

**Rare Chocolate**

Two alums are on a mission to preserve the world's rarest cacao and the rainforests where it grows. p. 22

**Cold Case Solved**

A chain of unlikely events and persistent U police work resolve a 50-year-old case. p. 14

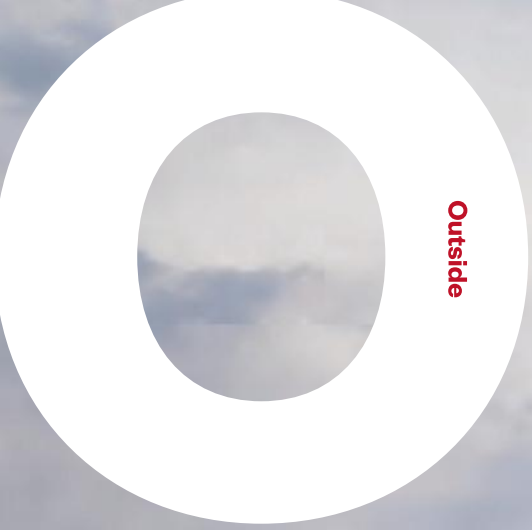
**Science Nucleus**

Peek inside the L. S. Skaggs Applied Science Building, a new hub for discovery. p. 16



**Hope Springs Eternal**

Need a pick-me-up? Read about 24 ways the U is making the world a brighter place. p. 28



Outside





## Cruisin' for a Cause

Swoop has a cherry new ride that's turning heads and shaping futures. Red Betty, a restored 1953 Chevy 3100 pickup, is the first officially branded vehicle in the U's new Red Metal Motors scholarship program. Here's how it works: The university customizes a classic vehicle to rep the U at parades, community events, campus celebrations—wherever Swoop lands for a visit. When it's time for a new model to take the spotlight, the vehicle is auctioned off to fund U student scholarships and future Red Metal Motors builds.

Utah-based Resurgence Automotive rebuilt Red Betty with a new body (painted Utah Red, of course) and a modern powertrain and other features. The truck is decked out with U details: U logos on the instrument panel and wheel covers, Swoop's signature on the dashboard, "Utah" on the tailgate, and wood flooring from the Huntsman Center lining the bed and running boards.

Red Betty's auction is slated for early 2027. Follow [@uofuredmetalmotors](#) on Instagram or visit [redmetalmotors.utah.edu](#) for auction info and upcoming Red Betty appearances.

PHOTO BY JEFF BAGLEY



### Web Extra

See photos of Red Betty's custom U details at [magazine.utah.edu/redbetty](#)

*For Matt and Yelena Caputo, the fine foods purveyors at Caputo's Market & Deli, craft chocolate is more than a commodity on their shelves—it's an expression of place and history. p. 22*



## WEB EXTRAS

More available at [magazine.utah.edu](http://magazine.utah.edu)



### What is it really like to work in Hollywood?

Does Tinseltown glitter as brightly as you'd think? U alumni in the entertainment industry gave us the inside scoop, from surprising aspects to characteristics that help creatives succeed. Read their insights at [magazine.utah.edu/hollywood](http://magazine.utah.edu/hollywood).

**Meet Red Betty**, the first custom vehicle in the U's Red Metal Motors scholarship program. The rebuilt 1953 Chevy pickup was Utah-fied inside and out with U logos, Swoop's signature, and other special touches. Visit [magazine.utah.edu/redbetty](http://magazine.utah.edu/redbetty) for a close-



up look at the details before it heads to auction to support U students.

### A pirate ship, an ice cream truck, and a medieval steed

were just some of the themes in the U's inaugural Soap Box Derby. U students and employees teamed up to design fast and fabulous carts for the downhill race from HPER to Library Plaza. See pics of the clever creations and glimpse the excitement of the day at [magazine.utah.edu/soapbox](http://magazine.utah.edu/soapbox).



## FEATURES

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### Keepers of Ancient Cacao

In the deep jungles of Central and South America, wild cacao hunters are discovering groves of trees first planted by ancient civilizations. Read about the two U alumni who have built an unlikely base camp for saving the world's rarest cacao and the rainforest ecosystems it depends on.

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### 24 Reasons to Be Hopeful

Studies show optimism is cratering, while despair and cynicism are on the rise. But humans have great capacity for resilience. We compiled 24 stories—one for each hour of the day—of how the U is changing lives around the world. Consider it an intervention for restoring your faith in what's possible.

34

### Bringing Douglas Home

In fall 1973, University of Utah student Douglas Brick walked out of his dorm and vanished. His case lay dormant for decades until a team of U police revived it, intent on finding answers. Follow the chain of unlikely events and persistent detective work that resolved the university's only missing-person cold case.

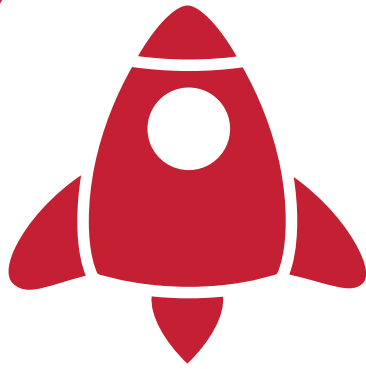


## ON THE COVER

**With a mission to improve lives** and impact society, the U cultivates optimism that a better world is possible. Illustrator Fortunate Joaquin depicts hope blooming eternal from the U campus.

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## Moving Toward Hope



As the new year begins, I'm reminded that hope is something we build through action. Across the University of Utah, I see that work happening every day—in the problems our researchers are tackling, the ways we're opening

doors for more students, and the ways our work is improving lives across our state. This issue focuses on that work—and the reasons it gives us to be hopeful, such as the inspiring efforts described in our cover feature (p. 28) and other stories.

The momentum is evident across campus. Engineers are designing materials that strip nearly all toxic “forever chemicals” from water. At Utah FORGE, researchers are demonstrating how geothermal energy can be developed beyond traditional volcanic hot spots—advancing the potential of a clean and reliable energy source.

We're applying that same forward-looking approach in other areas as well. We're modernizing the business operations that support Utah Athletics, responding to rapid changes in college sports while ensuring our academic mission and core priorities remain protected (p. 15). And

through Utah Promise, our new scholarship program, we're covering full tuition for eligible first-time students from Utah families whose household income and assets are each less than \$100,000 per year—a practical step toward making college attainable and strengthening the talent pipeline our state depends on (p. 8).

That commitment extends into our communities. In West Valley, the new University of Utah Eccles Health Campus and Eccles Hospital will respond directly to local needs—improving access to care and creating training pathways for students to build careers in their own neighborhoods. Our dental outreach programs continue to provide care to rural and refugee communities, and our students contribute thousands of volunteer hours to organizations across Utah.

All this work connects through Impact 2030, our plan to improve the life of every Utahn. By aligning our strengths in research, education, health care, and community partnership, we're translating knowledge into real-world impact. And you, our alumni and friends, are part of that effort—extending the university's impact through your work, leadership, and service well beyond campus. Together, this shared commitment reminds me why optimism is warranted—and why the future of this university, and our state, is something to believe in.

PRESIDENT TAYLOR RANDALL HBA'90



## A Living Museum

Last summer, *Utah Magazine* published what soon became one of our most beloved stories to date [“A Tree Grows on Campus,” Summer 2025]. Readers were particularly enchanted by the illustrations. Now, we’ve turned it into a single-page downloadable poster you can print for your office or keep on your desktop for a moment of inspiration. Find it at [magazine.utah.edu/treeposter](http://magazine.utah.edu/treeposter).

Thank you for this informative, beautifully illustrated article on trees. I’m heartened to know about these preservation efforts on campus and will definitely pay more attention when walking around now.

DEBERNIERE TORREY, SALT LAKE CITY

Thank you for a great article. I, too, love trees and love knowing the amazing trees found at the University of Utah.

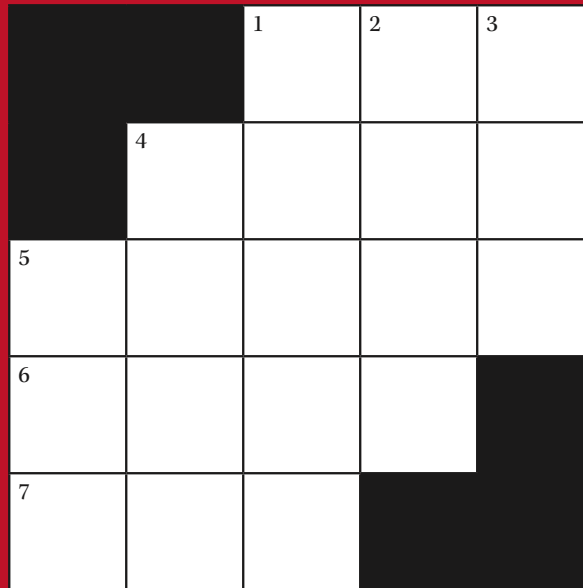
SUSAN CHILDRESS, SALT LAKE CITY

This was such a beautiful read. I love trees. This is the perfect tribute. Thank you!

BAILEE

## The Crimson Crossword

Welcome to the Crimson Crossword, our new mini puzzle series. Look for it in the Comments section of every issue.



### ACROSS

- How Utahns might order a side of fries and fry sauce: \_\_\_ carte
- Major category that includes BIO, CS, ME, MATH
- Red-feathered friend you’ll spot at the Huntsman Center
- Common Korean family name you’ll hear at the U’s Asia Campus (plural)
- Messages sent fast, for short

### DOWN

- Tiny units studied in Physics 101
- Some classmates born in early August, astrologically
- Sound booster you might see at RedFest
- Do the backstroke at Crimson Lagoon
- What students might do on a fresh powder day

For answers or to play online, go to [magazine.utah.edu/mini1](http://magazine.utah.edu/mini1)

## SOCIAL SPOTLIGHT

Even after the football season wrapped, our ears are still ringing. The MUSS brought the noise all fall, snagging back-to-back Big 12 Student Section of the Week honors—no surprise to anyone who saw the crowds when ESPN’s College GameDay and Fox’s Big Noon Kickoff rolled onto campus.



# UTAH'S WEEKLY POLITICAL ROUNDUP



THE  
**HINCKLEY  
REPORT**  
WITH  
JASON PERRY

In partnership with the Hinckley Institute of Politics at the University of Utah, The Hinckley Report provides insight and analysis into Utah politics, covering the most pressing political issues facing our state. Hosted by Jason Perry, director of the Hinckley Institute of Politics, each episode features Utah's top journalists, lawmakers, and policy experts.

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# News from the U



## New Utah Promise Scholarship

The U will soon cover tuition for eligible Utah students from families earning less than \$100K

Beginning in Fall 2026, the U will offer a new scholarship to qualifying students that will guarantee full coverage of tuition and mandatory fees for eligible first-time, first-year Utah residents whose family household income and assets are each less than \$100,000 per year, as defined by federal student aid guidelines. The new scholarship, called Utah Promise, is designed to expand access to the U for high school students across the state.

Utah Promise underscores the university's commitment to affordability and opportunity as part of its broader focus on student success. By ensuring that students from working- and middle-class families can attend without having to cover the burden of tuition costs, the program will help more Utahns pursue their degrees, graduate on time, and thrive in their careers.

"This is a transformative step for the University of Utah," says President Taylor Randall HBA'90. "No student should have to choose between pursuing a college education and their family's financial security. Utah Promise ensures that higher education is within reach for thousands of talented students across our state."

To qualify, students must complete a free application for admission by the Dec. 1 priority deadline, have an unweighted high school GPA of 3.5 or higher at the time of admission, and submit the FAFSA by Feb. 1. The program covers up to four years of full-time enrollment through scholarships and grants.

Recipients must maintain their eligibility each year by continuing to file the FAFSA and meet income and asset requirements. They also need to complete full-time course loads each semester while maintaining a minimum cumulative 3.5 GPA.

"Utahns deserve affordable, high-quality education that prepares them for their eventual careers," says Provost Mitzi Montoya. "Utah Promise is about investing in the people and future of our state. It gives more students the freedom to focus on learning, leadership, and discovery without the stress of overwhelming tuition bills."

The initiative uses both public and private donor funding and complements the For Utah scholarship, which already covers tuition and mandatory fees for Pell Grant-eligible students.

### NEWS ROUNDUP



The S.J. Quinney College of Law was named a "Best Value" law school by *The National Jurist* magazine. The publication gave Utah Law a grade of A- for its exceptional value and also included it on lists of the top law schools for criminal law and best law schools for public service. *The National Jurist* compiles rankings using a methodology that weighs bar exam passage, employment after law school, and tuition costs.



The U's David Eccles School of Business is still among the nation's best in entrepreneurship. *U.S. News & World Report*

just ranked its undergraduate entrepreneurship program No. 8 nationwide and No. 5 among public universities for 2026, recognizing the Lassonde Entrepreneur Institute's hands-on, startup-driven approach to turning ideas into impact.

The U just cracked the top 7 percent of the world's best universities. *U.S. News & World Report* ranked the school No. 141 among 2,250 global institutions—driven in part by medical research, particularly in cardiac systems, oncology, and surgery.



