operating his own video game tournaments. Now, at age 26, he's overseeing the launch of Samford's esports program, an ambitious leap into video game competition.**

French's official title is esports facility manager and coach, though the role is equal parts recruiter, scheduler, ambassador, project manager, event organizer and motivator.

Even before students got their first glimpse of the esports studio inside the new Campus Recreation, Wellness and Athletics Complex, French worked for weeks to mobilize gamers via the Discord social media platform commonly used by gaming communities. This wasn't merely a callout for experienced players who dominate their friendly circles in *Rocket League*, but also a concerted effort to convince newbies to check out the studio's 24 high-end gaming stations and, hopefully, become more engaged.

"It can be very intimidating when you're not sure if you're any good at a game," French said. "But the gamers who start off less skilled and suddenly develop, those are my favorite type of people to watch. There's that moment when it clicks for those people, and you realize they are going to be insanely talented."

French recalls handily beating a college classmate at *Smash Bros.*—the same classmate who has since become an elite national player. The gaming landscape is filled with teens who started playing casually before making leaps into top-level competitions. French hopes to generate enthusiasm during fall semester, gathering a dedicated group of gamers before Samford's team begins competing in tournaments

next spring. Students in the School of the Arts' game design major—the same tech-rich field French studied in college—could represent a talent pool.

"If you're building a brand-new basketball team entirely sourced from your existing student base, you're not going to expect them to make March Madness the first year. You're sort of building from scratch," he said. "The short-term goal is to get some sort of competitive base going."

Although there is a competitive element, some of the best instruction for esports, French admits, occurs peer-to-peer. The best coaching he ever received didn't cost him a cent but came from a roommate who noticed an exploitable flaw in his gameplay at certain intervals. His coaching tip was simple: attach a sticky note to the screen to remind French about avoiding the pitfall.

Samford's esports club has been approved to compete in six games, including *Fortnite*, *Valorant*, *Overwatch* and *League of Legends*. Then there are spectator-friendly titles—the brawling megahit *Smash Bros.* and cars playing soccer in *Rocket League*—for which French anticipates viewers watching from outside the studio.

"The studio has been wired to several areas throughout the rec center. It's fantastic," he said. This will allow for spectator experiences for all students who are fans of the team.

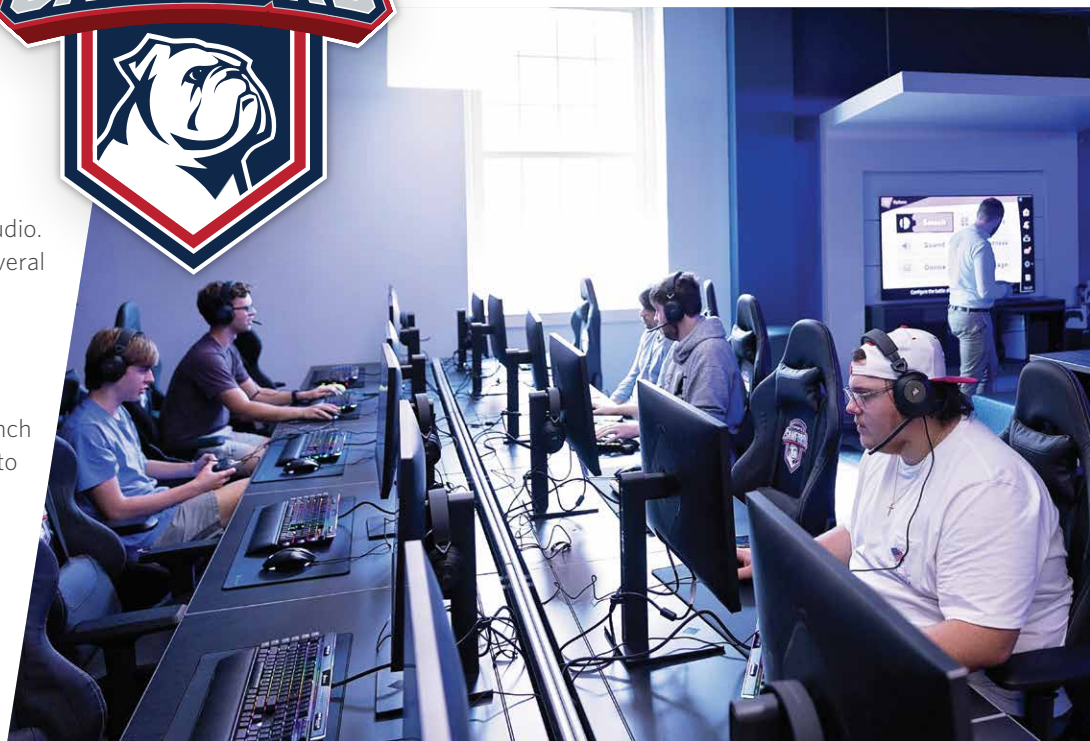
Samford esports is primed to launch with a sophisticated facility designed to meet gamers' preferences.

"The space has a state-of-the-art competition room, casual play area, and console area," said Joseph McCormick, Samford's chief information officer. "We were meticulous in even the smallest details and spoke with many students as we

developed our plans. I am thrilled that this new facility will offer a new way for Samford to extend our Christian mission, vision, and values into collegiate esports. The new Samford esports facility will offer a structured, yet flexible, environment that will encourage the growth of student community building. And come spring of 2025, it will allow us to move into competitive play."

As with traditional sports, there's the expectation of players attending mandatory practices and maintaining GPA requirements. In keeping with Samford's mission of delivering a Christ-centered experience on a close-knit campus, the esports program is about expanding perspectives and making meaningful relationships.

"The community aspect is by far the most valuable part of esports and gaming," French said. "The esports program is about providing students with new opportunities to demonstrate their God-given talents and generating lifelong connections." ▀







# *A Gift from the* **HEART**

*Joy Watson establishes a new scholarship for future nurses.*

*by Megan Winkler*

## **It all began with prayer and a dream of leaving a lasting legacy.**

Joy Watson, a 2023 alumna and current graduate student at Moffett & Sanders School of Nursing, used her perseverance and compassion to establish a scholarship for future nursing students. She is one of the youngest people to establish a scholarship at Samford.

Watson transferred to Samford in 2020, seeking hands-on nursing experience. Raised in a single-parent home and later by her grandparents, she balanced caring for her siblings, attending classes, and funding her education. At times, she worried that financial difficulties might derail her plans.

"One day, I dressed up to meet with a banker about a loan," Watson recalled. "My undergraduate nursing instructor, Lauren Jones, saw me and asked if I was OK. I explained my appointment, and she said she would pray for me."

The moment changed Watson's view of being a student at Samford. The spiritual support from faculty and administration revealed Samford as more than an institution—it was a community of people who genuinely cared. This support reaffirmed her faith and motivated her to help future students, who, like her, would be seen as individuals, not just numbers.

