She'd dreamt of becoming an astrophysicist since the eighth grade. But when doctoral student and single mother India Jackson (B.S. ’11, M.S. ’13) won a prized internship at NASA, she couldn’t afford the move to Houston. Then, the world came to her aid.
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ALUMNI TAILGATE

16 FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION
When doctoral student India Jackson (B.S. ’11, M.S. ’13), couldn’t afford the move to Houston for a coveted internship at NASA, she found her way with a little help from her friends and strangers alike.

22 THE BOLD RETURN
Atlanta’s historic Summerhill neighborhood and its main artery, Georgia Avenue, are in the midst of a renaissance. And it all started when Georgia State bought a Major League Baseball stadium.

28 IN THE GRID
Law professor Samuel Donaldson has published more than 120 crosswords in publications such as The New York Times. See if you can fill out his latest — a special Georgia State-themed puzzle.

COVER PHOTO BY BEN ROLLINS; PHOTO BY CAROLYN RICHARDSON
NEW LEADERS, SAME VISION

As we welcome a new guard of senior leaders, Georgia State gains even more momentum.

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CLASS NOTES

Your classmates are a successful bunch. From mayors and authors to business owners and Georgians of the Year, there are Panther out there doing fantastic things. Get a promotion? A new addition to the family? Go ahead, brag a little. Post your good news and read about your fellow alumni at news.gsu.edu/class-notes. You can share Class Notes through Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

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After a successful career in marketing, Steven Lester (B.V.A. ’75) rediscovered his passion for painting. He’s now one of the most celebrated sports artists in the country.

BY JAC KUNTZ | PHOTO BY STEVEN THACKSTON

On the night of April 8, 1974, Steven Lester was painting in the Art & Design studio on campus when he tuned his radio to hear the Atlanta Braves take on the Los Angeles Dodgers. Lester knew Braves’ slugger Hank Aaron was just one home run away from breaking Babe Ruth’s record, so he put down his paints and made the short walk to Atlanta Stadium in hopes of witnessing baseball history. In the fourth inning, Aaron sent the ball soaring into the left field stands, and Lester took in the moment before heading back to paint through the night. Today, his painting of “Hammerin’ Hank” swatting his 715th career homer is on display in his personal studio.

The United States Sports Academy’s 2019 Sport Artist of the Year, Lester has earned accolades for how he captures athleticism — from baseball to fly fishing — on the canvas. He calls his style “representational expressionism,” and his paintings portray movement in bold colors and with expressive brushwork.

Lester spent most of his career in marketing. He was the creative director for Turner Broadcasting System and a vice president and a creative director for two international advertising agencies.

“I tell people I have been an art professional all of my life, but I’ve just recently become a professional artist,” Lester said. “I used to hire and work with artists and illustrators and think critically about the aesthetic choices. Now, I find myself among them, and I’ve brought all of that experience with me.”

Since re-emerging in the art world just two years ago, he’s produced more than 200 paintings, illustrated two children’s books and shown his work in four states. His painting of a packed Georgia State Stadium hangs in the President’s Suite at the stadium.

In addition, his watercolor painting titled “Upon Further Review” — which features five football referees confering on the field — was recently added to the permanent collection at the American Sport Art Museum and Archives in Birmingham, Ala. — a dream come true, Lester says. He’s also been invited to the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, where he’ll capture the action as it happens as a live-event painter.
After working for several years on international marketing strategy for UPS, Velez was tabbed by Delta to develop the company’s first international social media strategy. To date, Velez has led initiatives to use social media to build the company’s brand across the globe and in 10 different languages.

“At Delta, I get to work in an international, creative and entrepreneurial capacity for a company that is intentional about diversity, inclusion, global commercialization and authenticity,” said Velez. “My job requires me to move quickly and adapt while giving me an opportunity to exercise my entrepreneurial muscles.”

Velez discovered a love for entrepreneurship when she co-founded a dental equipment exporting company shortly after graduating from college. Her experience as a Latina entrepreneur led her to pursue a career working with people in international markets. It also motivated her to apply for Georgia State’s master of international business degree program.

In 2016, Velez founded a division of the Georgia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce called HYPER (Hispanic Young Professionals & Entrepreneurs), which focuses on empowering Georgia’s future business leaders.

“At HYPER, we’re providing multi-cultural, next-generation leaders with much-needed access to professional and community spaces, inviting them to tables they’ve never sat at before, and bringing our Atlanta and Georgia communities together for a common cause,” she said. “It’s been 23 years since Atlanta welcomed Velez and her family to their new home. Her accomplishments in that time — entrepreneur, industry star, community leader — earned her a place among the 2019 class of the Alumni Association’s 40 Under 40, which celebrates Georgia State’s most influential and innovative alumni under 40 years of age.”

Today, the Colombia native and her fiancé, Helio Bernal, are settling into their new home in Atlanta’s Moxley Park neighborhood and preparing to open Bernal’s new Mexican restaurant and bodega, D Boca N Boca, on Georgia Avenue in Summerhill.

Thanks to Georgia State’s strides in sustainability, the university ranked among an elite group of 10 organizations in the nation who have made the best improvements in waste prevention and diversion over the past year. This is the second year in a row Georgia State has been recognized.

The accolades come from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) WasteWise program, which encourages organizations and businesses to achieve sustainability in their practices.

“We’re thrilled to be recognized by the EPA once again,” said Jenni Asman, sustainability program manager at Georgia State. “This university is on the cutting edge of innovative sustainability programs and initiatives because we recognize the importance of conservation and efficiency.”

The work conducted by the 10 winning organizations collectively prevented and diverted more than 356,000 tons of waste from entering landfills and saved the organizations more than $196 million in landfill fees.

DIGITAL DISCUSSIONS

Two new university podcasts spotlight innovations in higher education and research. Georgia State recently debuted two monthly podcasts, “Conversations With Mark Becker” and “The Research Podcast.”

In his podcast, President Mark Becker sits down with visionaries who are shaping the future of higher education. In the first episode, Becker spoke with Tim Renick, the driving force behind Georgia State’s success initiatives and an internationally recognized leader for introducing innovative programs that help students graduate.