## Rare, but Not Ignored

In a glass vial in Salt Lake City, thousands of fruit flies hold secrets that could provide hope for two children in Seattle. The flies have been engineered to carry the same genetic mutation that causes Charlotte and Cooper Hawkins to suffer seizures and lose their ability to walk. Each tiny insect represents a potential clue toward future treatments that pharmaceutical companies will never develop—the market is simply too small.

Charlotte and Cooper have a disorder so rare that only around a dozen people worldwide share their diagnosis. When diseases affect fewer than 200,000 people, the economics of drug development collapse. Yet more than 7,000 rare diseases affect 10 percent of the U.S. population. The treatment gap leaves individuals with rare diseases with few places to turn. For Jill and Doug Hawkins, that search led to Clement Chow's lab at University of Utah Health, where he is associate professor of human genetics in the Spencer Fox Eccles School of Medicine.

"Nobody was working on our disorder, and it fell on our family to drive this research," Jill explains. She founded the FAM177A1 Research Fund with a practical question: "What if there's a drug sitting on a pharmacy shelf that might work for our diseases, and what's an efficient way to figure that out?"

Chow's approach, which began about seven years ago, bypasses traditional drug development by testing hundreds to thousands of FDA-approved medications on fruit-fly models tailored to each rare disease. Despite their differences, flies and humans share about 60 percent of genes known to cause disease, making them ideal for rapid screening. Where pharmaceutical companies might spend years and hundreds of millions of dollars developing new treatments, Chow's team can test thousands of existing drugs in weeks.

"Repurposing is the best hope for finding a drug in the immediate term for any of these disorders," Chow says. "For so many rare diseases, the answer is sitting out there, and we just don't know it."





## Cancer Care Closer to Home

For people with cancer who live in the vast Mountain West, care is often located far from home. Huntsman Cancer Institute at the University of Utah serves a 524,000-square-mile region spanning Utah, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, and Wyoming, 93 percent of which is considered rural or frontier.

“People who live in urban areas shouldn’t be the only benefactors of the advances in cancer care,” says Kathi Mooney PhD’85, Huntsman Cancer Institute researcher and Distinguished Professor of Nursing at the U. With decreased access to early-detection screenings and cutting-edge clinical trials, rural cancer patients are 10 percent more likely to die from the disease than their urban peers.

To close that gap, Mooney is leading a five-year project funded by the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health’s PARADIGM program. The project builds on the Huntsman at Home initiative, which provides urgent care to cancer patients in their homes, treating symptoms like dehydration or infection to help avoid hospital visits. A study led by Mooney showed Huntsman at Home participants had 48 percent fewer ER visits and were 58 percent less likely to be admitted for unplanned hospital stays.

Huntsman at Home has already expanded to Utah’s Grand, Emery, and Carbon counties. The new PARADIGM initiative will add a mobile medical unit equipped with diagnostic imaging like ultrasound, X-ray, EKG, and blood testing equipment, as well as two treatment chairs so some chemotherapy and immunotherapy infusions can

be given in the rural communities where patients live. The vehicle will also be used to offer select clinical trials to rural participants.

As part of the program, Mooney and her team—including co-principal investigator Theresa Werner, Huntsman Cancer Institute deputy director and professor of medicine in the Oncology Division at the Spencer Fox Eccles School of Medicine—will conduct a clinical effectiveness study to monitor care outcomes, patient satisfaction, and cost-effectiveness.

“If we are committed to reaching all patients with cancer in the areas we serve, we have to develop models of care that actually make it possible,” says Mooney. “Our commitment is to solve the access issues that distance from Huntsman Cancer Institute creates—and demonstrate how distributed cancer care can be sustainable and scalable across this five-state area.”



RED-CHEEKED CORDON-BLEU, PHOTO BY ÇAĞAN ŞEKERCİOĞLU

# Taking Flight

After more than 25 years, a U conservation biologist releases the ultimate bird dataset

Twenty-six years ago, grad student Çağan Şekercioğlu needed one simple statistic for his dissertation: How many bug-eating tropical birds are threatened with extinction? Turns out, no one knew. So, he decided to find out himself.

What seemed like a quick side project evolved into BIRDBASE—a staggering dataset covering 78 traits for all 11,589 recognized bird species worldwide. It's the first comprehensive encyclopedia of its kind.

“Thanks to my being naïve, something that started with just a little question in grad school led to the foundation of my career,” he says.

The dataset tracks everything from body mass and diet to nesting habits and migration patterns.

It's already powered 98 research papers and revealed some eye-opening patterns: 54 percent of all birds are insectivores, many facing habitat threats. Fish-eating seabirds are at high extinction risk. And in tropical forests, fruit-eating birds are the unsung heroes—dispersing seeds for over 90 percent of woody plants.

Now publicly available online, BIRDBASE will help researchers worldwide tackle some of the biggest questions in conservation biology. Şekercioğlu, now a professor in the School of Biological Sciences, estimates nearly 30 person-years of labor went into building it, with help from countless students and volunteers.

## PICTURE

**The Bopsim Korean Festival** drew more than 10,000 visitors to the A. Ray Olpin Union Building last fall, filling campus with K-pop, street food, taekwondo, and traditional games. The event showcased vibrant Korean culture and celebrated the U's growing connections with its U Asia Campus in Incheon, South Korea.



BY THE NUMBERS

The U is celebrating another record year for student growth. For the sixth consecutive year, the U has welcomed its largest incoming class—showing that more students than ever are choosing the U for its value, outcomes, and opportunities.

**6,513**


first-year students enrolled for Fall 2025


**1,497** 

new transfer students

  
**38,261**

total students enrolled—an all-time high for the university

 **50**  
U.S. states represented among new students

**37**   
average undergraduate class size

 **19:1**  
student-to-faculty ratio, the lowest among public institutions in Utah

  
**Lowest tuition**  
among all Association of American Universities (AAU) public institutions in the West

# One App to Rule Them All

The new Utah 360 app pulls everything U-related—tickets, class schedules, events, and more—into one sleek, customizable platform

Gone are the days of toggling between multiple apps just to update your U Alumni profile, grab football tickets, and catch up on campus news. The U launched Utah 360, a new mobile app consolidating everything from athletics to student services into one streamlined platform.

“Utah 360 makes it simpler for anyone interacting with the U to find the information they need,” says Chief Operating Officer Jeff Labrum BA’94 MBA’95. “We’ve reimaged our campus app to focus on user experience and ease, as well as functionality.”

The app replaces five previous platforms—Utah 360 (Athletics), Mobile U, One U, Utah Tickets, and the Alumni app. Users can customize their experience to follow what matters most, whether that’s game-day updates, @theU news, or academic calendars.

“Utah 360 is a cutting-edge, personalized app designed to enable every individual to engage seamlessly with the U, regardless of their role, and



to discover resources that really add value to their U experience,” says Sarah Williams MEd’08, senior product manager.

The launch aligns with broader efforts to meet students where they are—literally. From finding food on campus to checking in at events, the app centralizes daily essentials.

“Utah 360 involves so much of students’ day-to-day lives at the U. They eat here. They study here. They socialize here, and there are a lot of details that go into making their campus lives easier,” says Chief Experience Officer Andrea Thomas BS’88. “Putting information in usable, customizable ways will make their experience simpler and more seamless.”

PICTURE



The ASUU Rail Jam brought the slopes to campus last fall, turning the Student Union Lawn into a winter wonderland where students competed alongside pros on rails and boxes. DJ beats, big tricks, and Woodward Park City’s expert course design made for an electric night—and a portion of the proceeds benefited Huntsman Mental Health Institute.

## Soapbox Showdown

Ingenuity, creativity, and campus pride were on full display as the U held its first-ever Soapbox Derby this past fall. Teams of students, faculty, and staff raced homemade carts—decorated in themes ranging from pirate ships to superheroes—down a winding course that started near the Spencer Fox Eccles Business Building and finished at Library Plaza. The track, designed with help from the College of Engineering, featured ramps and turns to keep things exciting (and ensure every cart had enough speed to make it through). After weeks of late-night building and last-minute fixes, the big day brought cheers, near misses, and plenty of photo finishes.

Organized by the Office of Student Experience, the event is set to roll on as a new Homecoming tradition—one that's sure to get bigger (and faster) each year.



**Web Extra** Check out more pics from the big day at [magazine.utah.edu/soapbox](http://magazine.utah.edu/soapbox)

## HOMETOWN

Vejle, Denmark

## YEAR IN SCHOOL

Junior

## MAJOR

Finance

## U CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- ITA Regional Finals Runner Up
- 2025 Big 12 All-Conference Second Team
- Most team wins in 2024-25 (12 singles, 8 doubles)
- First women's tennis player at Utah to go to the NCAA Singles Championships since 2011

## PROUDEST ACHIEVEMENT

Representing Denmark in the Billie Jean King Cup

## FAVORITE SLC GRUB

Spitz

## MOST-MISSED FOOD

Danish bread

## OFF-COURT HOBBY

Running and hiking



## Smashing Expectations

By the time she'd finished juniors, Emma Kamper ranked among the top five tennis players in her native Denmark and the top 500 globally. Now she's serving up wins on U.S. college courts. Utah Tennis discovered Kamper after receiving a YouTube highlight reel that she had sent to several coaches. "I came to campus for a visit, and everything just felt right," she says. Now in her third year at Utah, Kamper has hit her stride. This past fall, she entered the International Tennis Association Mountain Regional Championships as the No. 1 seed and won her first five matches—a performance that punched her ticket to the NCAA Individual Championships. She credits her success to her mental game. "I just feel like I have this calmness inside," she says. "I know what I'm capable of."



# A Bold New Play

U leads out with new athletics funding model

As college athletics undergoes sweeping change, the University of Utah is stepping forward with a new approach designed to strengthen Utah Athletics long-term while protecting the university's core missions of education, research, and patient care.

In December, the university's Board of Trustees authorized the University Foundation to create Utah Brand Initiatives, a new for-profit company that will manage select revenue-generating activities within Utah Athletics, including ticketing, licensing, and sponsorships. The company will benefit from expertise and investment from Otro Capital, a firm with operating experience in sports, media, and entertainment.

University leaders say the new model addresses a growing financial reality in college sports. Athletics expenses are rising rapidly—driven by conference realignment, the transfer portal, expanding name-image-likeness opportunities, and the House v. NCAA settlement—while universities face mounting pressure to hold down tuition and student fees and absorb broader financial headwinds.

At the December board meeting, leaders emphasized that traditional options—raising student fees, cutting academic programs, or eliminating sports—were not viable. “We have to maintain our vision of

the university—a place that inspires students, accelerates discovery, and serves communities,” said U President Taylor Randall HBA'90. “We also recognize that we have to preserve our elite athletic tradition. This brings an exciting solution and new future to Utah Athletics.”

The new structure is intended to modernize how certain revenue-generating business functions of athletics are managed, while keeping competitive, academic, student-athlete, and coaching decisions firmly within the Athletics Department. University leaders have emphasized that the arrangement does not involve selling any part of Utah Athletics or ceding control of programs, facilities, or operations, but instead separates commercial activities from the core responsibilities of running a collegiate athletics program.

For Athletics Director Mark Harlan, the new structure also brings an opportunity to enhance the fan experience. “Hospitality and how we treat our fans are among the most critical things we do,” Harlan told trustees. The new company, he said, will be “laser-focused on improving how we serve our fans.”

Utah Brand Initiatives will report annually to the foundation and the Board of Trustees.

## SPORTS BRIEFS



**Utah Athletics tied its highest graduation success rate (GSR)** in department history for the second year in a row, reaching 95 percent in NCAA's annual GSR report. That figure ties for the third-highest rate among all power conference public institutions. This is Utah's eighth consecutive year at 93 percent or higher and third time at 95 percent. The report measures the percentage of student-athletes who earned their undergraduate degrees within six years of enrolling.



**Utah Volleyball** capped the year with a first-round appearance in the NCAA Tournament for the 20th time in program history, after a 15-14 regular season that included Big 12 wins over No. 13 Kansas and No. 23 BYU. Junior outside hitter Kamryn Gibadlo and senior middle blocker Emrie Moea'i earned All-Big 12 honors for their contributions throughout the year. The season marked the end of an era as Beth Launiere, the program's winningest head coach, announced her retirement after 36 years. Launiere led the Utes to 689 victories, six conference titles, 20 NCAA Tournament berths, four Sweet Sixteens, and multiple awards across the Pac-12, AVCA West Region, and Mountain West Conference.

**Utah Golf** star Gabriel Palacios landed on the 2025-26 Haskins Award final fall watch list, a selection of 25 top NCAA Division I male golfers. Palacios also earned a spot on Team International in the 2025 Arnold Palmer Cup, the first Ute to be selected for the prestigious event.



**The Utah cross country team** finished 17th overall at the NCAA Cross Country Championships. Erin Vringer led Utah with a time of 19:38.2 for 59th place. Anastasia Peters was the next-best finisher for the Utes, crossing at 19:54.3 for 88th place. Both Vringer and Peters finished the 6000m course under 20 minutes, which marked just the fifth and sixth times a Ute has run a sub-20 at the championships.