Watson's vision became clearer after having a vivid dream the week before graduation.

"I dreamed I was in my white coat surrounded by students handing me papers marked declined, dropped out, denied or rejected. The stack was towering, and more students were waiting," Watson said. "I knew how it felt and realized I needed to act. That's when I decided to start a scholarship."

Victoria Allen, executive director of development at Samford, worked with Watson to create the scholarship after she started as a cardiothoracic nurse at UAB Hospital. They arranged a system to donate a portion of each of her paychecks to support the scholarship.

In 2023, the Watson Annual Scholarship Fund was established to support full-time Samford nursing students facing financial, personal or family hardships.

Watson believes God will pave the way for them. She hopes this scholarship will give them the encouragement to remain on their career path. "I want future nursing students to see Samford not as an overwhelming challenge but as a meaningful journey," Watson said. "Your effort will yield immense rewards, making you both a better nurse and a better person. It's worth it, and I hope to continue that legacy." ▀



Adrian Velez-Domenech

# From Puerto Rico TO HOMEWOOD

*Pharmacy students share their path to Samford.*

by Alison Ingle

**McWhorter School of Pharmacy is more than 1,600 miles from Puerto Rico, but despite the distance, 31 students from the island are currently working toward their Doctor of Pharmacy. Academic opportunities, faculty engagement and Southern hospitality are among the reasons many of these students have chosen to call Samford home.**

In 2015, the pharmacy school's reputation began to grow in Puerto Rico after Adrian Velez-Domenech, who is now a fourth-year student, attended Bulldog Pharmacy Camp. The annual weeklong event introduces high school juniors, seniors and rising college freshmen to the world of pharmacy through compounding labs, simulation experiences, hands-on demonstrations, and tours of local pharmacies and health care facilities.

Inspired by his exceptional experience, Velez-Domenech returned to his home in Moca, Puerto Rico, and helped spread the word about Samford's opportunities.

"The idea of moving thousands of miles was initially very stressful. Leaving behind my family and familiar surroundings felt overwhelming,"

Velez-Domenech said. "I chose Samford because it offers an excellent academic program and fosters a sense of community and support. From the moment I stepped on campus, I knew this was the right place to grow professionally and as a person."

At around the same time, the recruitment team identified a gap in opportunities for Puerto Rican students aspiring to study pharmacy. Initial outreach efforts included sending recruitment postcards to interested students. One of these postcards reached Yelitza Nieves Prosper, PharmD '21, who became McWhorter's first Puerto Rican graduate. She has paved the way for others, including her husband, Cesar German-Silvestry, PharmD '22, and 11 students in this fall's first-year class.

Over the past seven years, more than 40 students from Puerto Rico have become an integral part of the McWhorter family.

"I'm so pleased we made this connection with students in Puerto Rico and that it continues to grow," said Michael Crouch, dean of McWhorter School of Pharmacy. "The students add so much to our community, and Samford is better because of it."

Wilmarie Figueroa Rivera, a second-year student, has excelled at McWhorter, serving as a pharmacy camp counselor and student ambassador this past year.

"From the moment I arrived on campus, I was struck by its beautiful blend of historic charm and modern amenities, creating an inviting and conducive atmosphere for learning," she said. "The faculty here are not only experts in their fields but also genuinely invested in their students' success, offering invaluable mentorship and personalized support that has greatly enriched my educational journey."

Rivera appreciates the faith-based learning environment that solidifies her spiritual foundation and creates a sense of belonging. "Beyond the campus, Samford offers numerous opportunities for professional growth, connecting students with resources and networks that have allowed me to expand my horizons and gain practical experience," she said. ▀





## *Celebrating* **HOMECOMING 2024**

*by Allan Taylor*

With a blend of reunions and reminiscing, hugs and history, this year's Homecoming celebration featured both longstanding traditions, like football and tailgating, as well as new events, like the Friday night Quad party.

"We want our alumni to know we don't stop caring about them after they graduate," said Allison Toomey, director of special events and communication for the Samford Alumni Association. "You're a student for a season, but you're a Bulldog for life."

The weekend marked a special time for three reunion classes: the Class of 1999 celebrated 25 years, the Class of 2014 commemorated 10 years, and the Class of 1974 honored 50 years at the Golden Bulldog Luncheon.

Additionally, with the facility open for tours all weekend, alumni were able to step inside the transformed Seibert Hall for their first glimpse of the new Campus Recreation, Wellness and Athletics Complex.

Earlier in the week, students crowned their Homecoming king and queen, naming Jack Oliver, a senior journalism and mass communication major, and Emma Wolfe, a senior accounting major.

"This has been a great experience, and I tell that to everybody who is looking at going to college here," Wolfe said. "Samford is a transformational place that has given me lifelong friends." ▶









## ALUMNI OF THE YEAR

# 2024 Honorees

During Homecoming Weekend, Samford honored three outstanding alumni.

*by Allan Taylor*

### ANDREW BRASHER '02

#### ALUMNUS OF THE YEAR

A summa cum laude graduate of Samford, who earned his law degree from Harvard, Brasher became solicitor general for Alabama (2014-2019) and was confirmed to the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in 2020.

### BRENT FIELDER '08, MBA '19

#### OUTSTANDING YOUNG ALUMNUS OF THE YEAR

Chick-fil-A's vice president of global impact credits his Samford experience for "a lot of my deeper spiritual growth—being around believers who could disciple me through Bible studies and show me about living a life of consistency."

### KATHERINE RODGERS '15, MSE '17

#### HUMANITARIAN OF THE YEAR

The founder of Purposefully Made Ministries says: "In rural Africa, most people with disabilities are seen as a curse. They are abandoned and locked away. The people aren't taught that children with disabilities are a gift from God, that they have a purpose."

# Serendipity at Samford

An academic U-turn launched Andrew Brasher to an acclaimed legal career.

**Eighteen-year-old Andrew Brasher**, fresh off earning high school valedictorian honors, envisioned himself pursuing a career in academia, but his college advisers at Samford led him to consider another path.

"I had done mock trials and debate in high school, and I enjoyed writing, research, history and government," Brasher said. "The conversations with my advisers helped me realize how the law was a way to put my interests into real-world use, to have an immediate impact on people's lives."

Remembering these influential professors, like Mark Baggett and Fred Shepherd, prompts Brasher to marvel over his transformative time on Samford's campus, where he studied international relations, taught French labs and met his future wife.

Everything that transpired after—Harvard Law School, private practice litigation, becoming Alabama's solicitor general, a U.S. District judgeship, and ultimately being appointed to the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals—he can trace back to Samford.

"I'm struck by how serendipitous things are," Brasher said. "It's more than just a right-place-at-the-right-time kind of thing."