Becker has also spoken with Bridget Burns, executive director of the University Innovation Alliance, and with Arizona State University President Michael Crow, chair of the alliance. The goal of the University Innovation Alliance is to help more students gain access to higher education and better educational outcomes. Becker is vice chair.

“[The Research Podcast] highlights interesting and innovative research happening at Georgia State, in areas ranging from astronomy to history to biomedical sciences. The podcast features a different faculty member and a different topic each month. The podcasts are available on iTunes, Google Play, Spotify and SoundCloud.

8,000+

Freshmen enrolled at the Atlanta Campus and Perimeter College for the fall semester — the largest freshman class in Georgia State history.
FOR THE PEOPLE

As a Clarkston, Ga., city councilwoman, Yterenickia “YT” Bell is leading the charge to connect her town government with the residents of America’s most diverse square mile.

BY MATT NIXON PHOTO BY CAROLYN RICHARDSON

T here are no easy days for Yterenickia “YT” Bell (B.S. ’11, M.S.W. ’14, M.P.A. ’16), who works two full-time jobs to advocate for her neighbors and transform political systems.

During business hours, Bell, an honoree of the Alumni Association’s 40 Under 40 class of 2019, runs the Progressive Governance Academy for Re:Power, the Minnesota-based issue advocacy organization.

Then, every night from 4–10, she works for the city of Clarkston, Ga., where she serves on the city council and leads committee meetings, workshops, community assemblies and more.

“I never aspired to be on the front lines of city policymaking,” Bell said. “But I saw firsthand how certain policies and programs failed to address the community’s needs because certain populations simply couldn’t access them.”

Clarkston faces some unique challenges for effectively connecting with its citizens. Known as the “most diverse square mile in the U.S.,” the city was designated a refugee resettlement program in the 1990s. By the next decade, its high school was enrolling students from more than 50 different countries.

Bell’s background in social work gave her special insight into these challenges. For example, when the city council wanted to deny an alcohol sales permit to a new gas station to curb alcohol-related incidents, she knew that strategy was not a solution.

“Many of our people here are immigrants and refugees, and they’ve suffered trauma in dislocation — leaving everything behind, living in a foreign land, not speaking the language, she said. “To truly thrive, a city needs to engage all its citizens and connect them with the social, educational and mental health services they need — not just take away a coping mechanism.”

After declining previous requests to run for city council, Bell entered the race and was elected in 2017. She’s joined by three others from her generational cohort, making Clarkston city council the first millennial majority government in the U.S., according to mayor Ted Terry.

“It’s my goal to get everyone to the table,” she said. “Education can take a long time and a lot of work, but if you’re not meeting people where they are, they’re not going to get the help they need.”

Bell’s days are usually long and frequently demanding, and progress is often slow with incremental success. Nevertheless, her inexhaustible work ethic and passion for people fuel her during those days.

“Who doesn’t want to educate their community and help people grow?” asked Bell. “That’s the reward.”

IN THE FIELDS

Students and graduates provide crucial health care to migrant farmers and their families in southwest Georgia.

Dental hygiene graduates and physical therapy students provided free medical and dental services to about 1,000 migrant laborers and their families at farms in Colquitt, Tift, Cook and Brooks counties this summer.

Partnering with nursing students from Emory University and pharmacy students from the University of Georgia, the Panthers were volunteering for the Farm Worker Family Health Program, a service learning experience organized through the Elenton Farmworker Clinic.

Comprising more than 100 students and clinicians, the group checked for oral cancer, treated muscle and foot injuries, measured blood pressure and glucose levels, and provided antibiotics and over-the-counter medication.

MOVIE MENTOR

TOM LUSE, VETERAN FILM PRODUCER

known for his work as executive producer of “The Walking Dead” for the show’s first nine seasons, joined the Creative Media Industries Institute (CMII) as an artist-in-residence earlier this year.

Working with students and faculty in digital media production, Luse wants to make CMII Atlanta’s showpiece for show business.

“Creative people need to be able to learn how to do things and have access to tools if we’re really going to have a critical mass of media and entertainment production in Atlanta,” said Luse, who’s transitioned to a consultant for “The Walking Dead” so he can make time to pursue other ventures. “CMII can be that place.”

Next fall, he’ll be teaching his own master class where students will be able to meet and work with top film and television professionals.

NEXT GENERATION

New research clusters boost scientific advances in critical fields.

Three new research clusters join Georgia State’s Next Generation Program, which is dedicated to boosting the university’s research and scholarship.

One cluster, “Artificial Intelligence Augmented Systems: Design and Application,” supports the design of artificial intelligence and scholarship that considers its ethical and societal implications.

“Quantum Science, Quantum Materials and Quantum Information” supports capabilities and advances in quantum science, including research in ultrafast optics.

“Shared Vision: A Georgia State Imaging Innovation Hub” brings together existing faculty to explore a range of digital imaging research. With its increasing role in society and research, digital imaging is driving significant advances in nearly every technical field, including astronomy, medicine and security.

5

Consecutive years research funding at Georgia State has topped $100 million

MOVIE MENTOR

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BY WILLIAM INMAN (M.H.P. ’16)  |  PHOTO BY STEVEN THACKSTON

ON HIS FIRST DAY OF CLASS at Georgia State, Dan Ellington got lost. “This place is big,” Ellington said, laughing. “I’d just gotten here from a small town in Mississippi. I was heading back to my dorm after class and ended up at the CNN Center.”

The senior transfer from Itawamba Community College in Fulton, Miss., (population 3,882) has found his way to the Community College in Fulton, Miss., says the players have put behind them. “We know what it feels like to win. It was like to win the Cure Bowl, so we’ve all bought in, and we’re all working harder. Our plan is to get back to a bowl game and win our first Sun Belt Conference title in her first year as head coach.