## Where the Ideas of Utah's Future Scientists Take Flight

Science just got a serious upgrade at the University of Utah. The new L. S. Skaggs Applied Science Building—a sleek, 100,000-square-foot hub that opened last July—is where students dig into everything from air quality to drought modeling and semiconductor innovation.

The building anchors the \$97 million Applied Science Project, joining the restored William Stewart Building and Crocker Science Center to form the Crocker Science Complex—275,000 square feet of discovery housing the departments of Physics & Astronomy and Atmospheric Sciences and the Wilkes Center for Climate Science & Policy.

With this expansion, physics labs grew by 56 percent, and 37 STEM degree programs now share the space. On the rooftops, telescopes open the sky to weekly public stargazing while sensors measure the air Utahns breathe.

“This building is going to ripple through the lives of tens of thousands of students each year,” said Gary Crocker (honorary doctorate 2019) at the ribbon-cutting ceremony. The U now educates more than half of Utah’s STEM undergraduates and three-quarters of its graduate students across the state’s public universities.

The project was funded by a \$67.5 million state appropriation, a \$10 million gift from The ALSAM Foundation—founded by honorary doctorate recipients L. S. Skaggs (1970) and Aline W. Skaggs (1990)—and \$8.5 million from Gary and Ann Crocker BS’74. The Crocker gift was part of \$19.7 million the couple donated toward the broader Crocker Science Complex, which is named in their honor.





## Ring Leader

U chemists discover an enzyme that paves the way for stronger, longer-lasting GLP-1 drugs used to treat diabetes and obesity

A newly discovered enzyme could help create better versions of popular weight-loss and diabetes drugs like Ozempic and Wegovy, according to U chemistry researchers.

The enzyme, called PapB, ties drug molecules into tight rings—like tying a string of beads into a bracelet. When drugs are shaped into rings, they last longer in the body and work more effectively.

These medications are built from peptides, which are chains of amino acids that act like small proteins. However, the human body breaks down peptides quickly, sometimes within minutes.

“What we show in the study is an enzymatic method—using a tiny molecular machine to modify or hyper-modify peptides in extremely controlled ways,” says Karsten Eastman PhD’23, a U research associate in chemistry.

Right now, turning peptides into rings is expensive and complicated. PapB offers a simpler way to do it.

The team tested PapB on three different peptide-based drugs similar to Ozempic. In each case, the enzyme successfully tied the molecule into a ring.

The result? Drugs that stick around longer. By protecting peptides from the body’s natural recycling system, PapB could extend a drug’s effects from minutes to hours or more—making medications more effective and potentially requiring fewer doses.

## Between Spirit and Matter

Sanctification. Alchemy. Magic. Beth Krensky uses words like these to describe her artistic practice, which fuses the earthly and the ethereal. A globally recognized artist and Distinguished Professor of art and art history at the U, Krensky transforms natural and manmade objects into sacred pieces used in performances that “traverse the borderlands between spirit and matter.”

Krensky has always been drawn to forgotten things. “Even at age four, I was sneakily picking up little objects from the street or gutters and building tiny sculptures with them,” she recalls. “I’m interested in things infused with memory and that have some component of the spiritual.”

A piece now touring Australia in an international textile art biennial captures this concept. *Robe of Remembrance and Return* weaves together linen from Krensky’s art school days, velvet from a skirt worn to her first major exhibition in Chile, and shells gathered with her son. When the exhibit ends, Krensky will wear the robe into the Tasman Sea—echoing her recurring dreams of gliding over the ocean like a pelican.

At her recent solo show at Material Gallery in Salt Lake, Krensky filled an entire room with years of treasures gathered across the globe. An artfully arranged collection, the *Store of Wishes* displayed Tibetan singing bowls, Latin American milagros, and other artifacts alongside her own creations, such as *Wish*, a series of wands forged from driftwood and detritus. The “store” invited curiosity, wonder, exploration—common threads in her art practice and teaching philosophy.

“The arts provide a free space where there are no rules,” says Krensky, area head of art education at the U and 2022 Utah Higher Education Art Educator of the Year. “I explore how to create those spaces for others so that they can imagine and create for themselves.”



# Golden Broccoli Lights Up Cells

U biochemists create a glowing sensor that tracks glycine—a simple amino acid with complex roles—inside living cells in real time

Scientists have long struggled with a frustrating limitation when trying to measure what's happening inside a cell: they had to destroy it first. U Professor of Chemistry Ming Chen Hammond and her team may have solved that problem with the help of a glowing molecule they call Golden Broccoli.

The researchers track glycine—a simple molecule with outsized roles in memory, reflexes, and brain development—using a glowing sensor. When the sensor finds glycine inside a cell, it lights up in two colors. Yellow light shows how much of the sensor is in each cell, while red light reveals glycine levels—together allowing researchers to take precise measurements while cells remain intact and alive.

The tool could deepen our understanding of how the brain works. The team plans to use the sensor to study astrocytes. Scientists suspect

that these cells supply chemical signals to neurons, but they've never been able to watch it happen. Golden Broccoli may finally let scientists watch in real time as astrocytes release glycine and influence brain signaling.

"Any questions we have about how the amount of glycine in the cell changes during different cellular processes, or where glycine is located in the cell at different times, can now be answered," says Madeline Bodin, a doctoral student in Hammond's lab that led the study.

The quirky name comes from a scientific tradition of naming glowing RNA sensors after produce—spinach, broccoli, corn, mango—based on the colors they emit. Golden Broccoli is a tweaked version of the original Broccoli RNA, engineered to glow yellow instead of green. The name simply reflects scientists having a bit of fun with tradition.

## Unlocking Hibernation's Hidden Code

What if humans could borrow some superpowers from hibernating animals? New research from the U suggests that the genetic keys to surviving months without food, reversing neurodegeneration, and bouncing back from conditions similar to diabetes and stroke may already exist in our DNA.

Two studies published in *Science* reveal that a gene cluster called the "fat mass and obesity" (FTO) locus plays a crucial role in hibernators' remarkable abilities. Turns out humans have these genes too. "What's striking about this region is that it is the strongest genetic risk factor for human obesity," says Chris Gregg, a Benning Presidential Endowed Chair and professor in neurobiology, anatomy, and human genetics at University of Utah Health, and senior author on the studies.

The research team found that specific DNA regions near the FTO locus act like orchestra conductors, adjusting the activity of hundreds of genes simultaneously. Researchers speculate that hibernators use these regions to fine-tune metabolism—packing on pounds before winter, then slowly burning fat reserves during hibernation.

When researchers mutated these hibernator-specific regions in mice, they observed changes in weight, metabolism, and body temperature regulation. The findings suggest that humans might already possess the genetic framework for hibernator-like resilience. "We just need to identify the control switches for these hibernator traits," says Susan Steinwand, research scientist in neurobiology and anatomy at U of U Health in the Spencer Fox Eccles School of Medicine and first author on one study.

Understanding these mechanisms could lead to treatments for metabolic disorders, neurodegeneration, and age-related diseases—essentially awakening superpowers hidden within human DNA.





# Computing Power Play

A \$50 million AI supercomputer will give the U some of the most powerful academic research infrastructure in the nation

## The U to Offer Two New Minors in AI

Starting Fall 2026, U students will have two new ways to build Artificial Intelligence expertise: a Business AI minor from the David Eccles School of Business that's open to undergraduates in any major, and a new AI minor from the Kahlert School of Computing designed to complement engineering and other technical fields.

The 16-credit Business AI minor requires only minimal coding experience, and it focuses on practical applications, including machine learning, chatbot development, and predictive analytics. Students will build real solutions using tools like Python and Tableau.

"Eccles students will be AI-fluent and fundamentals-strong. Our new Business AI minor will be a step beyond, giving them the knowledge and skills to use AI strategically and responsibly. This addition to our curriculum ensures our graduates are not just prepared to enter the workforce, but ready to drive innovation and create lasting value for their organizations and communities," says Eccles School Dean Kurt Dirks. "Artificial intelligence is transforming every corner of business, and employers are clear that they need graduates who can apply it effectively."

The Kahlert School has been teaching AI courses since the 1970s, and the new minor is designed to build on that tradition. It complements undergraduate degrees in fields that work with data, language, design, computation, or cyber-physical systems, serving as a bridge to disciplines such as engineering, mathematics, computational linguistics, games, and the sciences.

"This minor gives students the technical depth to understand how AI systems actually work—not just how to use them," says Mary Hall, director of the Kahlert School of Computing. "That foundation prepares them to drive innovation across science, engineering, medicine, and beyond."

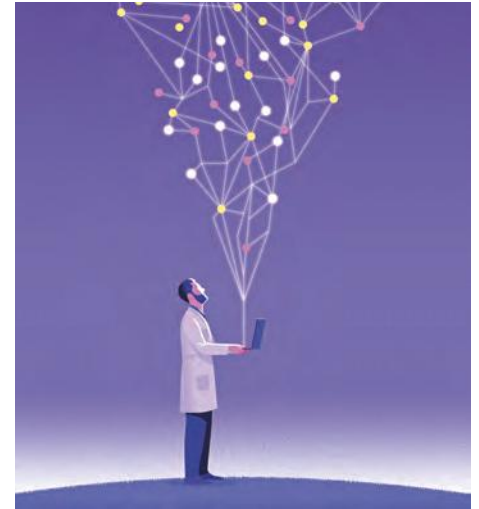
The U is building a \$50 million AI supercomputer to accelerate breakthroughs in cancer, mental health, Alzheimer's, and other research. The university will partner with NVIDIA and Hewlett Packard Enterprise to increase computing capacity 3.5-fold—joining only Oregon State and the University of Florida with comparable AI infrastructure nationwide.

The payoff could be significant. AI can process massive datasets far faster than traditional methods, potentially shortening the timeline for identifying promising treatments and getting them to patients.

The Huntsman Family Foundation along with Brynn and Peter Huntsman are providing a lead philanthropic gift to launch the project. David Huntsman, president of the Huntsman Family Foundation, says that investing in AI is consistent with his family's history of philanthropy and would "carry on the legacy of supporting innovative solutions that help relieve human suffering."

"This AI initiative will accelerate world-class cancer research that enhances capabilities in ways we hardly imagined just a few years ago," says Peter Huntsman, Huntsman Cancer Foundation CEO and chairman.

Mental health research will also see major investment. Christena Huntsman Durham, Huntsman Mental Health Foundation CEO, noted that as the institute opens its new state-of-the-art 185,000-square-foot Translational Research Build-



ing, the technology will help "move even faster to get help to those who need it most."

The infrastructure will be available to researchers, students, and entrepreneurs across Utah's higher education system through two facilities—one in Salt Lake City and another elsewhere in the state. The university plans to seek remaining funds from the State of Utah and other sources.

"Our goal is to make the state awash in computing power," says U President Taylor Randall HBA'90, "driving research to find new cures and igniting Utah's entrepreneurial spirit."



## PICTURE

The U closed out its yearlong 175th anniversary celebration with a campus bash last fall, packing the Union with live music, dancing, games, caricature artists, and desserts galore. The night was capped off with a drone and light show that lit up the skyline.



**GET TO KNOW  
THE KEN GARFF UNIVERSITY CLUB.**

**OPEN HOUSE: MARCH 30, 6-8:00 P.M.**



The Ken Garff University Club is way more than just a pre-game destination. A private club with member-exclusive events, incredible dining, space for remote work and study, and even hosting your private events, we truly are where you and your family want to be.



**KEN GARFF  
UNIVERSITY CLUB**  
AT RICE-ECCLES STADIUM



Yelena Caputo

CELEBRATE AND PERFECT  
WILD CHOCOLATE  
WILD CHOCOLATE  
WILD CHOCOLATE  
WILD CHOCOLATE

WILD CHOCOLATE  
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# KEEPERS OF ANCIENT

WRITTEN BY  
LISA  
ANDERSON

PHOTOS BY  
DAVE  
TITENSOR

# CACAO

FROM THEIR SALT LAKE DELI, TWO U ALUMS HAVE  
BUILT AN UNLIKELY BASE CAMP FOR SAVING  
THE WORLD'S RAREST CACAO IN THE RAINFORESTS  
WHERE CHOCOLATE BEGAN.

# IN THE DEEP RAINFORESTS

of Central and South America, traversable only by river and inhabited only by wildlife, ancient secrets lie in wait. Cacao trees, their ripe golden pods gleaming like treasure, hint at the bygone civilizations that considered this food a divine gift.

In 2016, a legendary strain of cacao long thought to have disappeared was identified in Belize's Maya Mountains. Anthropologists say the Mayans reserved this most valuable variety for royalty and sacred ceremonies. Today, thanks to a band of passionate chocolate trailblazers—including two U alums—you can experience the same delicacy consumed by past Mesoamerican civilizations.