Entering Harvard Law, he questioned if he was in the right place, and worried over being outclassed among students at one of the nation's iconic institutions. However, Brasher immediately earned validation through his selection to the *Harvard Law Review*—a distinction typically reserved for about 30 students from a class of 500.

"That's when I realized I was actually doing well and not just treading water," he said. He ultimately graduated cum laude and received the Victor Brudney Prize for his paper on corporate law.

During a postgraduate internship in Washington, D.C., Brasher lived just blocks from the Supreme Court, affording him the chance to attend arguments. A decade later, he would argue SCOTUS cases himself as the Alabama solicitor general, what he described as "a dream job for a young lawyer."

In May 2019, Brasher was confirmed as a U.S. District Judge in Alabama, following his nomination by President Donald Trump. Six months later, Trump nominated Brasher for the U.S. Court of Appeals, with confirmation from the Senate following in February 2020.

"I could have stayed in private practice, could have stayed in a government job, but I needed to keep challenging myself,"



ALUMNUS OF THE YEAR:

**ANDREW BRASHER**

Brasher said. "Now I probably have the last job I'm ever going to have."

Shepherd, a professor of political science, recalls Brasher as a "fantastic student from day one," eager to challenge himself through upper-level courses.

"It was obvious from the start that he was an independent thinker who had the intellectual tools to thrive in whatever career he chose," Shepherd said. "His time at Harvard and on the bench has shown that he is very much his own person when it comes to important legal and political matters. I think his experience in the classroom at Samford may have been an important part of this evolution."

The 11th Circuit's jurisdiction spans Alabama, Georgia and Florida, with headquarters in Atlanta. Brasher is one of two Samford graduates on the 12-judge court, joining Kevin Newsom '94 who was seated in 2017. The caseload can appear staggering—the current average exceeds 4,500 filings annually and Brasher authors more than 100 opinions a year.

When at home in Birmingham, the 43-year-old Brasher jokes about settling into "normal old-man activities" such as crossword puzzles, lake fishing and, of course, reading.

"I read all the time for work and then I read more at home," he said. "I really love learning. I love the process of coming to understand something that I didn't know previously. I tell my kids I got into a profession where I just do homework for my job." ■



# Chick-fil-A Career Shows Alumnus “You Can Love Business and Love Jesus at the Same Time”

**An encounter with Chick-fil-A founder** Truett Cathy made Brent Fielder a believer—in the ministry of business.

Fielder witnessed firsthand Cathy’s benevolence and authenticity while working at a summer camp. Their subsequent conversations reinforced the fact that glorifying God and faithfully stewarding resources truly is vital to the Chick-fil-A culture.

“It made me realize that this man is as good as everybody thinks he is, his money’s going to good places, and he’s doing really well with this business,” Fielder said. “Studying all that

reconciled my own love for business—showing you can love business and love Jesus at the same time.”

Fielder, now 39, has spent the past four years leading Chick-fil-A’s philanthropy and community engagement efforts, though his involvement with the quick-service restaurant stretches back to 2003 when he started working with the WinShape Foundation, also founded by Truett Cathy. While serving at WinShape, Fielder met and married the Chick-fil-A founder’s granddaughter, Angela. He also served as a local owner-operator of a Birmingham-area Chick-fil-A franchise for five years—which proved to be anything but a passive investment.

“While operating Chick-fil-A Greystone, I had the opportunity to serve on the Chick-fil-A Board of Directors as well. I was the only board member leaving the meeting to go work in a restaurant,” he said. “I essentially had this real-life lab, so to speak, where I could take my formal education, pair it with an unbelievable board experience, and apply it all to practice in my own restaurant.”

A recent promotion to lead Global Impact for Chick-fil-A integrated Fielder’s undergraduate emphasis at Samford. As a student, he was a part of the first cohort of Brock School of Business’ entrepreneurship program.

“Back then, we were all trying to figure out what the program actually was,” he said. “It’s the business school, but we were studying nonprofit management. Now the idea of a company having a social impact has evolved.”

Fielder is now involved in the evolving impact of Chick-fil-A through its True Inspiration grants, which have eclipsed \$6 million annually. While awards typically range from \$25,000 to \$200,000, one recipient receives a \$350,000 grant. Fielder was on hand last year for the surprise unveiling to a Kansas foster care organization. “There were lots of tears, lots of emotion,” he said, and then came a revelation from the co-founder. The foster care organization had recently been warned that it needed between \$300,000 and \$400,000 by the end of the year to continue operating.

“My faith compels me to believe that coincidences just don’t happen,” Fielder said. “The fact we showed up that day with this award—for the exact amount of money they needed—was remarkable. It reminds me the Lord’s hands are in it. He’s in the details, and he’s really using our company to make a positive influence.”



**YOUNG ALUMNUS OF THE YEAR:  
BRENT FIELDER**

# Faith Lived Out

Katherine Rodgers followed her calling to help disabled children in Kenya.

**Before coming to Samford** in 2011, Katherine Rodgers knew little about life outside of Clarksdale, Mississippi. Her high school graduation class had 30 students, and she jokes about never having driven on the interstate until she left for college. Then the Lord led Rodgers to attend Samford, the first in a string of callings that culminated in her launching Purposefully Made Ministries, which provides resources for children with disabilities in rural Kenya.

For a girl who was very shy, Rodgers never imagined she would one day be the founder and chief fundraiser of a global organization stretching into Africa.

She now spends most of the year working at a rented, six-room facility that serves 19 disabled children from surrounding villages. Many of the children are coping with cerebral palsy, and their villages are too isolated and their finances too meager for them to seek hospital treatment. The center provides physical therapy and occupational therapy for the children, Christian counseling for the families, as well as prenatal and postnatal education.

"Unfortunately, in rural Africa, most children with disabilities are seen as a curse. They are abandoned and locked away," Rodgers said. "The people are not taught that children with disabilities are a gift from God, that they have a purpose. They see them as punishment for something that the mom did wrong or something the village did wrong."

Her path to Kenya set aside career ambitions and seemed to defy common sense to many around her. It was a journey waged purely upon conviction. After earning a bachelor's degree in early childhood special education and a master's degree in elementary education, she began teaching in Mississippi. It felt like the perfect job for Rodgers until she joined a summer mission trip to Kenya. Absorbing the plight of disabled children there, she sensed the pull: "I knew I had to come back and do something."

During the following school year back home, thoughts of Kenya consumed her. God kept rousing her in the middle of the night, "putting it in my heart," she said.

God called Rodgers so fervently that when it came time to renew her Mississippi teaching contract, she declined. Her focus turned to Kenya, though she wasn't sure where to begin.