ELLESTON has also set a lofty goal for himself going into his second campaign as the team’s signal caller. “I want to be the Sun Belt Player of the Year,” he said. “My coaches think I can do it, and that was the first thing [head coach [Shawn]] Elliott and [offensive coordinator Brad] Glenn said after spring ball — that there’s no reason I can’t do it.”

Elliott was a three-star recruit coming out of high school and originally committed to play for conference foe Louisiana-Monroe. He never played a down for the Warhawks, instead opting for junior college where he ranked second in the country in passing yards per game and fifth in touchdown passes. He signed with Georgia State Dec. 16, 2017, the same day the Panthers won their first bowl game. Elliott believes in his quarterback and says Ellington’s leadership is just as valuable to the team as his ability to get yards on the ground and through the air. “To be a good quarterback, you have to be a good leader, and Dan is that for us,” Elliott said. “He really loves to play the game. He really works at it, and he’s always got a smile on his face. We’re thrilled to have him as a leader on our team.”

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THE BIG LEAGUER Pitcher Hunter Gaddis became the highest draft pick in Georgia State’s baseball program history when he was taken in the fifth round by the Cleveland Indians during the 2019 Major League Baseball draft. Gaddis is a two-time All-Sun Belt Conference honoree and three-time Sun Belt Pitcher of the Week. His selection marks the sixth straight year Georgia State has had at least one baseball player drafted.

NEW HEAD COACHES Brad Stromdahl returns to the baseball program as head coach, and Jessica Steward has been named head coach of the women’s golf team.

STROMDAHL was an assistant coach for the Panthers for five seasons before becoming the head coach at Georgia Gwinnett College in 2013. He turned Georgia Gwinnett into a powerhouse in the NAIA and led the team to back-to-back NAIA World Series appearances over the past two seasons. Stromdahl compiled a record of 328-104 in his seven seasons with the Grizzlies.

STEWART comes to Georgia State from Lamar University, where her team won the 2016 Southland Conference Championship title in her first year as head coach.

MENTAL ILLNESS AFFECTS ABOUT ONE IN FIVE ADULTS in the U.S. Yet despite the best efforts of clinicians, research suggests these disorders are frequently misdiagnosed. Ten years ago, The Lancet published a meta-analysis of more than 50,000 patients that found physicians correctly identified depression in their patients less than 50 percent of the time. In a study from the year before, researchers at the Alpert Medical School of Brown University found that 27 percent of adult participants who said they had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder did not actually have the disorder. Part of the problem is there’s still so much about the brain that experts don’t know, including how it’s affected by mental health disorders.

“Scientists have long thought of the brain as a locked black box because it’s so complex and dynamic,” says Vince Calhoun, Distinguished University Professor of Psychology and director of the Center for Translational Research in Neuroimaging and Data Science (TReNDS). “We’re working to remove some of the mystery.”

Working at the intersection of engineering, computer science and neuroscience, Calhoun’s team uses machine learning to pull more and better data from brain imaging scans and create a new picture of what’s happening inside the mind. He has developed algorithms that have strengthened scientists’ understanding of brain function, structure and genomics — and how each is affected by mental or neurological disorders and various tasks.

Earlier this year, Calhoun, who is also a Georgia Research Alliance Eminent Scholar in Brain Health & Image Analysis, received nearly $4 million from the National Institute of Mental Health to develop new models that use data to better predict mental illness.

“Mood and psychosis disorders are incredibly complex and variable, and they’re influenced by a number of interrelated genetic and environmental factors,” Calhoun says. “Two people may have the same diagnosis without sharing symptoms, or they may have the same symptoms with different diagnoses. There is also a growing consensus that we should approach mental illness as a continuum rather than slot patients into all-or-nothing categories.”

By combining brain imaging and genomic data, the researchers will compare the accuracy of two approaches to mental health diagnosis — the standard diagnostic category method, in which clinicians use a checklist of symptoms to assign a diagnosis, and a data-driven method, where experts analyze brain data to determine a diagnosis. They will also evaluate the accuracy of a dimensional approach to diagnosis, which places patients along a spectrum by measuring constructs such as working memory, cognition or emotional reactivity.

“We’re trying to determine which diagnostic approach is best supported by the data as well as which data are most informative,” says Calhoun. “When we answer those questions, we’ll open the gateway to a lot of other insights, too.”
DAVE COHEN CAN EASILY REMEMBER THE FIRST CALL he made for Georgia State — an exhibition game between the men’s basketball team and a Canadian national team at the Cobb County Civic Center in 1983.

“I remember setting up on the concourse of the arena because we couldn’t broadcast from courtside,” Cohen said. “But honestly, I can’t remember who won.”

Forgive the longtime radio announcer for forgetting that particular outcome. Cohen is going into his 37th year as the “Voice of the Panthers” and has called hundreds of basketball and baseball games and every down of Georgia State football. He’s provided the soundtrack for the biggest moments in Georgia State sports — the 1991 win over Arkansas-Little Rock that sent the Panthers to their first NCAA Tournament; Darvin Cooper’s late 4-point play against Wisconsin in the 2001 Big Dance and R.J. Hunter’s 3-pointer to beat Baylor in the first round of the 2015 NCAA Tournament; and Tony Graham’s jump shot in 1984 to beat Arkansas-Little Rock in the Transamerican Athletic Conference tournament.

“I originally tracked down 17 Jewish former major league baseball players. I've also always had an interest in the Jewish players because they recognized...”

“I grow up near Boston, and Kiss never played the old Boston Garden when I was a kid because of the fire code — the band uses a good bit of pyrotechnics. I was a huge fan from the first time I saw them on a record cover back in 1975, but my parents wouldn't take me to see them. So, I had an uncle who lived in New York, and in 1979, he bought me a ticket to see them. On July 24, 1979, I saw KISS for the first time in Madison Square Garden on the Dynasty Tour. In August, I saw them for the 57th time.”

“The Shot.”