"When you taste it, you understand why it was so revered," says Matt Caputo BS'04. He and his wife and business partner, Yelena Caputo BA'03 HBS'03 JD'06, are among the key players bringing these edible artifacts to life. Together, they're on a mission to protect wild cacao and the disappearing rainforests where it still thrives.

## THE ART AND CRAFT OF CHOCOLATE

Mention Caputo's Market and Deli to any Salt Laker, and you'll likely hear about a favorite sandwich. Locals know Matt and Yelena as owners of the beloved establishment founded by Tony Caputo, Matt's late father. Some may have taken Matt's chocolate tasting classes at U of U Lifelong Learning or the Natural History Museum of Utah's 2014 chocolate exhibit. Fewer people may know Matt and Yelena run the world's largest distributor of artisan chocolate, A Priori, and have become what journalist Rowan Jacobsen calls "the ultimate champions of wild chocolate" in his book and podcast on the subject.

It's a reputation they'd never have foreseen as students at the U. Motivated by an interest in international relations, Yelena earned her Juris Doctor from the S.J. Quinney College of Law after completing degrees in political science and Russian. Matt loved working at Caputo's but didn't necessarily envision a career there until a class in the David Eccles School of Business ignited a passion. He graduated in marketing and used his newfound expertise to grow the family business.

A self-professed "cheese geek" and gourmet, Matt took it as a challenge when a food writer friend rated Caputo's chocolate section as sub-par. His curiosity led to a deep dive into chocolate's craft and history, especially its mystical role in ancient Mesoamerican cultures. But it was a blind taste test of different cacao varieties that truly opened his eyes.

"The cacao bean offered a much more immediate and clear exploration of terroir than wine," he says. "I could feel myself tumbling down the rabbit hole at that moment."

Craft chocolate, made by master chocolatiers who spotlight the unique flavors of premium beans, fits right in among Caputo's shelves of artisan olive oils, vinegars, and other comestibles. "There are food lovers. Then there are food nerds," proclaims the Caputo's website. A deeper mission drives the business: to fight

against a food system dominated by industrialized production and monoculture farming.

"We're worried that some of the world's foods and culinary traditions could disappear forever," says Yelena, who left her career as deputy district attorney in 2013 to help run Caputo's and expand A Priori into a leading specialty foods importer and distributor.

Most grocery-store chocolate across the country comes from the same strain of cacao, bred for yield over flavor. The beans require deep roasting and added ingredients, explains Matt. The result tastes dark, toasty, and like vanilla—but not like cacao. "I view it as a confection," he says. Craft chocolate, on the other hand, "is a taste of place and an expression of history."

## FIGHTING FOR WILD CHOCOLATE

Craft chocolate was just the beginning. The Caputos began hearing tales of explorers searching Central and South American jungles for wild-growing cacao. "These intrepid Indiana Jones types were finding previously uncharted, untasted varieties," Matt says.

Among those explorers is award-winning Brazilian chocolate maker Luisa Abram, who created what became the Caputos' favorite bar, made with wild cacao growing along South America's Juruá River. Abram sources only wild cacao, drifting through Amazonian waterways in search of undiscovered strains. Her first encounter with Juruá was "mesmerizing," she says, evoking florals, honeycomb, and lychee.

Every bar made from wild cacao is a minor miracle. One growing season might bring floods, another drought. Landowners might decide to raze cacao-laden rainforest for cattle ranching. And the deep jungle's lack of infrastructure threatens delicate processes like fermentation. It's a costly labor of love. In 2020, floods and the pandemic hit Abram hard, forcing her to consider discontinuing her beloved Juruá bar.

But the Caputos couldn't let it end there. It wasn't just their favorite chocolate. It represented biodiversity, sustainable sourcing, traditional artisanship—everything their newly established Caputo's Preservation Program aimed to protect. They offered to prepay, at top dollar, for the next harvest—well before they would see any financial return.

"I must have read that email three or four times in a row, like, 'Am I understanding it right?'" says Abram.

The gamble paid off. The resulting Wild Juruá bar, made by Abram and branded under the Caputo's name, was a hit. Production has continued, and now cacao

harvesting is an integral part of the local economy.

The success of Wild Juruá spurred the Caputos to expand. They reached out to Volker Lehmann, a wild chocolate pioneer credited with creating the first such bar. On his Tranquilidad estate in Bolivia, trees thrive in wetlands on raised islands reportedly built for cacao cultivation centuries ago. Lehmann's beans earned the



Luisa Abram (left) talks with harvesters on a cacao expedition in the Upper Amazon Basin.

first heirloom designation from the Heirloom Cacao Preservation Fund (HCP), which works to identify and protect exceptional strains from economic and environmental threats. Caputo's funded the genetic testing through their annual chocolate festival, which has raised more than \$50,000 for HCP.

When Matt and Yelena proposed a partnership to help maintain Tranquilidad, Lehmann agreed immediately. Utah chocolate maker Ritual pays him well above fair trade for his beans, and Caputo's gives \$1 per bar back to the estate. Matt calls the Caputo's Wild Tranquilidad bar—with notes of citrus and spice—"one of the best-tasting dark chocolate bars of all time."

## THE FOOD OF THE GODS

The Belize Foundation for Research and Environmental Education (BFREE) occupies a section of old-growth rainforest untouched since the days of the Mayans. This biodiversity wonderland shelters endangered wildlife such as the harpy eagle—the largest predatory bird in the Americas, with talons larger than grizzly claws—and thousands of plant species, including wild cacao.

"I saw this shade-loving species and thought it had social, environmental, and economic potential that could be transformative when it comes to agriculture," says BFREE founder Jacob Marlin.

Curious, he sent the beans to HCP for genetic testing—and the results electrified the chocolate world. The beans were 100 percent pure Criollo, prized by Mayan royalty for its delicate flavor, low bitterness, and creamy texture. Long thought extinct, it had been hiding in plain sight.

For Matt and Yelena, the discovery embodied the mythology and romanticism that drew them to craft chocolate. To help bring it to life would be a dream. With conservation his first priority, Marlin agreed to share the beans if a portion of sales supported BFREE. The Caputos readily agreed, pricing the bar at \$65 and pledging a share of proceeds. Then, a few weeks later, came a surprise.

"Matt and Yelena called me and said, 'We care so much about BFREE's mission that we'd like to give 100 percent of the revenue back to you,'" says Marlin. All sales—not just profits—would go to BFREE. "I was humbled. This just speaks to their spirit of lifting others and creating positive change by supporting organizations they believe in."

To make the bar, they enlisted master chocolate maker Domantas Užpalis of Chocolate Naive in Lithuania. Užpalis calls Criollo "one of the best cacaos, if not the best cacao, we've ever worked with. It's fruity, nutty, creamy, delicious, soft, indulgent—on par with the food of the gods."

The first Caputo's Wild Criollo bar sold out in five weeks. More shipments followed, and BFREE has received over \$16,000 in donations to date.

*The Caputo's wild chocolate line includes Wild Criollo, Wild Juruá, and Wild Tranquilidad.*




## SMALL MIRACLES

Matt and Yelena are the first to point out that their wild chocolate line relies on partnerships. The names on the packaging tell the story: Luisa Abram, the Novo Horizonte community that harvests Juruá, Volker Lehmann with Tranquilidad, Ritual Chocolate, BFREE, and Chocolate Naive.

"We're blessed to work with equally passionate people who get it," says Yelena.

They know these efforts are fragile—built on relationships, persistence, and a stability that can shift overnight. One deal with a developer, for instance, could mean the disappearance of an undiscovered gastronomic treasure. "And we would never know," Yelena says. "I can only imagine the scale at which that has happened throughout modern history. So when we find these miracles, and we have the capacity to help save them, sign us up immediately." **U**

*Lisa Anderson BA'02 is associate editor of Utah Magazine.*

A photograph of a stadium interior, likely during a game or event. The foreground is filled with rows of red plastic seats. In the middle ground, there is a large, multi-tiered structure, possibly a scoreboard or a set of bleachers, with a red horizontal beam across it. The background shows a large, open sky with scattered white and yellowish clouds, suggesting a bright but slightly overcast day. The overall perspective is from a low angle, looking up towards the sky.

The official care partner  
for getting back in the game.



**HEALTH**  
UNIVERSITY OF UTAH



# 24

**Optimism is cratering, but human capacity for resilience isn't. These stories will restore your faith in what's possible.**

## Reasons to Be Hopeful



**By Seth Bracken**

**Illustrations by Fortunate Joaquin**

**EVERY ACT OF PROGRESS** begins with hope. Science is showing that hope is more than a feeling—it's a cognitive process that allows us to envision a better world and believe that we can achieve it.

Unfortunately, hope is tanking. A 2025 Pew Research Center survey found that only 33 percent of Americans are optimistic about the future—down from 56 percent in 2018. Yet even as we lose faith in the future, research keeps showing we're stronger than we think. Despite 70 percent of people experiencing serious trauma, only 5 percent develop PTSD, according to a recent World Health Organization study. We're in a hope crisis while walking around with a massive, largely untapped capacity for bouncing back.

So how do we activate it deliberately? Researchers are now tracking not just how resilience works, but what triggers it.

"It takes surprisingly little to induce enough positive emotion in someone to improve their creativity and problem-solving,"

says Lisa Aspinwall, a U professor of psychology who studies how optimism shapes our response to health risks. "It could be something as small as an unexpected gift or a walk in nature with a loved one that gives you just enough of a mood boost to tackle whatever's in front of you."

Resilience isn't fixed, and our brains are unexpectedly malleable. Some interventions—including cognitive reframing, mindfulness practice, and social connection—can produce measurable improvements within weeks. Brain scans show structural changes after just eight weeks of consistent practice.

Some research shows that the most effective approach combines simple daily habits like five minutes of mindful breathing, writing down three specific things you're grateful for, or practicing disputing negative beliefs with evidence when adversity strikes.

Consider this list your five-minute intervention—24 stories from the U that inspire hope for a brighter future.



# First You Realize It's Possible



## 1 Providers are prescribing food as medicine.

Providers at U of U Health can now prescribe fresh produce and whole foods the same way they prescribe medication. Through the Food Pharmacy program, patients pick up free, nutritious foods from a mobile trailer and get coaching from dietitians. With nearly 500,000 Utahns facing food insecurity, the program treats the problem, not just the symptoms.



## 2 U engineers are tackling 'forever chemicals.'

A new material removes nearly 100 percent of toxic "forever chemicals" from water in five minutes—and glows like a tiny beacon to show contamination levels. The breakthrough from U engineers tackles PFOA contamination that's been

linked to cancer and found in water supplies nationwide.

## 3 A new center plans to cut stillbirths in half.

Every year, 24,000 U.S. families lose a baby to stillbirth. University of Utah Health's new Stillbirth Center of Excellence—the first in the nation—aims to cut that number in half through

partnerships with local, national, and global health organizations.

## 4 The Wilkes Climate Launch Prize is effecting real-world solutions.

The U's Wilkes Climate Launch Prize backs bold climate solutions that are delivering results, awarding \$2.25 million to

innovative startups with potential for wide impact over just the last three years. This year's winner is a Kathmandu-based company replacing coal-fired bricks with eco-technology that slashes emissions and costs. Previous winners tackled cow methane with algae and used robots to turn crop waste into carbon-trapping biochar.

## 5 The Moran Eye Center is fighting a form of blindness at its source.

Each year, age-related macular degeneration steals sight from millions as the leading cause of blindness in people over 65, with limited treatments and no cure available. But researchers at the U's John A. Moran Eye Center have been working to change that. They have unraveled the disease's genetic roots and developed a gene therapy—now in clinical trials—designed to slow or even halt a common form of the disease with a single injection.

## 6 A new program is providing mental health crisis care to youth.

When children and teenagers are in mental health crisis, Utah families now have an alternative to the emergency room. Huntsman Mental Health Institute's new 24/7 youth crisis care program gets most youth assessed and stabilized with a plan within hours instead of waiting for answers in an emergency room. This specialized program complements the Kem and Carolyn Gardner Mental Health Crisis Care Center, which serves adults in crisis.

## 7 U research is helping bring an end to HIV transmission.

A twice-yearly injection can now prevent HIV infection—a game-changing breakthrough, especially for regions where daily prevention pills are difficult to access. The drug lenacapavir builds on decades of basic research by U Distinguished Professor of Biochemistry Wesley Sundquist, who holds the Dr. Leo T. Samuels and Barbara K. Samuels Presidential Endowed Chair in the Spencer Fox Eccles School of Medicine, bringing us closer to ending new HIV infections worldwide.