"I stepped out of the boat in faith. My family was worried, and everyone thought I was having a midlife crisis, even though



**HUMANITARIAN OF THE YEAR:**

**KATHERINE RODGERS**

I was only 25 at the time. They asked me about giving up a government job, my pension and insurance to go to Africa with no real plan. All God was telling me was, 'Go to Kenya and work with these children.'" she said. "The rest is history. He has been so faithful every step of the way, showing me where to go."

Since founding the ministry in 2020, Rodgers has built a nine-person staff of teachers, counselors, cooks and drivers. Some staffers came from the missionary community and others were recommended through word of mouth. "I didn't know who to trust or who to call, but God's timing has been perfect," she said. "One person would fall into my lap, and then they would know someone else. We're small, but we're growing as God leads us."

Rodgers beams about the Kenyan families. "It doesn't feel like going to work every day, because these babies are our babies." Their faith-on-fire approach to enduring hardships made her dig deeper for gratitude.

"They have every reason to be upset with God over their conditions, but they actually have the strongest faith, because God is the only one who has been faithful to them," Rodgers said. "He gives them breath in their lungs, and He gives them energy to search for food for one more day. When I see them, I see faith truly lived out. It has been tested and persevered."

Rodgers carries a special warmth for the Samford professors and mentors who poured into her. "I always knew God was my Father, that He loved me and I loved Him, but I didn't understand what that looked like on a day-to-day basis until building those friendships and mentorships with people at Samford," she said. "They have seen a shy Mississippi girl with a small voice become a teacher who's in command of her classroom. And now they've seen her move to another side of the world. I pray that they know it's a credit to them. I wouldn't be the woman I am today without their motivation." ■





# The 1991 Football Team and a Super Bowl Champion Headline the 2025 Samford Athletics Hall of Fame Class

by Joey Mullins

**The 1991 Samford football team, which posted a school-record 12 wins and reached the national semifinals in the program's first visit to the NCAA Division I-AA playoffs, headlines the 2025 Athletics Hall of Fame class.**

Coached by Terry Bowden, the 1991 football team finished 12-2, winning playoff games at New Hampshire and James Madison before losing to eventual national champion Youngstown State.

## **Other inductees into the Hall of Fame's eighth class are:**

- All-American defensive back, **James Bradberry** (football, 2012-15) was a second-round NFL draft pick in 2016 who played for the Carolina Panthers, New York Giants and Philadelphia Eagles. He was named to the Pro Bowl in 2020 with the Giants and won Super Bowl LVII with the Eagles.
- **Ashley Cope** (track and field, 2011-14) won the SoCon title in the heptathlon (2013 and 2014), pentathlon (2014), 100-meter hurdles (2013) and pole vault (2013). As the 2013 SoCon Women's Outdoor Most Outstanding Athlete, she holds school records for the pentathlon 60-meter hurdles and the heptathlon 800 meters. Cope coached eight seasons as an assistant coach for Samford track and field (2015-22).
- **Joey Davenport** (basketball, 1992-96) stands fourth in career scoring at Samford with 1,651 points, and he is the school's all-time leader in made free throws (557). He

led the team in scoring during the 1993-94 season, averaging 19.4 points per game.

- **Bill Lankford** (basketball, 1954-57) was a standout at Samford (then Howard College), and shares the school record for scoring average in a season, averaging 23.4 points per game. He ranks fifth in program history with 1,621 points. Lankford became a successful high school and junior college basketball coach, and his 1980 Jefferson State team finished second in the National Junior College Championship Tournament.

"Every year, I am amazed at the impressive accomplishments by our inductees," said Martin Newton, Samford's director of athletics. "But even more, it touches me to see how much Samford University means to each member of our Hall of Fame. We look forward to inducting this class, which includes two of the top basketball players in school history, an NFL veteran, a track and field standout and one of the best football teams in program history."

Additionally, Samford Athletics has announced Rickie and MaryAnn Moon as this year's recipients of the John C. Pittman Lifetime Achievement award. Rickie earned his bachelor's degree from Samford in 1977 and his master's in 1997, while MaryAnn is a 1976 Samford graduate. ▀

# CLASS NOTES

Compiled by the Samford University Alumni Association. Share your updates via [sualumni@samford.edu](mailto:sualumni@samford.edu) or 205-726-4392.

## 1970s

**Jimmy Rane '71** was appointed by Governor Kay Ivey to the Alabama Growth Alliance.

**Stancil Starnes '72** was named as an honoree in the Birmingham Business Hall of Fame for 2024.

**Stephen Hammond '78, '81** has been appointed to the Lower Florida Keys Hospital District by Governor DeSantis.

## 1980s

**Mark Meadows '84** has opened a new location of Chick-fil-A in Hoover, Alabama.

**Robert Clark '85** has been named pastor at Crestview Baptist Church in Prattville, Alabama.

**Evan Jenkins '87** has been named among "The 500 Most Influential People Shaping Policy" by *Washingtonian* magazine.

**Jennifer Nichols '88** has been named to Alabama Association of Justice Board.

## 1990s

**Robert Aderholt '90** has received the National Grocers Association Spirit of America Award.

**Beverly Grace Galvez '91** has published a book, *Carl COVID*.

**Nicole Williams '91** has been named a *Birmingham Business Journal's* 2024 Women to Watch honoree.

**Stephen Dillard '92** has been named as a founding advisory board member of The Legal Accountability Project, which works to ensure law clerks have positive clerkship experiences.

**Mark Brewer '94** has been selected as dean at the University of St Andrews Business School in Scotland.

**Robert Shaffeld III '95, '01** has joined Prevalon Energy's board of directors.

**Anita Allcorn '96** has been selected for Leadership Alabama's Class of 2024-25.

**Jimmy Holloway '96** has been selected for Leadership Alabama's Class of 2024-25.

**Paul Wells '96** has received the *Birmingham Business Journal's* 2024 C-Suite Award and was selected for Leadership Alabama's Class of 2024-25.

**Kary Wolfe '96, '99** has been named a *Birmingham Business Journal's* 2024 Women to Watch honoree.

**Gary Wright '96** has been selected as worship and discipleship pastor at First Baptist Church in Saks, Alabama.

**Christopher Gilreath '97** has joined Stranch, Jennings & Garvey as member and co-lead to the practice's personal injury group in Nashville, Tennessee.

**Mark Willard '97** has been named worship pastor at Whitesburg Baptist Church in Huntsville, Alabama.

**Kenneth Riley '99** has been named to the Alabama Association of Justice Board.

**Thomas Sinclair '99** has been named to the Alabama Association of Justice Board.

## 2000s

**Scott Brewer '00** has been named as District Judge, 29th Judicial Circuit, Place #1, in Talladega County by Alabama Governor Kay Ivey.

**Chadwick Eggleston '00** has been named vice president of instruction and student engagement at McLennan Community College in Waco, Texas.