You probably know more about the history of Georgia State sports than anyone else. What are some of the best moments from way back when? Well, speaking of calls and the SEC, there’s one call I wish I still had recorded: Tony Graham’s jump shot in 1984 to beat Tennessee in Stokely Arena in Knoxville. Technology was a little different back then, and I would have needed to have a tape recorder rolling to catch it. But that was the program’s first signature win. Going into Tennessee, we were 0-5 and had just lost at Oklahoma and SMU (Southern Methodist University). As you can imagine, we were not favored ... at all. We had never before beaten a Power 5 or SEC team, and that was the first one.

Another big one was when we beat Arkansas-Little Rock in the first one. Another big one was when we beat Arkansas-Little Rock in the Tournament in Madison Square Garden on the Dynasty Tour. In August, I saw them for the 57th time.”

Dave Cohen (B.A. ’94) reflects on his early days in the booth, recalls some of Georgia State’s biggest sports moments and talks about his status as a superfan of the rock band Kiss.

INTERVIEW BY WILLIAM IMAN (M.H.P. ’66) PHOTO BY MEG BUSCEMA
She’d dreamt of becoming an astrophysicist since the eighth grade. But when doctoral student and single mother India Jackson (B.S. ’11, M.S. ’13) won a prized internship at NASA, she couldn’t afford the move to Houston. Then, the world came to her aid.

BY MAYA KROTH | PHOTOS BY BEN ROLLINS
When India Jackson tore open the envelope from NASA on a spring afternoon, she knew she’d arrived at a decisive moment in her career as an astrophysicist. But she didn’t know just how bittersweet it would turn out to be.

Inside was a letter informing the Georgia State doctoral student that she’d been awarded a highly coveted summer internship with the agency’s Space Radiation Analysis Group in Houston, where she’d research how to keep astronauts safe from the deadly radiation of solar flares.

But as she read on, her heart sank. There it was in bold letters: Travel and housing costs are the student’s responsibility.

It was a career-making offer for India, who loves science fiction and sports a tattoo of a mathematical equation on her chest. But as a 32-year-old single mom who’d already taken a huge pay cut to pursue her academic dream, she had no idea how she could afford to accept the internship.

Pay rent in Atlanta was hard enough on her graduate student stipend. How would she manage to afford a second apartment in Houston, plus airfare, a car and 10 weeks of activities for her 12-year-old daughter, Jewel?

“Unfortunately, it was a feeling I’d felt several times before, where opportunities present themselves but require you to have money,” she says. “But this was different. This was NASA. I thought, ‘Let’s try to make the impossible possible.’”

A cousin suggested raising the money on crowdfunding website GoFundMe.com, but India was skeptical anyone would want to give money to a stranger. Her cousin insisted: India was doing something exceptional, and people would see that. So, they posted a link to the fundraiser so they could send more money. “What if something unexpected happened?” they asked. “Wouldn’t it be helpful to have a little buffer?”

People wrote in begging her to reopen the fundraiser so they could send more money. “I didn’t need all the extra money—for what? This is not a cash grab,” explains India, who radiates a disarming charm.

“Having met her goal, she shut it down. Then the floodgates really opened. People wrote in begging her to reopen the fundraiser so they could send more money. ‘What if something unexpected happened?’ they asked. ‘Wouldn’t it be helpful to have a little buffer?’ Her answer was a hard no. Then came the interview requests from international media: BBC News, CNN, The New York Times. ‘People were genuinely shocked that my little girl is different,’” India’s mother Laquanda Jackson (A.A. ’08, B.A. ’08, M.A. ’13) says. “She used to do sentences,” recalls Laquanda Jackson (A.A. ’08, B.A. ’08, M.A. ’13). “She used to do ABCs. I just knew: This little girl is different.”

When India was in third grade, teachers suggested she skip ahead, but Laquanda, a sociologist, thought it would be better for her daughter to stay among kids her own age. By middle school, though, there was no denying India’s talents. “She was doing calculus in the eighth grade,” Laquanda remembers.

That same year, India was selected to participate in an exclusive STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) program at Atlanta’s Fernbank Science Center. It was there, in the planetarium, where India became captivated with the stars, driving her to reach the highest echelons of academic science. However, her journey from Lithonia, Ga., to NASA wasn’t without tension. Frequently caught between her steadfast commitments to both her family and her calling, she has time and again relied on her intuition to make difficult decisions, despite the misgivings of her friends and family.

India’s mother knew there was something special about her daughter from the time she was 2 years old. “She would talk in full, complete sentences,” recalls Laquanda Jackson (A.A. ’08, B.A. ’08, M.A. ’13). “She used to do my older son’s homework. At two, she was adding, doing ABCs. I just knew: This little girl is different.”

India’s talents were adding, doing ABCs. India Jackson was on her way to NASA.

“When you decide to be a scientist, you do it to make history, not to make money.”
“Quitting was not an option.”

This determination is partly what intrigued astronomy professor Piet Martens to sign on as India’s doctoral adviser. “She’s totally different from your average graduate student,” he says. “She’s older, she’s had life experience, she’d already taught college, and she clearly has a passion for math. I thought it would be a great fit.”

Martens works closely with NASA’s Space Radiation Analysis Group, and it was he who suggested India apply for the internship.

“She dares to take risks, she has initiative and she’s curious,” says Martens, who adds that Jackson’s background brings much-needed diversity to an organization that depends on researchers creatively solving problems together. “I’m very motivated to make our field more diverse. It’s better for NASA if there’s more balance.”

By the time the NASA letter arrived, though, India had been walking a lonely road. Friends and family members questioned her decision to swap a teaching salary for a graduate stipend one-third the size. Her car was repossessed, occasionally forcing her to walk to class. An internship at NASA was a sign all the risks could finally pay off.

Still, Laquanda discouraged her daughter from accepting.

“I’m old school,” Laquanda says. “You’re talking about a very traditional African American Christian family, where your family comes first, and you yourself as a career woman come second. I told her, ‘No, you need to focus on your daughter and family, and your career comes later.’”

It wasn’t until India’s story went viral that Laquanda began to realize just how remarkable her daughter’s achievement was.