◀  
**A mobile Food Pharmacy delivers fresh food prescribed by providers.**

**8 Student volunteers are logging millions of hours of service.**

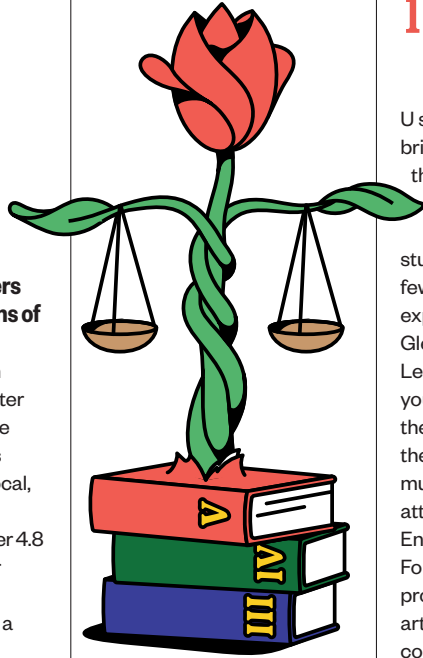
Since the Lowell Bennion Community Service Center was founded in 1987, more than 240,000 volunteers have given their time to local, national, and global projects—racking up over 4.8 million hours of volunteer service and making community engagement a cornerstone of the U experience.

**9 Law students are setting a record for pro bono service.**

At the U, law students don't just study casebooks. They also put their legal skills to work in the real world through the Pro Bono Initiative, helping to answer legal questions free of charge in areas like eviction, debt, immigration, and estate planning. This year, law students served more than 2,000 community members—the most in school history—as part of a culture where service comes standard.

**10 Students are helping preserve Indigenous stories.**

U students in the College of Humanities are working alongside Northwestern Band of Shoshone Nation elders to digitize 160+ years of historical records, helping the tribe reclaim their own stories after decades of extractive research. The archive has uncovered crucial materials—including a list of survivors from the 1863 Bear River Massacre. Students have participated in tree-planting ceremonies at the massacre site, learning what true collaboration looks like.



**11 Arts programs are lighting up classrooms and communities.**

U students and faculty are bringing creativity directly to the community—from Salt Lake area elementary schools where 500 students each year forgo a few worksheets to instead explore paint and rhythm, to Glendale's Community Learning Center, where young people from all over the world create dances, theater productions, and music while their parents attend classes such as English language instruction. For over 15 years, these programs have shown how art can build community connections.



**12 Surgeons are restoring hope and sight across the globe.**

A 10-year-old girl in Tanzania survived a terrifying hyena attack but lost vision in one eye. That is, until surgeons from the U's John A. Moran Eye Center performed the first oculoplastic surgery ever done in that region of Africa, a critical step in fully restoring her vision. Funded entirely by donors, Moran Eye Center's Global Outreach Division provides sight-restoring care locally and worldwide in countries like Tanzania, which has fewer than one ophthalmologist per million people.

**Then You See People Stepping Up**

**13**

**UMFA is enriching the lives of older adults.**



Whether it's picking up a paintbrush for the first time in decades or trying their hand at fabric dyeing, adults 55+ are discovering that creativity doesn't have an expiration date. The UMFA's free monthly Creative Aging workshops create space for learning, connection, and hands-on art-making—proving that it's never too late to explore something new.

**Creative Aging brings adults 55+ together for free, hands-on art workshops.**



▲ World-class care and top-tier training come together.

# 14

## A new hospital is bringing more opportunity to West Valley.

The new University of Utah Eccles Health Campus and Eccles Hospital in West Valley, opening in 2028, will create over 2,000 jobs while serving as a major training ground for the next generation of health care workers. The campus will offer hands-on clinical training and research opportunities, and connect students to career pathways from high school through advanced degrees. The campus and hospital, named in honor of a landmark \$75 million gift from the George S. and Dolores Doré Eccles Foundation, will train local students to serve their own community while bringing U of U Health's world-class care closer to home.

## Next You Watch Communities Transform

### 15 Rural miners are receiving hearing care closer to home.

For miners in rural Utah, a routine hearing check can mean hours of travel to Salt Lake City. The College of Health's Tele-Audiology Clinic for Rural Miners brings that care closer, offering free follow-up appointments to ensure that hearing aids are meeting the hearing goals of the patient. With more than 60 percent of miners facing noise-induced hearing loss, the clinic is helping protect both livelihoods and quality of life.

### 16 The Three Wishes program is providing dignity in final days.

One patient spent her last days surrounded by holiday decorations; another reached out to stroke a beloved dog brought to the bedside. At U of U Health, the Three Wishes Project has created more than 700 such moments—and meaningful mementos like recorded heartbeats and locks of hair—for 300 patients in intensive care, softening the hardest goodbyes while also contributing to the sense of purpose for the ICU staff who make them possible.

### 17 Neighbors are leading lasting change.

Through University Neighborhood Partners (UNP), westside residents and the U work side by side to tackle challenges like health care, education, and job access. Instead of top-down programs, UNP backs neighborhood-driven solutions—supporting community coalitions, local educational pathways, and workforce training designed by the community itself. This model bridges divides across Salt Lake and the west valley, proving that when neighbors lead, lasting change follows.



University Neighborhood Partners helps communities solve local issues.

### 18 The School of Dentistry is expanding access to dental care.

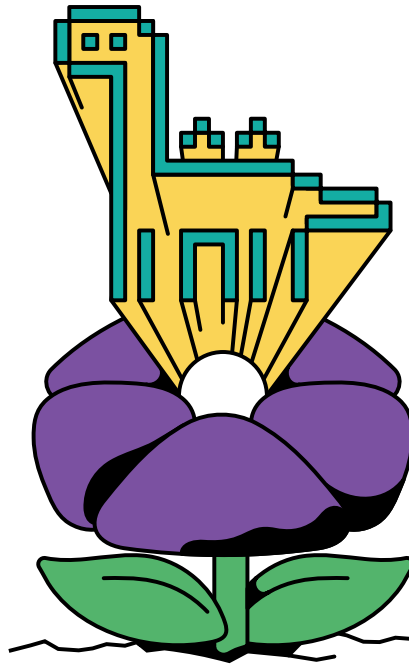
From a mobile clinic reaching rural towns to Salt Lake area partnerships serving refugees, people in substance abuse treatment, schoolkids, and those with special needs, the U's School of Dentistry is filling critical gaps in care. Clinics across the state provide affordable treatment for Medicaid recipients and uninsured patients, while the Oral Health Assistance Program has delivered over \$3 million in care to those with nowhere else to turn. By coordinating with over 400 Medicaid providers statewide, the school is making oral health accessible to more Utahns.

## 19 More nurses are filling Utah's care gaps.

The College of Nursing's Advanced Nursing Education Workforce program tackles Utah's health care shortage by training nurse practitioners and midwives where they're needed most. Around 20 students gain hands-on experience running primary care clinics in Salt Lake City, then take those skills to underserved and rural communities across the state.

## 20 AI partnerships are accelerating learning and healing.

The U is harnessing artificial intelligence to transform education and medicine, equipping Utah teachers statewide with cutting-edge AI tools while tripling university computing power and enabling Huntsman Cancer Institute to slash the timeline from cancer diagnosis to lifesaving treatments. Partnerships with NVIDIA and Hewlett Packard Enterprise, along with innovative research across campus, position Utah as a leader in using AI to solve problems that matter to every family.



## 22 NHMU is teaching kids to think critically.

Kids might think they're just building goofy virtual dinosaurs in Dino Lab. Little do they know they're becoming junior scientists. Dino Lab is one of many engaging modules in Research Quest, an educational program created by the Natural History Museum of Utah at the U. Funded by a \$1.3 million National Science Foundation grant and support from the Joseph and Evelyn Rosenblatt Charitable Fund and the I.J. and Jeanné Wagner Charitable Foundation, the

program has reached more than 2,000 educators and 700,000 classroom logins so far, giving students the critical thinking skills to navigate a world of misinformation.

## 23 UPEP is opening doors behind bars.

The Utah Prison Education Project is expanding access to higher education for incarcerated students, offering courses that range from microbiology to literature and even enrolling cohorts working toward full degrees. The effort began in the Honors College and has since grown to involve faculty across campus, giving hundreds of people behind bars the chance to reimagine their futures through learning.

## 24

### U scientists are linking computers to the brain.

A prosthetic arm that can *feel*—sending signals directly to the brain—is no longer science fiction. At the U's NeuroRobotics Lab, scientists are fusing AI with neuroscience to create technologies that restore human function. **U**

*Seth Bracken is editor of Utah Magazine.*



▶ **Researchers at the U's NeuroRobotics Lab are developing prosthetics that send signals to the brain, restoring not just movement but sensation.**

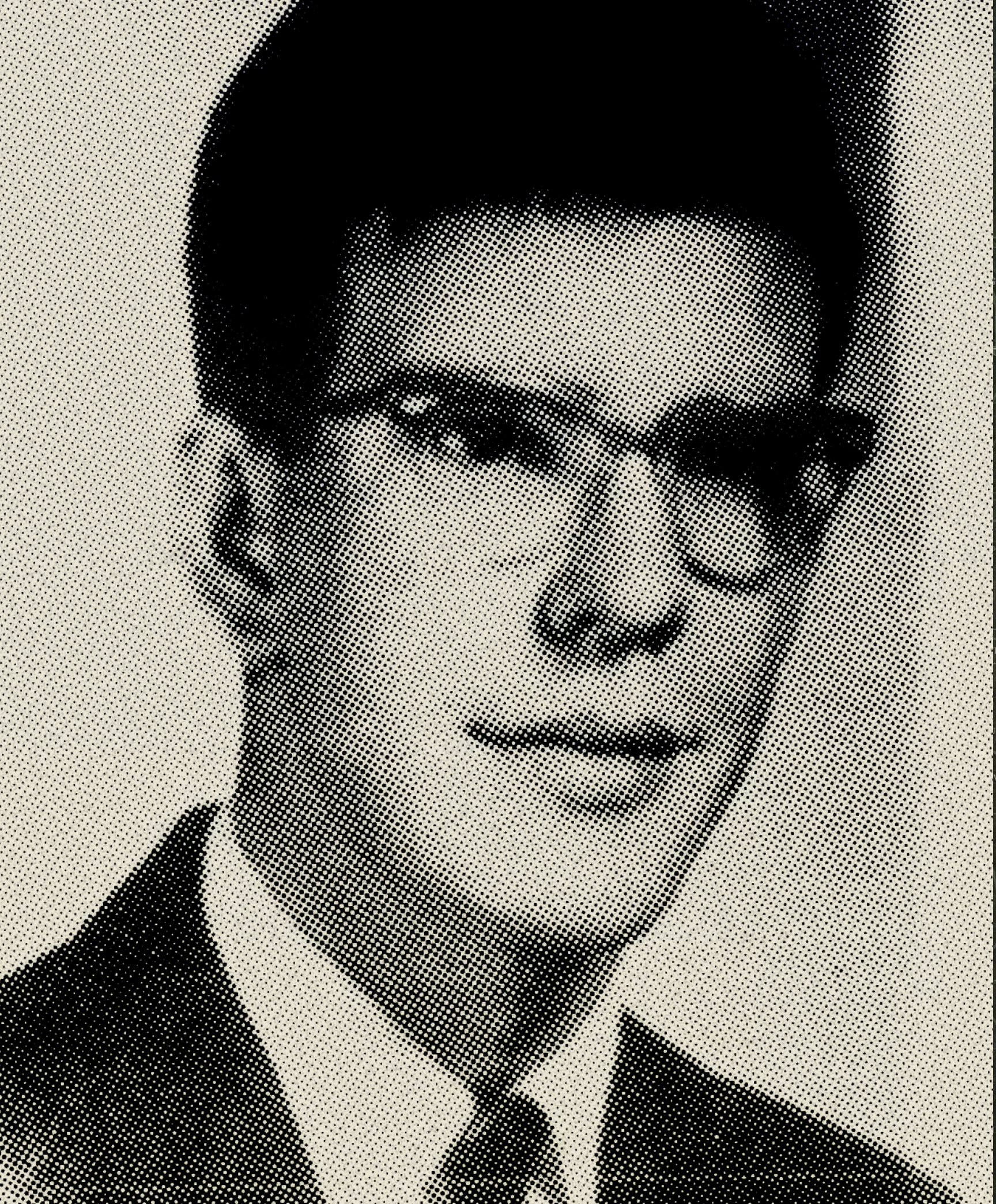
# Finally, You Envision a Brighter Tomorrow

## A geothermal energy breakthrough is powering a clean future.

**21** Clean geothermal energy from anywhere in the world—not just volcanic hot spots. That's what the U-led Utah FORGE project proved possible in April 2024, successfully creating a geothermal reservoir where none existed naturally by circulating water through hot rock a mile and a half underground. The breakthrough—backed by \$300 million in Department of Energy funding—could unlock geothermal power worldwide.

**Utah FORGE shows how geothermal energy could be achieved virtually everywhere.**

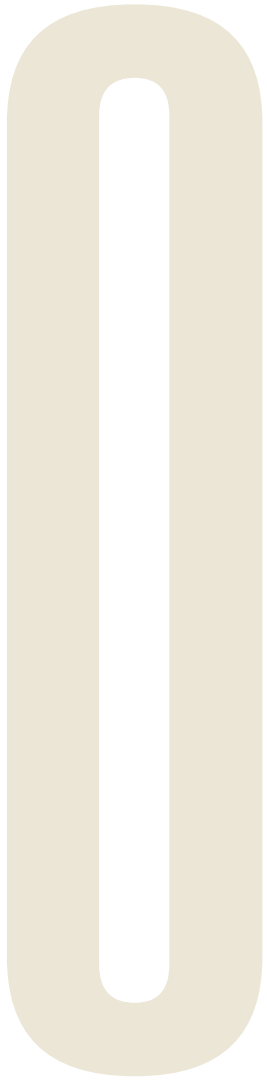




# BRINGING DOUGLAS HOME

After nearly 50 years, an unlikely chain of events and reinvigorated new U police work resolves the university's only missing-person cold case.