**Amy Hampton '00** has been named managing counsel in Vanderbilt University Medical Center's Office of Legal Affairs in Nashville, Tennessee.

**Christopher Hanes '00** has been promoted to chief operating officer of Obsessed Garage, LLC in Lady Lake, Florida.

**Eric Williams '00** has been named executive vice president and chief financial officer for Sunnova Energy International, Inc. in Houston, Texas.

**Phil Goodwin '01** has been named chairman of Alabama Iron and Steel Council.

**Andria Cleghorn '02, '08** has been named a *Birmingham Business Journal's* 2024 Women to Watch honoree.

**Benjamin Ford '03** has been named to the Alabama Association of Justice Board.

**Robert Pacienza '03** has been appointed to the Florida Faith-Based and Community-Based Advisory Council.

**Brian Boyd '04** has been named to the Alabama Association of Justice Board.

**Rachel Lary '05** has been named to the Alabama Association of Justice Board.

**Brett Turnbull '05** has been named to the Alabama Association of Justice Board.

**Brian Cook '06** has been selected for Leadership Alabama's Class of 2024-25.

**Steven Hall '06** has been appointed executive director of the Citrus Research and Field Trial Foundation in Lake Alfred, Florida.

**Stephanie Houston Mays '07** has been named a *Birmingham Business Journal's* Emerging Influencers for 2024.

**Kristen Shuler '07** has been named president of East-West Ministries International.



**Whitney White '08** has been selected to the executive committee of American Society of Health-System Pharmacists' pharmacy practice sections.

**Matthew Penfield '09** has been named managing principal at Bressler, Amery & Ross in Birmingham, Alabama.

## 2010s

**Ashley Peinhardt '10** has been named to the Alabama Association of Justice Board.

**Staci Pierce '10** has been named a *Birmingham Business Journal's* Emerging Influencers for 2024.

**Joel Brock '11** has been appointed to the Pediatric Acute-Onset Neuropsychiatric Syndrome Advisory Council with the Texas Health and Human Services.

**Misty Emmons '11, '24** has been named dean of the School of Health, Science and Technology at Cornerstone University in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

**Sarah Beth Magette '11** has been named a *Birmingham Business Journal's* 2024 Women to Watch honoree.

**Emily Thomas '11** has been named the recipient of the 2024 South Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities Excellence in Teaching Award. She is an associate professor of mathematics at Charleston Southern University in Charleston, South Carolina.

**Isaac Cooper '12** has been named interim president and chief executive officer of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute in Birmingham, Alabama.

**Brian Nabors '13** has been appointed assistant professor of composition at Louisiana State University's College of Music and Dramatic Arts.

**Chuck Oliver '13** has been named pastor at Hepzibah Baptist Church in Talladega, Alabama.

**Matthew Massey '13, '17** has been selected for Leadership Alabama's Class of 2024-25.

**Cline Thompson '13** has been named vice president of sales for the Minor League Baseball team, Rocket City Trash Pandas, in Huntsville, Alabama.

**Megan Curry '16** has been named head softball coach at Wallace State Community College in Hanceville, Alabama.

**Austin Billings '17** has been appointed head coach of Western Colorado University's track and field program.

**Jeremy Brown '17** has been named pastor of Mignon Baptist Church in Sylacauga, Alabama.

**Mark Fereg '17** has joined Gunster in labor and employment law in West Palm Beach, Florida.

**Benjamin Studstill '17** has been promoted to senior manager of the health care division at Warren Averett in Birmingham, Alabama.

**Juliette Stanley '17, '18** has been named a summer associate for Van Ness Feldman.

**Celia Gannaway '18** has been named in *Birmingham Business Journal's* NextGen in Real Estate and Construction.

## 2020s

**Gray Gilmore '20** has been selected to participate in the 2024 Birmingham Bar Association's Future Leaders Forum.

**Nicole Jones '20** has been named by Governor DeSantis to the Florida Real Estate Appraisal Board.

**Graham Dvorak '21, '22** has been named a *Birmingham Business Journal* NextGen Money 2024 honoree.

**Amy England '21** has been named assistant principal at Hoover High School in Hoover, Alabama.

**Drew Fillinger '21** has been cast on the national tour of *Chicago*.

**Cassidy Goble '21** has been named a *Birmingham Business Journal* NextGen Money 2024 honoree.

**Bryan Johnson '21** has been appointed executive director of the Literacy Council of Central Alabama.

**David Matthews '22** has been named to the 2024 intern cohort for the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation.

**Francisco Pecci '22** has joined McDowell Knight in Mobile, Alabama.

**Chelsea Bayko '23** was named principal for Rocky Ridge Elementary School in Birmingham, Alabama.

**Michael Ross '23** was selected by the Minnesota Twins in the MLB draft.

**DeLee Benton '24** has been named director of Brierfield Ironworks Historical State Park in Brierfield, Alabama.

**Garrett Howe '24** has been selected by the Cleveland Guardians in the MLB draft.

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THOUGHTS ABOUT

# seasons

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about *Seasons* magazine.

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**What stories do you want to  
see in future issues?**

We want to hear your thoughts.

Scan the  
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# FUTURE BULLDOGS

**Leslie Cooper Marquez '04** and David Marquez welcomed their son, Joseph Henry. **1**

**Tara Kilcoyne Blockley '08** and Josh Blockley welcomed their daughter, Arden Elizabeth. **2**

**Amanda Pearson Lowery '09** and Bobby Lowery welcomed their son, Beau Denton. **3**

**Stephen Moss '10** and Audrey Moss welcomed their daughter, Ruthie Barbara. **4**

**Keighlee Buchanan '11** and Brent Buchanan welcomed their daughter, Maury Bird "Birdie". **5**

**Hillary Davis '11** and Nathan Davis welcomed their son, Neal Wade. **6**

**Kelly Miles Petrovics '12, '19** and Jarrod Petrovics welcomed their son, Patton Davis. **7**

**Meredith McCoy Patton '13, '15, '21** and **Bradley Patton '13, '17** welcomed their son, Henry Robert. **8**

**Michael Johnson '15** and Katherine Johnson welcomed their daughter, Kalina Rose. **9**

**Melody Martinez Nait Sidenas '15** and Sofiana Nait Sidenas welcomed their daughter, Adeline Belle. **10**

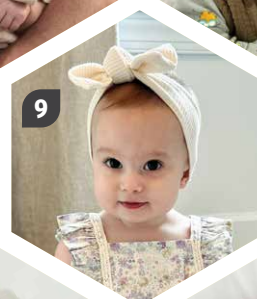
**Morgan Rogers Mudd '16** and Jacob Mudd welcomed their daughter, Anna Grace. **11**