“Even my in-laws in Pittsburgh were already calling me,” she remembers. “When I saw my daughter’s and granddaughter’s faces on TV, and then ‘Good Morning America’ just happened to mention it, that’s when it hit me: Wow, she’s famous! And doing things! This is amazing.”

Laquanda came around, and she now displays framed printouts of news stories about her daughter around the house. She admires India for having the courage to pursue her goals in the face of adversity – the struggles that come not only with having to convince her reluctant family of the wisdom of her decisions. “She’s independent. She’s fierce,” Laquanda says. “And she’s a really good mother.”

India decided to go back to Georgia State for a good salary. But she soon of graduate school, she to follow her gut. Fresh out the junior year.)

(Jewel arrived during India’s had a young child to raise. “They thought that I was crazy. They’d pull her back to the stars. We’re making good money. Why would you stop what you have going on now?” She tried to explain that everything in trigged astronomy professor Piet Martens to sign on as India’s doctoral adviser. “They agreed. India applied for the internship.

Assigned to NASA’s Space Medicine Operations Division, India conducted research on solar flares and radiation belts, which will be critical in keeping astronauts safe on two important upcoming missions. NASA is gearing up to send astronauts to Mars and launch Project Artemis, which will mark the United States’ first crewed landing on the moon since 1972. Named for Apollo’s twin sister, the mission also aims to land a woman on the moon for the first time in history.

Since she started her internship, India’s had a chance to speak with astronauts, visit the buoyancy lab where they train for zero gravity and attend lectures about the latest findings from the field of space medicine. She hopes the experience might lead to a fellowship with NASA and possibly a permanent job.

As it turns out, that extra $500 India collected from her crowdfunding campaign came in handy after all. About half way through her internship, she started to feel ill. She drove herself to the emergency room, where doctors diagnosed her with uterine fibroids. The bleeding was so bad that she had to undergo three blood transfusions in Houston before traveling back to Atlanta to find her regular doctor.

Once again, her parents urged her to stay home to look after her health, but India was back at work within days. “People believed in me. They gave me money that I had already spent. I worked my whole life for this opportunity,” she says. “Quitting was not an option.”

In some ways, India’s journey to NASA is the epitome of a feel-good story: strangers coming together to make a deserving woman’s dreams come true. But focusing only on her individual experience obscures the systemic obstacles that keep fields like astrophysics so overwhelmingly white and male.

Single moms — anyone who has financial obligations because of the reality of life — should have as much of an opportunity to do physics as anyone else,” Shannon Palus argued for Slate in an op-ed inspired by India’s story. “It’s hard to imagine a world in which GoFundMe’s are consistently filling in the gaps for all of the budding researchers who wouldn’t otherwise be able to float the bill.”

India considers herself lucky to have built a large enough social media following for her crowdfunding campaign to go viral, but she recognizes that’s not a solution for everyone. “It’s tough for the poor to pull themselves out of poverty, and poverty-stricken students of color always have a tougher time,” she says. “For deserving students to take these opportunities, we need to have more community involvement.”

Still, she encourages people like her to find the courage to take risks and follow their destiny – even all the way to NASA. “As a scientist and mathematician, I work off logic most of the time, but for life decisions, I work off intuition,” she says. “Logic works sometimes, but your intuition works every time.”
IN THIRD GRADE, WALTER GRIMES MOVED WITH HIS FAMILY INTO AN APARTMENT COMPLEX IN SUMMERHILL, AN ENCLAVE JUST SOUTH OF DOWNTOWN ATLANTA. It was the 1960s, and like most kids in his primarily African American neighborhood, Grimes would roller skate up and around Georgia Avenue with friends. They’d pick out hot dogs and hamburgers from the glass case at Happy Jack’s grocery store, ice skate at Atlanta Stadium at Christmas and sneak into football games at Cheney Stadium. It was the kind of neighborhood where everyone knew everyone.

The Summerhill Grimes remembers so fondly was like its own little town within a city — self-supported and proud. But as forces changed Atlanta over the decades, the neighborhood grappled with new issues. A number of Georgia Avenue’s once-flourishing businesses closed, and the corridor struggled to attract new attention.

Today, the area is the focus of a massive redevelopment venture that began when Georgia State set out to transform Turner Field into the university’s new football stadium and teamed up with private developers led by Carter USA to breathe new life into the surrounding parking lots and bereft buildings. At the heart of the mixed-use metamorphosis is the Georgia Avenue that anchored Grimes’ childhood. For him and other seasoned Summerhill residents, this main street is memory lane.

Just over two years into the dramatic adaptive-reuse project, the vision for Summerhill’s return to a vibrant, sustainable community is starting to take shape. A handful of the crumbling early 20th-century low-rises lining the main thoroughfare have been rehabilitated by Carter as retail units. The Little Tart Bakeshop has been pouring lattes and plating pastries since January. Next door, Big Softie is filling waffle cones with soft serve and frozen treats while its neighbor, Halfway Crooks Beer, slings cold nudes. Across the street, droves of patrons are piling into Junior’s Pizza for savory pies and Wood’s Chapel BBQ — whose name pays homage to one of the neighborhood’s first churches — for the already-famous smoky brisket and down-home sides.

Nearly a dozen more eateries are on deck to open their doors in the coming months, including Hot Dog Pete’s, Hero Doughnuts, Little Bear (farm-to-table fare), Talat Market (Thai food), Concept (American menu) and D Boca N Boca (Mexican dishes). Joining them soon nearby are Redacted, a cocktail lounge, and a third location of Krystle Rodriguez’s (B.A. ’06) java haunt Hodgepodge Coffeehouse.

Just across from the stadium, Georgia State students have started moving into the apartments at Aspen Heights, whose 220 units opened in time for the start of the fall semester. Under the Georgia State Stadium spotlight, historic Summerhill is beginning its next evolution.