BY Amy Choate-Nielsen



On a bright, late-summer day,  
the family of Douglas Brick  
gathers at the Trinity Episcopal Church  
in Pocatello, Idaho,  
to mourn and to celebrate.

**THEY CELEBRATE** seeing each other again; they celebrate memories and miracles. They mourn decades of heartache and a death that went without answers for far too long.

When their brother left his University of Utah dormitory on October 12, 1973, he never returned. Records of his disappearance were lost, and he became the U's only cold case, shrouded in mystery until University of Utah Police Department (UUPD) detectives started investigating again. Their discoveries in 2025 followed a series of improbable events: a remarkable encounter, a news story noticed, a fragment of bone spotted on the mountainside. Now, his story is a reminder of the untold influence one person can have across generations, even on strangers.

On the day Doug should have turned 75, his family traveled from opposite sides of the country for a bittersweet celebration of his life. There are a few significant places that have impacted the Brick family

over the years, and Trinity Church is one of them. So many times, they have sat on the beautiful hardwood benches under the glint of centuries-old stained glass. So many times, in funeral services marking losses that changed their lives forever, they have recited the words "Hear us, Lord."

First, they honored their father, Francis Harold Brick, who died in 1964 when Doug was 14. Then, after waiting nearly 20 years for news of their younger brother, they held a memorial service in Doug's honor in 1990. In 2010, they mourned their mother, who passed away at the age of 90, with Doug still missing. It all happened in the same chapel that's been standing since 1897. So much has changed, but Trinity Church is the same.

"Welcome," the Rev. Haydie LeCorbeiller says as she begins the service. "Today, we celebrate knowing that our brother Douglas Halliwell Brick is finally home."

PROMONTORY MOUNTAINS

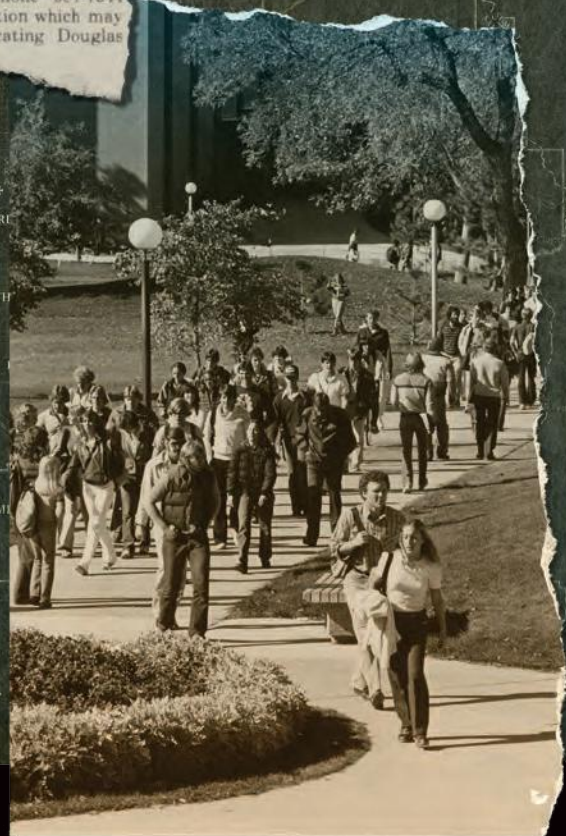
CACHE NATIONAL FOREST  
BEAR RIVER RANGE



## Missing person

The University is seeking information concerning the whereabouts of an Austin Hall resident, Douglas Brick, 23, who has been missing from the campus since Friday, October 12. Mr. Brick is a senior student at the University from Pocatello. He is currently at

tempting to locate the University undergraduate and would appreciate receiving information from anyone who may have had contact with him since October 12. Please telephone 581-7944 with any information which may contribute to locating Douglas Brick.



STANBURY MOUNTAINS

SATCHAL FOREST

RET PEAK  
BERNESS

TOGUE ARMY  
DEPOT SOUTH

EAGLE MOUNTAIN

## ➤ HEBGEN LAKE, WEST YELLOWSTONE

It might have been the sight of the mountains reflecting off the surface of Hebgen Lake or the smell of lodgepole pines that made Doug fall in love with nature. He spent countless hours outside growing up in Pocatello, but his grandparents' lake cabin just outside of Yellowstone National Park was special. The Brick family came here often, forming the memories they shared from the pulpit at Doug's funeral.

"On summer nights, my brothers and I would sleep outside in the backyard and watch the shooting stars," says his sister, Sue. "We enjoyed the summer days."

Smart, shy, and sensitive, Doug took a job working for the Forest Service during the summer. Family members say Doug's connection to the land was so strong he considered fighting wildfires for a living, but when he went to the U, he embarked on a different path.

His family valued education. His father had degrees in chemical engineering and pharmacy, and his brother David was on his way to earning a doctorate at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Doug followed suit, enrolling in advanced math, economics, and physics classes.

Now his family wonders if he felt pressure to conform. They think about how hard it was to lose his father so young. His brother and sister wonder if there was more they could have done.

"For many years, I've done the guilt trip: 'I should have done this or should have done that,'" Sue says. "But when you're young, you don't know how to deal with somebody who's depressed, and you don't have that kind of wisdom. And so, I decided not to go on that path. Rivers don't run uphill. I had to let that flow."

It's hard to pinpoint what shifted in Doug, and impossible to know why. He graduated high school fourth in his class, and he carried his meticulously organized habits with him into college. At first, he did well at the U, then, after about a year, things changed. What started as two incompletes turned to four, and on and on until his GPA plummeted. He took the classes again, trying to regain ground, but from 1971 until 1973, every class he took was marked incomplete, no credit, or withdrawal. The chasm seemed insurmountable. His mother tried to get him help when she noticed he was struggling—not eating and running himself ragged—but Doug refused.

Doug continued to return home to Pocatello during the summer to work and

visit his high school sweetheart, until she moved to Texas. In the summer of 1973, Doug came home to visit his mother. He asked her about proposing to his girlfriend, and what should he do if he couldn't afford a ring? His mom recommended buying something special, like a jewelry box. As he packed up his car to drive back to school, she said goodbye. It was the last time she saw him alive.

A few weeks later, Doug flew to Texas to propose, but he was turned down. His girlfriend said, "Not until you get your degree," according to a journal entry written by his mother. Doug gave his girlfriend the jewelry box he purchased anyway, and he returned to the U. In October, he disappeared.

Police searched for him but didn't find anything. Rumors spread that Doug might have fled the country or hitched a ride to start a new life. His family didn't know what to believe. As the case grew colder, his files were lost. It seemed Doug would never be found again.



*Eleven-year-old Douglas Brick holds a doll and the family cat, Muffy.*

Doug's disappearance was especially hard on his mother. She felt she was somehow responsible. On the day she died, she told David and his wife she thought Doug went missing because of her actions, and she began to cry.

## ➤ BLACK MOUNTAIN, SALT LAKE CITY

The foothills behind the U are deceptively difficult to traverse. On trail, the terrain is steep, with ridgelines that appear darker, sharper, and more treacherous at night. Off trail, the underbrush can be so thick you can't see your own shoes.

On their way to his funeral, Doug's family drove to the base of the hillside to look up. For them, this is hallowed ground. When they see the velvety green flanks of Black Mountain, they see miracles.

A fortuitous sequence of events led them here. In September 2022, changes were happening in the UUPD. Major Heather Sturzenegger had just been promoted from lieutenant over investigations to executive officer; a new detective named Jon Dial had joined the team; and the department had just hired its first crime data analyst, Nikol Mitchell BA'07. She discovered the nearly 50-year-old cold case.

The UUPD had little to go on—no police records, no witnesses, not even the name of Doug's roommate, if he was even still alive. Still, Sturzenegger had a feeling that they could solve this case. She asked for a volunteer to take it on, and Dial raised his hand. For the first time in decades, Doug's file was back on someone's desk.

Little by little, the case grew. Dial discovered that Sue, with the encouragement of her daughter, had called the U's dispatch center several times over the years, looking for her brother. In November 2022, Dial flew to her home to take a DNA sample and see if it matched any John Does in the national system. It didn't—but it was progress. They had a family member. Now they needed a witness, someone who talked to the police, who could confirm where the search for Doug took place.

That witness appeared unexpectedly. In December 2022, Sturzenegger accompanied her daughter to a doctor's appointment in the office of Steve Warren. She was off duty, making small talk about her job as an investigations lieutenant when Warren casually mentioned, "That's interesting. When I was a student at the U in 1973, my roommate went missing."



Sturzenegger was stunned. “What was your roommate’s name?” she asked. He couldn’t recall right away; they had lived together only a month. Even so, Warren never forgot his roommate’s glasses, or his face, or how neatly his car was packed when he found it deserted in the parking lot. In the back seat was a receipt from a gun store and a box of shells, with one cartridge missing. Still, police didn’t believe that Doug had killed himself, because he was “a law-and-order man,” and there was no note.

After Warren reported his roommate missing, he joined a search party in the hills behind the U to look for him.

“Was it Douglas Brick?” Sturzenegger asked. Warren replied, “Yes, it was.”

It was a huge breakthrough, with uncanny timing. From that point on, Dial felt a closeness to Doug that he couldn’t explain. He felt a push to be persistent, even when the case stalled for more than a year. He thought about a journal entry Doug’s mother wrote about a chance encounter with a psychic who claimed Doug slipped and fell. “He really wants you to find him,” the psychic had said.

Then, in October 2024, almost 51 years to the day Doug went missing, Sturzenegger saw a news story about hunters who found two fragments of a human skull in the same area where the search for Doug took place. She reached out to the county’s Office of the Medical Examiner and asked for DNA testing. In May 2025, the results came back: a 99.99 percent match to Sue.

“When I got the report, I lost my breath,” Sturzenegger said. “My heart was pounding. I was thinking, am I reading this right? Is this him?”

Dial couldn’t sleep until he delivered the news in person three days later. Doug had been found.

“There were various incidents that seemed coincidental in nature,” Dial later said at Doug’s funeral. “I personally don’t lean too heavily on coincidence. It’s nothing short of a miracle.”

*Detective Jon Dial and Major Heather Sturzenegger of the UUPD join Doug’s family members to place roses at his gravesite during his funeral services in August 2025.*

## ➤ POCATELLO, IDAHO

On the day of his funeral, Doug’s family gathers in a hotel lobby to catch up with Dial and Sturzenegger and marvel at the improbable chain of events that brought their brother home.

They talk about returning to Pocatello, the family cabin, and the mountain where Doug was found. They’d like to hike up that trail, to be where he was in his last moments. Finding Doug’s remains in the wild was like finding a needle in a haystack. How did it happen at all, they wonder. But also, why did it take so long?

Though the cause of Doug’s death remains a mystery, the family finds a measure of peace in the answers they do have. They no longer Google their brother’s name or imagine him calling out of the blue. They no longer wonder if he wanted to remain undiscovered, hiding elsewhere in the world. They turn to hope and faith to ease their unanswered questions. There is sorrow, but also, celebration.

“I believe the best is yet to come, even after death,” Sue says in her eulogy. “The best is yet to come.” **U**

*Amy Choate-Nielsen is associate director of strategic communications for University Marketing and Communications.*

## SAFEGUARDS

# How does the U help students who academically struggle today?



If a student today began slipping the way Doug did, modern-day early warning measures would activate before they reached a breaking point. The U now uses a blend of technology, proactive outreach, and mental health resources to identify and support students who are struggling academically or emotionally.

Navigate U, launched in 2023, allows advisors to flag early signs that a student might be falling behind. From there, success coaches and counselors reach out directly, connecting students with tutoring, course planning, and other resources. The U’s behavioral intervention and case management teams track concerning patterns, and mental health support is available through Huntsman Mental

Health Institute, U Counseling Services, and the 24/7 SafeUT app. Students can talk with crisis counselors, schedule therapy, or receive immediate help if they—or someone they know—are in trouble.

“Students aren’t expected to navigate the intricacies of life as a college student alone,” says T. Chase Hagood, vice provost for student success. “We’re trying to knit together an environment where every student can thrive. If a student starts withdrawing from all their classes, it’s on us to notice. And once we know, we have to act. The urgency is real, and early intervention is critical.”



## Operation Student Success

Military-connected students find a welcoming base on campus at the Veterans Support Center

It started in a space the size of a closet. Today, the U's Veterans Support Center occupies a section of the Union Building's fourth floor and serves over 1,700 military-connected students—veterans, active duty servicemembers, National Guard, reservists, ROTC students, and their dependents and spouses.