**Natalie Frank Higgins '17** and **William Higgins '17** welcomed their son, Tucker Norris. **12**

**Tori Fiscus Welch '19** and **Peyton Welch '19** welcomed their daughter, Riley Rivers. **13**

**Maggie Folker '20** and Jacob Folker welcomed their daughter, Sybil Leigh Ann. **14**

**April Rudolph Rodgers '21** and Zachary Rodgers welcomed their daughter, Hattie Elizabeth. **15**





# IN MEMORIAM

**'43 Mary Louise Shirley Hodges**, age 102, of Birmingham, Alabama, died on June 2, 2024.

**'44 Evelyn "Bobbie" Parker**, age 100, of Montgomery, Alabama, died on June 23, 2024.

**'46 Nanette Wood Fields**, age 98, of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, died on July 30, 2024.

**'47 William Peebles Jr.**, age 96, of Birmingham, Alabama, died on June 6, 2024.

**'50 Charles Cleveland**, age 96, of Birmingham, Alabama, died on April 16, 2024.

**'50 Lena Wells Crouch**, age 92, of Birmingham, Alabama, died on May 17, 2024.

**'50 Mary Helen Johnson Peacock**, age 95, of Jacksonville, Florida, died on June 1, 2024.

**'51 Kenneth Traweek**, age 95, of Birmingham, Alabama, died on June 7, 2024.

**'53 Gerald Gillis**, age 90, of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, died on April 22, 2024.

**'54 J. Claude Bennett**, age 90, of Birmingham, Alabama, died on August 11, 2024.

**'54 Betty Messick**, age 90, of Atlanta, Georgia, died on June 13, 2024.

**'54 Jean Martin**, age 97, of North Richland Hills, Texas, died on June 25, 2024.

**'54 Minnie "Carolyn" Howell Patrenos**, age 90, of Livingston, Alabama, died on May 21, 2024.

**'55 B. Jackson "Jack" Harris**, age 91, of Pensacola, Florida, died on October 30, 2023.

**'56 Paul Blankenship Sr.**, age 90, of Odenville, Alabama, died on May 19, 2024.

**'56 Louie Grimes**, age 92, of Dothan, Alabama, died on May 14, 2024.

**'56 Jennice Karrh**, age 89, of Asheville, North Carolina, died on February 20, 2024.

**'57 William Benefield**, age 90, of San Antonio, Texas, died on July 16, 2024.

**'57 Louie Reynolds Jr.**, age 92, of Enterprise, Alabama, died on June 19, 2024.

**'58 Ila Wallace Bishop**, age 87, of Sugar Hill, Georgia, died on June 16, 2024.

**'58 Fred Brown Jr.**, age 88, of Linden, Alabama, died on June 30, 2024.

**'58 Julius David Davidson**, age 86, of Shoal Creek, Alabama, died on March 25, 2024.

**'58 Viola Beard Hayes**, age 88, of Knoxville, Tennessee, died on May 13, 2024.

**'58 Harold McDonald Sr.**, age 87, of Albemarle, North Carolina, died on May 25, 2024.

**'58 Nancy Smith Perdue**, age 88, of La Grange, Georgia, died on April 15, 2024.

**'58 William Earle Riley**, age 87, of Gardendale, Alabama, died on July 9, 2024.

**'59 Gwin Theron Wells**, age 95, of Sumiton, Alabama, died on August 9, 2024.

**'60 Roy Barnett Jr.**, age 87, of Marion, Alabama, died on April 26, 2024.

**'60 John Estess**, age 86, of Tupelo, Mississippi, died on April 3, 2024.

**'60 Eleanor Lee Estes McCarley**, age 85, of Carrollton, Georgia, died on July 27, 2024.

**'61 Kenneth Burns Sr.**, age 88, of Hueytown, Alabama, died on May 25, 2024.

**'61 Curtis Florence Sr.**, age 86, of Gardendale, Alabama, died on March 29, 2024.

**'61 Nelda Chadwick Schultz**, age 83, of Brentwood, Tennessee, died on May 1, 2024.

**'62 Clyne Buxton**, age 101, of Cleveland, Tennessee, died on August 14, 2024.

**'62 Fred Stearns**, age 84, of Opelika, Alabama, died on July 30, 2024.

**'63 Annella Junkins Flowers**, age 82, of Huntsville, Alabama, died on May 15, 2024.

**'63 Robert Landis Sr.**, age 93, of Sheffield, Alabama, died on May 26, 2024.

**'63 Anita Genevieve Cardwell "Genny" Turpin**, age 83, of Anniston, Alabama, died on July 25, 2024.

**'64 Don Lasseter Sr.**, age 82, of Memphis, Tennessee, died on May 22, 2024.

**'64 John Bonwell Royal**, age 83, of Douglas, Georgia, died on May 29, 2024.

**'64 Nancy Neighbors Womack**, age 81, of Alexander City, Alabama, died on May 12, 2024.

**'65 Hershel Adams**, age 81, of Niceville, Florida, died on August 9, 2024.

**'65 Thomas Donahoo**, age 84, of Jacksonville, Florida, died on May 22, 2024.

**'65 Mona Hurlbert Fisher**, age 79, of Vestavia Hills, Alabama, died on April 10, 2024.

**'65 Charles Kennedy**, age 80, of Greenville, Alabama, died on June 19, 2024.

**'65 Ann Harriet Franklin Marchino**, age 81, of Birmingham, Alabama, died on June 15, 2024.

**'66 Bruce Coshatt**, age 81, of Birmingham, Alabama, died on June 2, 2024.

**'66, '67 Thomas Hagood Jr.**, age 80, of Douglasville, Georgia, died on May 21, 2024.

**'66 Jerry Herring**, age 86, of Dothan, Alabama, died on July 30, 2024.

**'66 Betty Joyce Strickland Saunders Smith**, age 86, of Pelham, Alabama, died on August 7, 2024.

**'66 Samuel Windle Jr.**, age 82, of Columbus, Mississippi, died on March 26, 2024.

**'67 Larry Bolton**, age 78, of Scottsboro, Alabama, died on June 17, 2024.

**'67 William Broach**, age 89, of Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, died on June 20, 2024.

**'67 Robert "Bob" Campbell III**, age 81, of Mobile, Alabama, died on March 27, 2024.

**'67 Mitzi Lane Holladay**, age 79, of Tyler, Alabama, died on April 24, 2024.

**'67 Joseph Hopper**, age 79, of Verbena, Alabama, died on August 13, 2024.

**'67 Charles Robinson**, age 83, of Birmingham, Alabama, died on August 10, 2024.

**'68 Danny Fred Hankins**, age 78, of Gadsden, Alabama, died on August 14, 2024.

**'68 Sherry Johnson**, age 77, of Fernandina Beach, Florida, died on June 20, 2024.

**'69 Charles "Larry" Reddoch**, age 82, of Gulfport, Mississippi, died on July 3, 2024.

**'69 Amy Sue Moss Sims**, age 84, of Selma, Alabama, died on August 17, 2024.

**'69 Kenneth "Jerry" Vines**, age 81, of Trussville, Alabama, died on June 27, 2024.

**'70 Carl Chamblee Sr.**, age 91, of Warrior, Alabama, died on April 2, 2024.