THE OLD NEIGHBORHOOD
For nearly a century, Summerhill thrived on the entrepreneurial spirit of a faithful immigrant and African American population. Freedmen and freedwomen planted roots following the Civil War and created one of the city’s first African American communities. Faith and education were neighborhood fixtures. Wood’s Chapel and Clarke’s Chapel opened for worship services, and the Atlanta Board of Education established the sole public school for Atlanta’s black children. The
Summerhill School became E.P. Johnson Elementary School in 1923. Soon, Jewish, Syrian and Greek immigrants discovered the neighborhood’s charm and opportunities. By the 1920s and 1930s, as mom-and-pop delis, bakeries and grocers from national chains sprouted on Georgia Avenue and adjacent streets, Summerhill was designated a local retail district. With a theater, dry cleaners, barber shop and pharmacy, the neighborhood had nearly everything residents could want or need.

Catherine Robinson (M.Ed. ’97) grew up in a home on the corner of Little and Fraser streets in the 1940s and ’50s. She’s shared her memories with Richard Laupus, a community photo documentarian and author of “There’s Something About Summerhill.” A longtime resident of neighboring Peoplestown, Laupus has degrees in English and international law and politics and recently returned to school at Georgia State to pursue photography.

Robinson says, “At that time, for my family and most of our neighbors, education was everything, except faith was first.” Her mother and father ran a beauty salon and church, respectively, out of the family home. Robinson attended all-black E.P. Johnson, but she went on to become one of the first educators to integrate Atlanta Public Schools in the ’70s.

Like Robinson, a number of Atlantans who would grow up to be famous entertainers and influential city leaders called Summerhill home. Former heavyweight champion boxer Evander Holyfield, singer Gladys Knight, and business mogul Oprah Winfrey all-black E.P. Johnson, but she went on to become one of the first educators to integrate Atlanta Public Schools in the ’70s.

Justina, run the Summerhill Community Outreach ministry. For Davis and Laupus, introducing this storied history into the public consciousness is critical to Summerhill’s rebirth. Together, they’ve developed an exhaustive digital history and such would be the case until the Braves announced a move to the suburbs in 2013.

“At that time, for my family and most of our neighbors, education was everything, except faith was first.”

— Catherine Robinson (M.Ed. ’97)
Although the university doesn’t have a direct hand in the development along Georgia Avenue, deputy general counsel Bharath Parthasarathy, who is responsible for many of the day-to-day aspects of Georgia State’s involvement in the project, says its interest isn’t limited.

“We’re invested in a vibrant, inclusive Georgia Avenue for everyone’s benefit, from neighborhood residents to Panther fans ready for gametimes, guests and tourists, and our faculty, staff and students,” says Parthasarathy.

Meanwhile, Carter has made strides along Georgia Avenue in its large-scale plan to create a safe, friendly mixed-use community with retail, office space and housing — a nod to Summerhill in its heyday.

D Boca N Boca owner Helio Bernal can’t wait to start welcoming customers to his restaurant and bodega on the corner of Fraser Street and Georgia Avenue this December. Bernal and his best friend, Adi Komic (B.A. ’16), who is Boca’s chef, are from Mexico and Bosnia, respectively.

“So many of the original businesses on this street were founded on immigrant entrepreneurial energy, and we’re proud to go back to those roots,” Bernal says.

As a Georgia State graduate, Komic feels an added connection to the space. Looking down from D Boca N Boca’s front door, you can see the new football stadium in all its glory. The view is even better from Aspen Heights, where new residents — the majority of whom are Georgia State students — can essentially tailgate from their apartments.

Soon, they’ll have more neighbors. Carter plans to add a 311-unit apartment complex by 2021 and partnered with Hedgewood Homes to debut 100 multifamily townhomes in the shadows of the stadium by the end of 2019.

The addition of a MARTA bus rapid transit line running from the southern extension of the Atlanta BeltLine up through Capitol Avenue in Summerhill to the North Avenue train station is in the works, too. It would provide a long-missing point of connection to downtown and the Atlanta Campus. The first phase of service is projected for 2025.

Longtime residents like Gloria Woods, who has lived in the same house in Summerhill since 1988, are optimistic about the neighborhood’s reinvention.

“If you’ve got something to contribute to society, to make it better for everyone, come out and share,” says Woods, who opened up to Laupus in “There’s Something About Summerhill.” “Don’t be afraid of people who are coming. Welcome them. That’s how neighborhoods grow.”

Wanda Rasheed, treasurer of the Organized Neighbors of Summerhill, is pleased with the progress.

“I can see the development strengthening the community by bringing us [old and new residents] closer together as we show off the neighborhood and share our pride,” she says.

With neighbors attending football games and other stadium events, Rasheed believes the presence of Georgia State (where two of her children are enrolled) has helped rekindle a community spirit.

The statistics are encouraging, too. Neighborhood crime rates are down, and Georgia State’s applications, enrollment and employment rates are up among residents of Summerhill and other neighborhoods around the stadium. Parthasarathy chalks the results up to a collective effort from Summerhill residents, Georgia State, Carter, the Atlanta Police Department, Atlanta Public Schools and more.

“Georgia State is just one of many players investing in efforts that have led to overall positive gains in and around the stadium and, specifically, for the families and residents in those neighborhoods,” he says.

The profile of the university’s athletics program, headlined by football, has been elevated significantly. With the stadium creating an expansion of the downtown campus, Georgia State’s footprint and economic impact on Atlanta continues to grow.

As Georgia State, Carter and partners wrap up each new phase of construction, Summerhill is evolving by the day. The resilient, historic community is on the cusp of something big, and its implications for Atlanta are even bigger.
The Cruciverbalist

A law professor for most of the day, Samuel Donaldson also turns a trade as a builder of puzzles and often finds ways to cross one with the other.

BY TONY REHAGEN | PHOTOS BY STEVEN THACKSTON
STUDENTS IN SAMUEL DONALDSON’S TAX AND ESTATE LAW CLASSES know to look out for the professor’s puzzles. These brainteasers aren’t part of the weighty essay exams that pupils cram for all night. The answers aren’t checked, nor are the results factored into the semester’s final grades. In fact, these little tests aren’t even traditional pop quizzes at all.