The transformation goes beyond square footage. Since its founding in 2011, the center has evolved into a hub providing free tutoring, peer mentoring, embedded VA counselors, and a community that center director Major Faamai Taupau says “helps students thrive—academically, personally, and socially.” The results of these efforts speak for themselves. Military-connected students at the U now achieve higher grades, retention rates, and graduation rates than their non-military peers.

Last year, the I.J. and Jeanné Wagner Charitable Foundation established the Izzi Wagner Legacy Fund to sustain the center's programs. “The Izzi Wagner Legacy Fund is already transforming lives,” says Taupau. “It's expanding access to critical resources and creating a true home that will empower generations to thrive.”

The center also hosts brown bag lunches where alumni like Carl Churchill BA'85 BA'85 MBA'04, who leads the U's Veteran Alumni Chapter, sit with students to discuss topics like veteran business loans and entrepreneurship.

After earning his undergraduate degrees in German and political science and then his executive MBA following 21 years in the Army, Churchill went on to co-found Alpha Coffee with his wife, Lori Churchill, now with locations in downtown Salt Lake City and Cottonwood Heights. Through their Grounds for Good program, they've donated over \$150,000 to veteran causes and community organizations and donated more than 24,000 bags of coffee to deployed troops.

The Veteran Alumni Chapter organizes blood drives, supports the annual Meet a Veteran barbecue, and promotes the 9/11 stair climb at Rice-Eccles Stadium, among other efforts. Now Carl Churchill and Taupau are working to formalize connections between students and alumni, creating a structured mentorship program pairing veteran graduates with current students navigating everything from starting businesses to transitioning into civilian careers.

“When parents visit campus with their military-connected students, they tell us the Veterans Support Center made the difference in choosing the U,” Taupau says. For Carl Churchill, the work reflects a deeper philosophy. “Everything in life and business is about people. By helping and serving others in a genuine way, your life becomes richer by default.”

To get involved with the Veteran Alumni Chapter, visit [magazine.utah.edu/veterans](http://magazine.utah.edu/veterans).

### ALUMNI NEWS ROUNDUP

**Mark your calendars for U Alumni happenings** this spring. Connect with friends, network with professionals, and forge new connections at these events:



#### APRIL

##### Grad Finale

U campus

Tuesday, April 21–Wednesday, April 22

#### MAY

##### New York City Chapter Event

Tuesday, May 5

##### St. George Chapter Event

Thursday, May 14

##### Day of Service

All chapters

Saturday, May 16



##### European Alumni Reunion

Oslo, Norway

Friday, May 22–Sunday, May 24

#### JUNE

##### Chicago Chapter Event

Thursday, June 11



##### Dinks & Drinks Pickleball Classic

Second Summit Hard Cider Co.

Salt Lake City

June 13

Visit [alumni.utah.edu](http://alumni.utah.edu) and follow us on social media @UtahAlumni for more details.

## Ten Women to Watch

These alumnae are leading companies, transforming public transit, shaping policy, and launching bold new ventures—all powered by a University of Utah education.

When *Utah Business* magazine unveiled its 30 Women to Watch for 2025, one in three honorees were U alums. These 10 standouts—CEOs, founders, policymakers, and innovators—are redefining leadership across Utah's landscape.

"The accomplishments of these remarkable women reflect what we strive for at the Eccles School—preparing leaders who create meaningful impact in their organizations and communities," says Kurt Dirks, dean of the David Eccles School of Business. "Their leadership is shaping Utah's future by strengthening our economy, inspiring innovation, and opening doors for others to succeed."

Each is charting her own course while reflecting the curiosity, creativity, and drive that define the U. Read their full stories at [magazine.utah.edu/womentowatch](https://magazine.utah.edu/womentowatch).



(F)



(G)



(E)



(D)



(H)



(C)



(I)



(B)



(J)



(A)

- (A) **Lucy Andre** JD'92 | CEO, Stadler Signalling North America
- (B) **Dana Baird** BS'94 | Executive Managing Director, Cushman & Wakefield
- (C) **Angie Balfour** MBA'07 | Chief People Officer, SeekWell (Parent Company of 1-800 Contacts)
- (D) **Tonia Dalton** BA'96 BS'96 | Founding Partner, Induo Marketing
- (E) **Lindsey England** BA'03 EMBA'25 | People Strategy Consultant, True North HR
- (F) **Cheylynn Hayman** BA'00 JD'03 | Shareholder, Parr Brown Gee & Loveless PC
- (G) **Chiao-Ih Hui** BS'02 MBA'05 | Founder & CEO, Solution Diagnostics
- (H) **Ashley Iverson** BS'13 | Founder, Function of Yoga
- (I) **Felecia Maxfield-Barrett** BS'05 MPA'11 | CEO & President, Utah Global Diplomacy
- (J) **Candice B. Pierucci** MPA'19 | State Representative, Utah House of Representatives, District 49

# What is the key to making it in Hollywood?

Panelists featured at U Alumni's "From the U to Hollywood" event share advice for U grads headed to Tinseltown.



Treat Hollywood less like a monolith and more like an ecosystem. There's no single path in, only intersections of creativity, relationships, and timing. Focus first on mastering your craft, because skill builds credibility, and credibility attracts opportunity. Then nurture genuine relationships—collaboration is the currency of this industry. Be prepared to build your own momentum: write, produce, or volunteer on projects that align with your voice. Persistence matters more than perfection; every "no" refines your approach. And remember, integrity travels faster than gossip. The entertainment world is vast but tightly networked. Always remember that your reputation precedes you. Lead with generosity, curiosity, and follow-through, and Hollywood will eventually make room for your vision, grit, and know-how.

—Jared Ruga MFA'16 MBA'16 JD'16, Emmy-winning and GLAAD-nominated producer



As a writer, your script is your calling card. Write that terrible first draft, then refine until it's the best you can get on your own. Then ask for feedback from people whose opinions you trust—preferably other writers or industry professionals. Address any notes you get multiple times. Otherwise, address only the notes that resonate with you—you know your story best.

Do not chase trends—it never works. Write what you know. Read any and all scripts you can get your hands on. Make connections with people in the industry and politely ask them to read your script. Give them ample time, and if they respond well, ask for help getting your script to the right people. And keep writing—those people will expect you to back that script up with another great script.

—Stephanie Groff BA'21, screenwriter who recently sold a script to Sony



Opportunity can (and will) come knocking on the door at any time, so be ready. Read, write, shoot, edit, repeat—prepare yourself as much as you can so when the time comes, you can show what you're made of. Ultimately, your attitude is key. Stay positive, work hard, and give it your all. It's a tough business, but if you can prove your value and be a team player, you can achieve anything you want.

You have to constantly reinvent yourself, especially with the changing state of our business right now. The opportunities for studio-based projects are changing, but the need for material is still there. No matter what field you're interested in, being a good storyteller is key. I encourage you to learn how to write, further your education, watch everything, and don't let the challenges change your mind.

—Rick Page BA'94, cinematographer whose credits include Brooklyn Nine-Nine and Blockbuster





The advice I always give to people is to become well-rounded. Find the career you want to do, then do every single job surrounding it to fully understand and get better at your sought-after career. As a screenwriter, it benefits me to act in something to understand how written words are performed; to direct something to see how to make written words work logistically; or even to produce something to fully understand what does and doesn't capture attention throughout the process. Every aspect of these things makes my writing better because I'm more informed about what works and what doesn't. And I'm not talking about anything huge—you can just do small experiments and work with friends on short films. Trust me, studios always want the people who are the most informed. But, truly, this can translate to any chosen career.

—Jeff Dixon BA'99, whose animated show *Curses!* premiered last year on AppleTV+



## Bringing the U to You

A nationwide event series brings campus updates, expert insights, and connections to U alumni across the country

Missing your alma mater but can't make it back to campus? Maybe the U can come to you.

U Alumni's Bringing the U to You event series has been taking the show on the road, connecting Utah alums from coast to coast. From the Bay Area to New York City, alumni are gathering for evenings of conversation, connection, and Utah pride.

"The Bringing the U to You series has been a rewarding way for us to engage with alumni out of state," says Kris Bosman BS'99, chief alumni relations officer. "We've learned our alumni are not just interested in creating connections with each other—they want to engage with leadership and learn what's new at their alma mater."

Depending on the city where they're held, events might feature a single speaker or a panel discussion—plus plenty of

time to mingle with fellow alums over drinks and appetizers. "The networking value alone is huge," says Alex Junge BS'20, alumni chapters manager.

Topics range from university plans and initiatives to timely issues such as AI. In Houston and Austin, guests explored the ethics of artificial intelligence with experts from the John and Marcia Price College of Engineering and the Department of Communication.

Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, Junge notes. One attendee called the April 2025 event in Orange County "amazing," adding, "The speaker did a fabulous job, and I had a great time meeting new people."

Follow @UtahAlumni on social media or visit [alumni.utah.edu](http://alumni.utah.edu) for announcements about future Bringing the U to You events.

# Class Notes

## '50s



Doreen Woolley

**Doreen Woolley** BS'50 has performed in the lobby of the Randall L. Jones Theatre at the Utah Shakespeare Festival for more than 22 years, greeting guests and adding to the festival experience with welcome music before shows. While in college, Woolley played for the Tanner Dance Program, where she developed her skills in improvisation and conversing while playing.

## '80s

**Oswaldo Bascur** PhD'82 was named to the National Academy of Engineering Class of 2025. Bascur's career took off with groundbreaking work in process optimization, particularly in the mining and mineral processing industries. His early work on dynamic simulators and process analysis tools helped revolutionize the industry. But he says one of the most rewarding parts of his career has been the opportunity to mentor the next generation of engineers.



Jensie Anderson

**Jensie Anderson** BFA'85 JD'93 received a 2025 Lifetime Service Award from the Utah State Bar. The awards "honor extraordinary legal professionals whose careers have exemplified commitment, integrity, and transformative impact in the legal community." Anderson directed the S.J. Quinney College of Law's in-house Innocence Clinic from 2002-22 and developed the Post-Conviction Clinic in the fall of 2023. Now professor emerita, she has worked closely with the Innocence Project for more than 22 years.



Lisa Eccles

**Lisa Eccles** BA'86 was honored with the Giant in our City award from the Salt Lake Chamber, recognizing exceptional and distinguished public service and professional achievement.

Eccles has led the George S. and Dolores Doré Eccles Foundation for more than 30 years, awarding nearly 400 grants annually supporting nonprofits in every corner of Utah. She has also served on the boards of the National Park Foundation, Preservation Utah, and many others.

## '90s

**Michael Hurben** BS'90 recently published *The Physics of Birds and Birding*, a physicist's perspective on both birds and the tools of birdwatching (he has now observed more than 5,000 bird species). Hurben says he is grateful to the U for taking a chance on him as a nontraditional student—a decision that led to his work on cutting-edge nanotechnology in magnetic recording and more than two decades in the field.

**Alan Kallmeyer** BME'90 is dean of the North Dakota State University College of Engineering. He has been a member of the NDSU community for nearly 30 years, including serving as chair of the mechanical engineering department from 2005 to 2022. With master's and doctoral degrees from the University of Iowa, he is principal investigator for the \$14 million NSF I-Corps Great Plains Hub, a consortium of 11 institutions that provides entrepreneurial training for scientists, researchers, and engineers.



Reyes Aguilar

**Reyes Aguilar** JD'92 received a 2025 Lifetime Service Award from the Utah State Bar, honoring a career exemplifying "commitment, integrity, and transformative impact in the legal community." Aguilar was associate dean of admissions and financial aid at the U for more than 32 years. He also served as a member of the S.J. Quinney College of Law Board of Trustees and the Office of Alumni Relations' former Young Alumni Board.

**Craig Menden** JD'95 is a partner in the M&A and Emerging Technologies groups with O'Melveny, based in Silicon Valley and Newport Beach, Calif. With nearly 30 years of experience and over 1,000 M&A transactions, Menden specializes in technology and life sciences. He previously worked at Willkie Farr & Gallagher and is recognized for his leadership in high-value deals.



Red Rocks great **Missy Marlowe** BS'93 has been inducted into the USA Gymnastics Hall of Fame. Marlowe was a 1987 World Championships team member, the 1987 USA Gymnastics Athlete of the Year, a three-time U.S. medalist—earning the bars gold, all-around silver, and beam bronze—and a 1988 Olympian before joining Utah Gymnastics from 1989-92. As a Red Rock, Marlowe was an All-American all four years she competed and earned seven perfect 10s over her career, ranking third all-time in Utah history. She was also the first NCAA gymnast to earn perfect 10s in all four events. She was part of two National Championship seasons for the Red Rocks and was a five-time individual NCAA Champion, and in 1992 was the first gymnast ever to win the Honda-Broderick Cup for the top female athlete in the country.

**Larry Larsen** BME'99 is the COO and executive vice president of Williams in Tulsa, Okla., where he oversees all aspects of the company's transmission, storage, and gathering and processing operations. Larsen has been with Williams for more than 25 years.

## '00s



David G. Derrick, Jr.