**'70 Elliott King**, age 84, of Stringer, Mississippi, died on July 17, 2024.

**'70 James Moncus Jr.**, age 83, of Birmingham, Alabama, died on July 22, 2024.

**'71 Frances Hatcher "Honey" Fuller**, age 79, of Kinston, North Carolina, died on July 5, 2024.

**'71 Robert Robbins**, age 83, of Chattanooga, Tennessee, died on August 17, 2024.

**'72 Dan Newton Praytor**, age 77, of Irondale, Alabama, died on August 14, 2024.

**'72 Gene Sellers**, age 90, of Birmingham, Alabama, died on August 8, 2024.

**'73 Quentin Brown Jr.**, age 77, of Mountain Brook, Alabama, died on July 2, 2024.

**'73 Jerrel "Dan" Smalley**, age 75, of Arab, Alabama, died on May 13, 2024.

**'74 Danny Hayes**, age 73, of Thorsby, Alabama, died on June 2, 2024.

**'74 Charles McKnight**, age 79, of Theodore, Alabama, died on March 28, 2024.

**'74 Frederick "Fred" Murray Jr.**, age 85, of Mountain Brook, Alabama, died on May 16, 2024.

**'74 Edward Pietrowski**, age 78, of Scranton, Pennsylvania, died on July 9, 2024.

**'74, '06 Ellen Elizabeth Shirley Weems**, age 72, of Hoover, Alabama, died on August 5, 2024.

**'75 James Barrett Jr.**, age 73, of Highlands, North Carolina, died on June 7, 2024.

**'75 Annette Watson Garrison**, age 70, of Calera, Alabama, died on August 3, 2024.

**'75 Vernon Hancock White**, age 90, of St. Petersburg, Florida, died on May 30, 2024.

**'75 Lynn Williams**, age 74, of Mountain Brook, Alabama, died on June 22, 2024.

**'77 Mark Kennedy**, age 72, of Montgomery, Alabama, died on July 17, 2024.

**'77 Curtis Norris**, age 71, of Gulf Shores, Alabama, died on May 21, 2024.

**'78 Susan Vance "Susie" Sikes**, age 73, of Birmingham, Alabama, died on April 19, 2024.

**'79 Richard Craven**, age 71, of Fayetteville, North Carolina, died on June 10, 2024.

**'79 Williamson Hynson Jr.**, age 76, of Fort Payne, Alabama, died on April 1, 2024.

**'79 Sallie Peters**, age 76, of Birmingham, Alabama, died on July 3, 2024.

**'80 Muzaffar Iqbal Sheikh**, age 84, of Vestavia Hills, Alabama, died on May 17, 2024.

**'80 Sonya Violet Webb**, age 65, of Jasper, Alabama, died on April 8, 2024.

**'83, '87 Mary West Barlow**, age 63, of New Orleans, Louisiana, died on March 26, 2024.

**'83 Philip Daniels**, age 63, of Pell City, Alabama, died on May 22, 2024.

**'83, '88 Anna Elizabeth Williams**, age 64, of Mountain Brook, Alabama, died on May 30, 2024.

**'85 Phillip Bryan Dean**, age 65, of Athens, Alabama, died on July 17, 2024.

**'85 Charles Smith**, age 81, of Decatur, Alabama, died on May 10, 2024.

**'85 Ed Landers**, age 67, of Pell City, Alabama, died on September 9, 2024.

**'89 Rhonda Goff**, age 70, of Birmingham, Alabama, died on July 17, 2024.

**'89 Timothy "Cubby" Manzella**, age 66, of Hoover, Alabama, died on March 31, 2024.

**'91 Lance Metcalf**, age 54, of Westminster, Maryland, died on July 20, 2024.

**'97 Patricia Toney Speights**, age 79, of Roswell, Georgia, died on March 27, 2024.

**'98 Jane Sims Dainas**, age 70, of Ohatchee, Alabama, died on July 21, 2024.

**'00 Will Jones Jr.**, age 75, of Birmingham, Alabama, died on May 23, 2024.

**'01 Lesley Bradford Massey**, age 70, of Montgomery, Alabama, died on August 13, 2024.

**'04 Joshua Bearden**, age 41, of Anniston, Alabama, died on April 14, 2024.

**'08 Brittany Gray Burkhead**, age 38, of Birmingham, Alabama, died on May 14, 2024.

**'09 Curtis West Jr.**, age 37, of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, died on March 28, 2024.

**'10 Alton "Al" Campbell III**, age 59, of Colorado Springs, Colorado, died on May 3, 2024.

**'10 Brian Noble**, age 42, of Hoover, Alabama, died on May 28, 2024.

**'11 Christopher "Chris" Gunnels**, age 43, of Athens, Alabama, died on June 4, 2024.

**'17, '18 April Punko**, age 37, of Chesapeake, Virginia, died on April 22, 2024.

**'17 Roy Anthony "Tony" West**, age 62, of Florence, Mississippi, died on April 13, 2024.

**Ed Landers '85** served as the director of Samford's Media Center for 31 years, retiring in 2023. Throughout the decades,

he impacted the lives of thousands of students and colleagues who had the honor to work alongside him. His commitment to mentoring others left a transformational imprint on this world.





# The 1841 SOCIETY

*Leaving Your Legacy*

*by Joelle Youngblood*



**Founded in 1841**, Samford University has long benefited from the generosity of others. Formerly known as the DeVotie Society, the 1841 Society pays tribute to our rich history while recognizing alumni and friends who have completed a planned gift to Samford.

While the most common type of planned gift is a simple bequest made through a donor's will, a charitable gift annuity is another great way to make a planned gift. A charitable gift annuity allows donors to contribute to Samford while receiving a fixed rate regular income for one or two lives. In most cases, donors can take a charitable deduction on a significant portion of their gift. By establishing a charitable gift annuity, donors can designate their gift for a particular purpose and make a lasting impact on future generations of students while enjoying the financial security that comes with it.

Ron and Cindy Mims represent this spirit of giving with their recent \$1 million charitable gift annuity to Samford. Their motivation stems from a long-standing connection to the university, beginning with Cindy's visits during high school and Ron's academic and professional journey. Ron graduated in 1970 with a degree in pharmacy, and Cindy earned two degrees from Samford: her bachelor's degree in education in 1960 and a Master of Science in Education in 1976.

"Samford is a beacon for others to be successful, and that's the reason we're giving our funds—to help students come to Samford and be successful," Ron said.