They’re crosswords, laid out in a standard 15-by-15 grid by Donaldson himself. Some of the clues refer back to the curriculum, but others involve more extensive knowledge and trivia. It’s a game, after all. But that’s not to say these little down-and-across exercises don’t serve a purpose.

“I give them as a diversion to keep that flexible part of their minds working,” says Donaldson. “In these puzzles, you can think you have an answer, but you have to be willing to erase and come up with other answers if the first doesn’t fit. Law is all about not being firmly convinced. You have to be willing to see that the answer could be something else. If you’re not willing to erase, you’ll never solve the problem.”

Donaldson’s explanation is a great excuse for him to let his students have a fun little break from their grueling course load. It also neatly illustrates the intersection of Donaldson’s two careers: professor and builder of crossword puzzles.

Another word for the latter (14 letters, starts with “C”) is cruciverbalist, a title Donaldson can include prominently on his resume after penning and publishing more than 120 puzzles in the likes of The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post and his hometown Atlanta Journal-Constitution. Though Donaldson gets paid for his work — at least the submissions that are accepted — he sees himself as an amateur, a hobbyist who spends his few spare hours outside of work laboring over empty boxes and cryptic clues, trying to elicit in others the pure joy of solving a puzzle.

“You want to create something that people see and, at first, are like, ‘What the hell?’” he says. “Ideally, after two or three tries, they figure it out. They have that ‘aha’ moment.”

Pencils Ready

Donaldson’s “aha” moment didn’t come until he was 40 years old. For the first four decades of his life, crosswords were a hobby by that ebbed and flowed in intensity. As a child, he’d wait for his father to return to their Portland, Ore., house after a long day working as a trainmaster for Union Pacific Railroad. His dad would grab both the morning and evening newspapers, sit in his favorite easy chair and fill out the puzzles in pen. Donaldson would crawl up onto his father’s lap and offer suggestions.

The senior Donaldson would simplify the clues for his son and occasionally even cram the boy’s errant answers into the grid just to hearten him until, distracted by the adjacent comics, he’d wander off to let his father finish in peace. Later as a preteen, Donaldson subscribed to a games magazine, but the boxes inside would often go unfilled as the adolescent’s life took over.

But in 2006 — long after Donaldson had graduated from the University of Arizona College of Law, when he was directing the graduate tax program at the University of Washington — he saw a documentary called “Wordplay.” The film is a tribute to all things crossword, including a profile of Will Shortz, the so-called “puzzle master” and editor of the wildly popular New York Times crossword.

There was also footage of the American Crossword Puzzle Tournament, held every year in Stamford, Conn., where box-fillers flocked to compete, indulge and connect. The movie awakened something dormant deep inside of Donaldson.

“It was a beacon that called out to me,” he says. “‘This is your tribe.’”

The following year, Donaldson treated himself to a belated 40th birthday present — a trip to Connecticut and an entry fee for the tournament. He walked into the convention hall and instantly felt at home.

“Crosswords are such a solitary pursuit,” he says. “Some couples might work the Sunday New York Times puzzle over coffee. But most puzzles don’t give way to conversation with the people sitting next to you or across the table. Here were 500 people who appreciate the magic that went into the building of a puzzle.”

The tournament was like a rite of passage. The contestants sat at tables in a large ballroom as the proctors passed out sheets of paper face down in front of them.

“You have 15 minutes,” called the official standing at the front of the room beside a large digital timer. “Ready. Set. Go!”

The command spurred a collective whoosh as hundreds of people simultaneously flipped over their pages. Then a
brief full of complete silence as they read the clues, yielding quickly to the scrit-scrit of graphite scratching paper and the inevitable rub-rub-sweep of erasers. After about two minutes, the first competitors started to get up and turn in their answers. Donaldson was among the many more who took the entire time. Once the scores were tallied, Donaldson finished 492nd out of 700.

Infinitely more valuable than that humbling experience in the tournament was the immediate access to the cruciverbalists in attendance. Finally putting faces and handshakes to the names he had read below the clues in his newspapers, Donaldson found almost all of these masters extremely approachable. When he mentioned he was thinking about creating his own crosswords, they all offered encouragement, and many offered tips, recommendations and even contact information for future advice.

Donaldson came home emboldened and started building. In 2008, he took a sabbatical from the University of Washington. In addition to his law research projects, he began seriously digging into his puzzle construction. His goal was to have a crossword published in The New York Times before his six-month leave was over.

**Grids for Sale**

As with any work of art, a crossword begins with a spark of inspiration. Most puzzles are built around a central theme — either a topic (like “The Wizard of Oz” or 18th-century U.S. presidents) or a format of clues and answers (such as inverted phrases in the form of “BLANK IN THE BLANK,” where “GRASS IN THE SNAKE” might be the answer to “Diagnosis of a stoned viper.”)

“The goal is to come up with something no one has seen in the almost 110-year history of crossword puzzles,” says Donaldson. “And, of course, something that will work.”

That might sound simple, but it’s actually the hardest part of the process. Generally, the theme of a puzzle is built on the longest answers across. And since the grids must have rotational symmetry on the longest answers, they must maintain the same length on the short answers. For instance, if there’s a 15-letter thematic word three rows from the top, there needs to be a 15-letter thematic word three rows from the bottom.

“Even if I come up with a theme, it’s a no-go if I can’t come up with matching-long answers,” says Donaldson. “A lot of it is just really luck.”

But if the gods of down-and-across do smile upon Donaldson, then the real construction begins. He builds the grid and lays out the theme words. Then he fills in the boxes around those long words with short terms and phrases, making sure the nautical letters neatly intersect. Next, he sets to work on the clever, but not too clever, clues.

“If I have to use an obscure European river just to make a puzzle work out, even experienced solvers would raise an eyebrow,” says Donaldson.

The idea is to make the piece simple yet deceptively smart to raise the reader with a structure clean and elegant to the glancing eye — more of a realist painting than a Jackson Pollock.