**David G. Derrick, Jr.** ex'00 is set to direct an original nature-themed feature for Warner Bros. Pictures Animation. Derrick directed *Moana 2* and previously contributed to *Moana*, *Raya and the Last Dragon*, *Encanto*, *Zootopia 2*, the first *How to Train Your Dragon*, and more.



Kim Cordova

**Kim Cordova** JD'01 is president of the Utah Bar Association. Cordova started her legal career as a prosecutor in the Salt Lake County District Attorney's Office, then co-managed a criminal defense firm before serving as executive director of the Utah Commission on Criminal and Juvenile

Justice. She is an adjunct professor at the S.J. Quinney College of Law.



David McGlynn

**David McGlynn** MFA'01 PhD'06 has published his first novel, *Everything We Could Do*, a sweeping story of parenthood, family, and redemption set against the backdrop of a small-town Wisconsin NICU. McGlynn has previously authored two memoirs and a short story collection, and his work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Men's Health*, *Real Simple*, and numerous other publications. He teaches at Lawrence University.

**Karrie Baldwin** (formerly Penney) BFA'03 recently presented the exhibit *Looking Up* at the Phillips Gallery in Kalispell, Montana. Baldwin grew up in the West and is deeply connected to the landscape. Her impressionist oil paintings focus on light, contrast, and color, particularly the color of the sunsets, reflections on water, and the feeling of standing in the light.

**Michael Daly** MBA'03 is chief operating officer for cashless payments trailblazer Marker Trax. Daly is a longtime gaming industry executive with more than 20 years of leadership experience in gaming technology, digital, and business growth, including as CEO of Catena Media.



Lindsay Allen

**Lindsay Allen** MBS'04 MED'09 is the director of development and alumni relations at the New England College of Optometry. She brings more than 20 years of experience to the role, having previously worked in development, alumni relations, and advancement at Boston University, St. Mark's School, Clark University, Boston College, and the U.

**Robert Cummings** MS'06 is director of the Utah Division of Securities, regulating the state's investment industry. He brings more than 15 years of experience in civil and criminal litigation to the role, having established his own law firm before joining Snow Christensen & Martineau, and trying several cases in the securities industry.

**Wes Madsen** MD'07 has joined The Guardian Group as a Qualified Medical Evaluator in Spine and Orthopaedic Surgery. He is a board-certified orthopedic surgeon with expertise in adult reconstruction, and his evaluations focus on concise, objective reporting and medical evidence-based conclusions.

**Nicholas G. Hanson** MD'08 has partnered with MDVIP in Salt Lake City to open a practice that offers personalized, membership-based health care. Hanson is a board-certified family physician who has been practicing in Utah for 13 years. His clinical interests include hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and sports medicine.

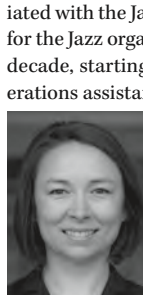
# '10s

**Matt Sadler** MAC'13 is a tax partner with Tanner LLC. With 15 years of experience, he specializes in tax compliance, planning, and M&A, and is actively involved with the AICPA and First Tee of Utah.



Marquis Newman

**Marquis Newman** BS'15 is the new director of pro scouting for the Utah Jazz. He was previously general manager of the Salt Lake City Stars, the minor-league basketball team affiliated with the Jazz. Newman has worked for the Jazz organization for more than a decade, starting out as a basketball operations assistant.



Abby Funabiki

**Abby Funabiki** MPA'15 is the chief of staff of Techbridge Girls, a nonprofit building equitable systems in STEM education. In her new role, Funabiki leads high-impact initiatives and serves as a strategic thought partner to the CEO. She was previously chief of staff at BootUp, where she helped reach over one million students from backgrounds underrepresented in technology.

**Jess Morrison** JD'15 transitioned from teaching to law, working in Goldman Sachs' compliance division before joining

the U's Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) in 2019. As OEO director, he focuses on addressing discrimination and Title IX issues, streamlining case resolutions, and supporting the university's Impact 2030 goals. Morrison also encourages law students to remain open to evolving career paths.

**John Michael Peterson** BFA'18 is portraying the character Brill in the North American tour of *The Outsiders: A New Musical*. Peterson previously performed in the national tour of *Cinderella*, in shows at The Old Globe and The Muny, and in several with Pioneer Theatre Company, among others. *The Outsiders* is set to run through mid-2026 on stages throughout the country.



Arielle Hassett

**Arielle Hassett** BS'18 BFA'18 is a research and development engineer for neurovascular devices at Stryker Neurovascular and a dancer and performer with Stephen Brown

Dance. Previously, she performed with Fem Dance Company, RDT's Regalia, and Brine, and she has trained with the Joffrey Ballet, Ballet West, Vaganova Ballet, RDT, Ririe-Woodbury, and the Juilliard School.

# '20s

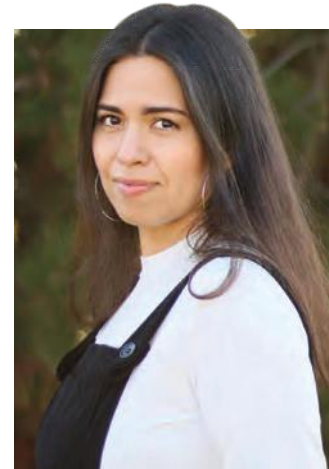
New research led by **Stefania Wilks** MS'21 explores ancient metates and manos used by Native Americans for grinding food in Oregon. Published in *American Antiquity*, the work highlights the long history of processing plants with ground stone tools. Wilks has also done significant work at the Crow Canyon lab in Colorado. Studying ancient plant remains reveals both what people ate and how they adapted to changes in the environment.



Diana Clarke

**Diana Clarke** PhD'22, a native of Aotearoa-New Zealand, is currently an assistant professor of English and creative writing at the University of Canberra, Australia. Clarke is the author of the novels *Thin Girls* and *The Hop*, each, as Roxane Gay writes, an "examination of what it means to be a woman in a body." She has previously been published in prestigious literary journals including *Glimmer Train*, *The Rumpus*, and *Black Warrior Review*.

## SPOTLIGHT



**Dianne Sánchez Shumway** BFA'10 is the director of learning and engagement at the Sun Valley Museum of Art, where she designs and leads immersive programs that foster creativity, inclusivity, and community engagement. At the U, Sánchez Shumway was a research assistant for community-based arts programs, collaborated on mural projects in Salt Lake City, and received grants to develop photography programs for refugee communities in South Salt Lake. When graduating, she was named the Most Outstanding Senior of the College of Fine Arts. Sánchez Shumway now holds a master's in Arts in Education from Harvard and is pursuing a doctorate in Art and Art Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. Raised by Colombian-American parents in Idaho and Florida, she has served as president of the Community Arts Caucus for the National Art Education Association and continues to advocate for the transformative power of the arts.

## SPOTLIGHT



**Nick Pedersen** BFA'05 created the art installation "Here Today / Gone Tomorrow" to inspire hope and action in response to "this immense environmental issue of the Great Salt Lake's decline." Located at 900 South and 900 West in Salt Lake, the pair of street-level billboards offers two futures for the lake (detail from "Gone" above). Pedersen creates hyper-realistic photomontages and says his work "explores environmental issues of the Anthropocene, an age of human impact on the natural world" and "questions the world we are now creating." A native Utahn, Pedersen moved away for about 10 years and says coming back and seeing how much the lake has receded was a shock.



Alex Aguirre

**Alex Aguirre** BS'25 recently spent several months as a marketing intern for the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and hopes to move on to the Indy 500. Aguirre previously worked in game presentation with Real Salt Lake and the Utah Royals. His passion is to make everyone love sports and entertainment as much as he does, creating fantastic memories for fans.



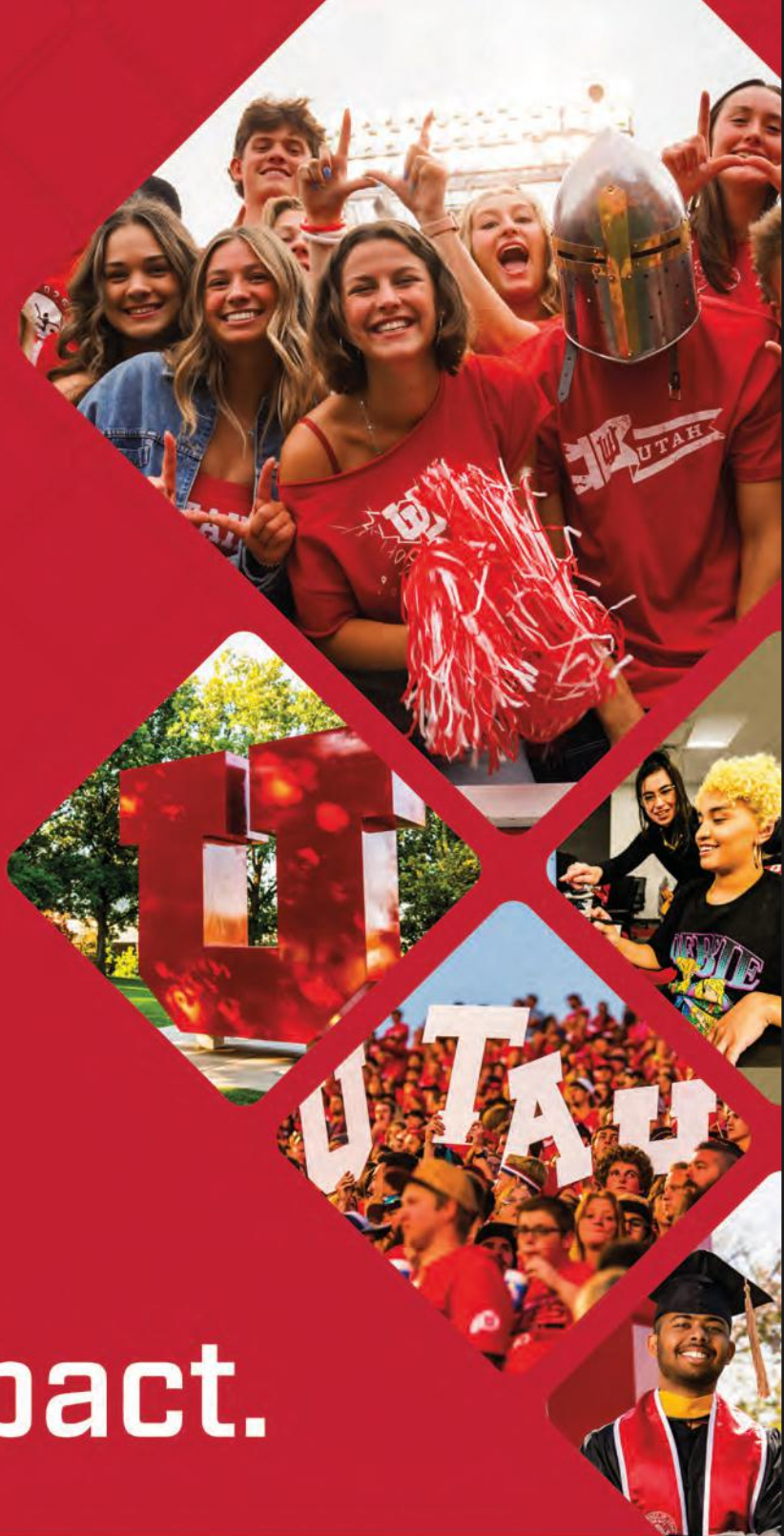
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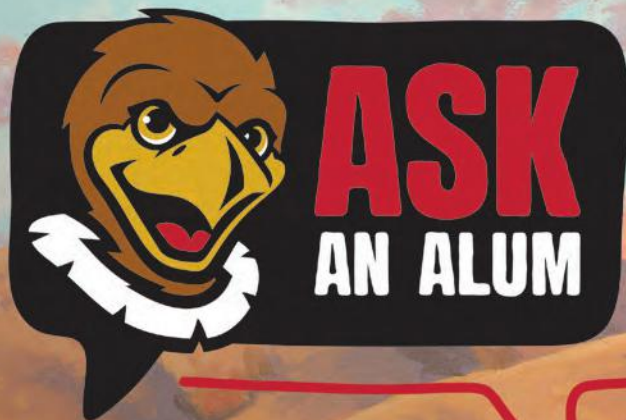


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## KUER Celebrates 65+ Years On Air

When KUER's first broadcast sounded from the basement of Kingsbury Hall more than 65 years ago on June 6, 1960, there wasn't much to suggest that the fledgling student station would be around longer than the school year—or that it would grow into a vibrant, statewide news outlet. But predating NPR by 10 years meant that when the national network launched, KUER was ready for it—and so were its listeners. As one of the network's founding stations, KUER became Utah's haven for thoughtful conversation and local news mixed with jazz and classical music. After moving to an all-talk format in 2015, the station has continued to push into the digital future. Audiences can now listen to KUER on their phones, computers, smart speakers, and, of course, FM. How will people access KUER in another 65 years? Wherever it is, one thing is certain: They will still find insightful discussions that connect them to the world.

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