The Mims understand the critical role of planned giving in ensuring the university's sustainability. Their financial journey began with modest contributions and steadily grew, illustrating how Samford's guidance has influenced their philanthropic choices. Their gifts have also served as tributes to their late son, further deepening the significance.

"Samford was founded in 1841 and has stood the test of time. Through the generosity of couples like Ron and Cindy, Samford will continue to endure," said Bo Kerr, assistant vice president for university advancement.

"We got here by wanting to encourage others to give," Cindy said. "If alumni want Samford to be here for the next generations, they need to give. Our biggest goal is to inspire others to join us in giving to Samford so others will experience the joy that we've found in our journey." ▸

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[samford.giftlegacy.com](https://samford.giftlegacy.com)





# STUDENT BIKES

## ACROSS THE COUNTRY



by Reagan Gage

Jesse Hungerpiller, a third-generation Samford student, spent his summer biking 4,300 miles from Seattle to Washington, D.C., as part of a fundraiser for people with disabilities.

He decided last January to join the bike trip with Journey to Hope, an organization his Pi Kappa Phi fraternity supports. A senior sports medicine major, Hungerpiller hadn't ridden bikes much since he was a kid. He began preparing for the trip on a stationary bike in February and logged 1,500 miles before switching to outdoor cycling.

A day after the 26-member group left Seattle on June 5, they traveled 130 miles through the Mount Rainier area. While it was the most difficult day of the two-month trek, Hungerpiller said it also was the most beautiful—seeing different subclimates while biking from the still-snowy mountain into the drier, arid regions.

The group always managed to sleep indoors, resting on air mattresses or sleeping bags on the floors of YMCAs, gymnasiums and churches, and waking up before sunrise each morning. The cross-country journey concluded in the

nation's capital on Aug. 10.

Hungerpiller said the most memorable aspect of the challenging trip was the people he spent time with and encountered along the way.

"Although the sights on the road were incredible, they will never surpass the connections and companionship I experienced, not only with the people we visited, but with my team as well," he said.

A Birmingham native, Hungerpiller spent time on Samford's campus for basketball camps and other activities while growing up. Although he stayed in his hometown for college, he said he still feels independent.

Another bonus of the close proximity to home means he can be present for family events like the 100th birthday party for his grandmother, Margaret Ann Miller Peterson '47, who was the first member of his family to attend Samford. ▀



# HARMONIOUS *Legacy*

*A transformative Steinway gift honors a lifetime of friendship between two Samford graduates.*

*by Anne Madison Adcock*

**Samford's School of the Arts received a transformative gift from Gary Cooney, a 1974 alumnus and longtime supporter of the university. Cooney's recent donation honors Malcolm Miller, a 1950 graduate of Howard College, and his late wife, Betty, two beloved figures in the Samford community known for their unwavering support of the university for the past 43 years.**

The story of this generous gift is rooted in a decades-long friendship and shared passion for Samford.

Fifty-one years ago, Miller hired Cooney for his first job at McGriff, Seibels & Williams Inc., sparking a connection that has lasted a lifetime. Shortly after Miller's retirement, he encouraged Cooney to network within the Samford community and use his

success to "pay it forward"—advice that has clearly resonated. Since then, Cooney has significantly impacted Samford's campus in many ways, including naming gifts for Brock School of Business' Cooney Hall and the Sullivan-Cooney Family Field House.

This time around, Cooney envisioned a unique gift to honor the Millers' legacy: a state-of-the-art Steinway

piano, personally selected from the company's New York headquarters. Lance Beaumont, dean of the School of the Arts, Joel Davis, chair of the Division of Music, and Cindy St. Clair, associate professor of piano, traveled to New York in October to choose the piano.

In discussing the unique gift, Cooney told Miller, "I see it as a way of touching a lot of people. That's what you've done for me in my life. This was an opportunity to put together something different and unique in the way of honoring you and Betty."

In response, Miller said, "It was an investment well made. The things that you do—that you don't have to do—will make you what you are when it's too late to do anything about it. That's what I see in you, and on Betty's behalf, I'm very thankful."

The Steinway features Spirio technology, delivering high-resolution playback of performances by world-renowned pianists.

This gift provides students with cutting-edge technology while exemplifying mentorship, friendship and the impact of giving back. The Steinway will inspire Samford students' musical journeys for years to come. ▮

Malcolm Miller and Gary Cooney



Scan the QR code to  
watch a conversation  
between Gary Cooney '74  
and Malcom Miller '50.



# Medieval Manuscript Donation Sparks Student Research

by Gunnar Sadowey

A collaborative research project led by Anthony Minnema, associate professor of history, and Emma Mikell, a senior English and classics double major, unveiled the mysteries of a medieval manuscript donated to Samford's Davis Library by the family of Carl Smallwood, a 1964 Howard College alumnus.

The manuscript, which arrived without any accompanying information regarding its content or origin, prompted an extensive analysis. The project began with a week-long orientation where Minnema introduced Mikell to paleography, the study of ancient scripts, and codicology, the study of manuscripts. Following the orientation, they spent the summer examining the manuscript and its historical significance.

"I was thrilled to hear about the donated manuscript page and jumped at the chance to teach these skills and provide a resource for Davis Library," said Minnema. "You usually have to travel to Europe and navigate large national libraries to get your hands on manuscripts, so it was a treat to do this work in Birmingham with a Samford student."

Mikell dedicated five weeks to the project, meeting regularly with Minnema to review her findings. A breakthrough occurred when Mikell backlit the manuscript, revealing a watermark that indicated its paper originated from Valencia, Spain, in the late 14th century. Further analysis of the handwriting, compared against catalogues of dated manuscripts, identified characteristics typical of early 15th-century Italian scripts.

She eventually identified the content of the manuscript as the work of Johannes Versoris, a master of theology at the University of Paris. This finding is particularly noteworthy, given that few manuscript copies of his work exist since he died in the 1480s before the advent of print technology.

Mikell will present her research at the upcoming Samford Student Undergraduate Research Colloquium in April 2025. She plans to continue her studies and aims to submit her findings to an undergraduate research journal or for her senior research seminar.

The manuscript's journey is not solely academic—it also holds personal significance for the donor's family. Smallwood's daughter, Jo Anne Pinnix, shared insights with Minnema and Mikell regarding her father's time at Samford.



Emma Mikell and Anthony Minnema

A Korean War veteran, Smallwood felt called to ministry at age 30, seeking guidance from professor Hul-Cee M. Acton, then-head of the romance languages department. Acton supported Smallwood's education and inspired him to embrace the "divine spark" in others, a lesson that profoundly impacted his ministry. ▮





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This year, Samford celebrated 60 years of Family Weekend with a dynamic schedule of events for a record number of students and their families to enjoy, including a concert on the Quad with fireworks.