Donaldson’s early efforts were naturally more abstract — or, as he puts it, “hot garbage.” But gradually, after hours of trial and error, he got some grids to lock into place. His first published puzzle ran in USA Today during his 2008 sabbatical. Next was the New York Sun. Finally, he broke through and got a grid in The New York Times in October of the same year, months after he returned to work. It’s a feat he’s replicated 32 times since.

When he arrived at Georgia State’s College of Law as a professor in 2012, he brought his side gig with him. Each puzzle takes anywhere between one hour and 30, spread out over time. For each one he sells, he estimates about two to three times as many end up on the “Island of Misfit Puzzles.” Of the 200 or so cruciverbalists in the world, only a handful are talented and prolific enough to do it full time.

“For most of us, it’s an avocation, not a vocation,” Donaldson says.

Donaldson is still a passionate consumer of puzzles, which helps him and inspires him in his creation. He spends his 40-minute MARTA commute every morning and evening working crosswords, cratering out three or four finished puzzles each way. He still competes each year in the national tournament. He’s improved his ranking considerably, coming in 56th out of 345 participants last year. He still takes most of the allotted time to chase over his work and make sure he’s confident in most of his answers. Like any true cruciverbalist, he’s not afraid to erase a guess and try again.

**Clue Finder**

Donaldson figures it takes him about two hours to create the grid for a daily puzzle, and another hour or two to write the clues. For a Sunday puzzle, however, it takes about twice as long.

“I spend much more time developing the theme,” he says. “I need to brainstorm all of the possible theme entries and then select the best ones, hoping they are of symmetrical lengths. Sometimes, it takes 10 minutes, and sometimes it takes 10 hours, depending on the idea.”

As for his ability to solve a puzzle, that depends on the day of the week.

“I usually solve Monday puzzles in about four minutes. Saturday puzzles take about 10 to 12 minutes. Sunday-sized puzzles are usually around 15 minutes.”

**PANTHER PRIDE** by Samuel Donaldson

**ACROSS**

1. Lab-mate runners (2 wds.)
2. Underneath
3. Southerly
4. Canyon comeback
5. Rice ___ (“The San Francisco treaty”) (Hyph.)
6. When tripled, “one thing led to another”
7. Acting like a know-it-all
8. Awaits a decision
9. Old TV game systems
10. Powerful threesome
11. Cheers, compared to Corn Flakes
12. People getting all the credit on campus? (2 wds.)
13. Young male, in hip-hop
14. Sahara and Gobi, for two
15. PBS or the Discovery Channel (Abbr.)
16. Village People song often acted out when sung (Abbr.)
17. Mediterranean ___
18. Fleet unit
19. Those with 21 merit badges (2 wds.)
20. “When in Rome, ___ the Romans...” (2 wds.)
21. Award given to “Game of Thrones” at least 38 times
22. Getting loader, on a musical score (Abbr.)
23. Relative acquired at a wedding (Hyph.)
24. Old dramedy series about a large family (3 wds.)
25. Hockey legend Jaromir ___
26. Calendar page period (2 wds. Abbr.)
27. Cole ___ (common BBQ side)
28. Tennis legend and activist Arthur
29. Bowled SeaWorld performer
30. Snake-like swimmers
31.党组成员 (out)
32. ___ Angeles
33. Heavy burden
34. Former obstacle course game show famous for its “Big Balls”
35. Move with a Hula-Hoop
36. Chocolate-covered snack popular in movie theaters
37. Fitbit unit
38. Powerful threesome
39. Award given to “Game of Thrones” at least 38 times
40. Intolerance (condition that drives the discusgreso drinking milk)
41. Menacing
42. “I think about that for a hard pass!” (2 wds.)
43. Desist partner
44. Correct way to turn a ___
45. Shoelace tip
46. Big gambler, in casino-speak
47. How most games are broadcast (2 wds., Abbr.)
48. “Easy A” star Stone
49. Awesome song
50. Direction opposite ENE

**DOWN**

1. One crying foul
2. Best card to have in War
3. “King of Pain” band (2 wds.)
4. Cirque du ___ (group whose “Volta” comes to Atlanta this fall)
5. First aid kit item
6. Units of energy
7. ___ Angeles
8. Heavy burden
9. Former obstacle course game show famous for its “Big Balls”
10. Move with a Hula-Hoop
11. Chocolate-covered snack popular in movie theaters
12. “Much ___ About Nothing”
13. Tavern
14. Sporting tattoos
15. “By Jove!”
16. Fashioned from a ___
17. ___ intolerance (condition that drives the discusreso drinking milk)
18. “Easy A” star Stone
19. Awesome song
20. Direction opposite ENE (Abbr.)

Donaldson created a special crossword puzzle for Georgia State University Magazine. Real Panthers will quickly figure out what goes in the circled squares. If you need a little help or want to check your answers, visit magazine.gsu.edu.
Q: Now that Library Plaza is coming down, I wondered what the place looked like before it was built. What was there?
Submitted by Amanda Beacham (M.Ed. ’01)

A: Parking lots. And lots of cars.

In 1964, Joseph Perrin, head of the Art Department, proposed implementing a plaza concept for an expanding campus that would provide parking for “thousands” of cars underneath while allowing “convenient bridging of streets, pedestrian safety and open uncluttered vistas.” He must’ve been persuasive. In 1966, Georgia State built two buildings on Courtland Street and a new two-story library, which displaced some of the parking. A staircase provided access to the library from ground-level parking. By 1968, the Business Administration building (now Classroom South) across Decatur Street had been completed, and three more stories were being added to the library. Completion of the Classroom Building (now Langdale Hall) accompanied the construction of the first phase of the plaza, linking the new building with the library in 1971. This plaza featured an upper entrance to Kell Hall and a bridge over Decatur Street. Phase two completed the most recent configuration by extending the plaza to Sparks Hall and Courtland Street.

With the upcoming demolition of the plaza, we will be going back to the future — but one that consists of a greenway instead of parking lots.

Do you have a question about Georgia State history? Ask Laurel Bowen, the university archivist. Send an email to archives@gsu.edu or contact @gsu_archives on Twitter or Instagram. We’ll include the top question and answer here in our next issue.