A LIFE WORTH FIGHTING FOR

LAW STUDENT ALLIE ARMBRUSTER (J.D. ’20) fought to overcome a decade of substance abuse that nearly killed her. Now she’s on a mission to transform our legal system’s approach to drug offenders — and save lives.
With financial support of the Burning Bright campaign, the university has:

- Increased scholarship awards by 50 percent
- Awarded 7,200+ micro grants averaging $900 since 2012
- Received $14.5 million from State Farm to create up to 50 scholarships for underserved high school students
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The Phoenix Project is the largest archeological collection ever associated with Atlanta. It tells the city’s story through more than 100,000 unearthed artifacts.

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LETHAL WEAPON 13
University researchers are closer than ever to creating a drug to thwart the Ebola virus.
AS THE CLOCK TICKED DOWN to zero at the 2017 AutoNation Cure Bowl in Orlando, Fla., you could hear chants of “G-S-U, G-S-U,” and the Georgia State football team swarmed its first-year head coach, Shawn Elliott, in celebration.

It was thrilling to watch our players and fans revel in such a milestone for our football team — its first bowl game victory in program history. For me, the indelible moment of the day came during the press conference after the game, when Coach Elliott told the media something that’s stuck with me ever since.

“Georgia State is a very young program,” he said. “There are a lot of programs that took 50–60 years to win their first bowl game. My son is going to be telling his kids one day where he was for that first bowl win.”

He’s right. Georgia State football has been moving at warp speed since we took the field in 2010. We joined the Football Bowl Subdivision level in 2013, earned our first bowl invitation in 2015, and now we’re bowl game winners.

We play football in a stadium that hosted the Olympics, and five former Georgia State student-athletes have played in the National Football League (NFL). Three Panthers were recently signed to NFL teams as free agents, including Chandon Sullivan (B.A. ’17), a first-team Academic All-American defensive back.

Our university has been on a steep trajectory for the past decade, and our athletics program has grown and risen along with it. Panther sports have given us some memorable moments in the spotlight. From “The Shot” — R.J. Hunter’s 30-foot three-pointer to beat No. 3-seed Baylor in the 2015 NCAA basketball tournament — to our first game in Georgia State Stadium, the former Turner Field, people are taking notice of us.

Men’s basketball returned to the NCAA Tournament this March for the second time in four years, and star guard D’Marcus Simonds was named the Sun Belt Conference Player of the Year and an Associated Press All-America Honorable Mention.

The outstanding beach volleyball team, coached by former Panther volleyball star Beth Van Fleet (B.B.A. ’99), has qualified for a pair of national championships in the last three years and could be on the verge again next season. Men’s golf is a perennial powerhouse with four conference titles and eight NCAA Tournament appearances in the last decade, and men’s tennis won the Sun Belt title last year and played in the NCAA tournament.

Most important, our student-athletes are high achievers in the classroom. Georgia State student-athletes posted a 3.16 grade point average (GPA) for the fall 2017 semester, with 222 individuals earning academic honors. The 3.16 GPA marks the 19th consecutive semester, dating back to 2008, that the Panthers have maintained a GPA of 3.0 or higher.

We’re also working to build top-notch facilities for our teams and fans. Plans are in the works for a new 8,000-seat convocation center near the Georgia State Stadium. The state legislature approved $5 million for design funding in the state budget, and the building should be complete by 2021.

Like young Max Elliott, Coach Elliott’s son, we’re all witnesses to a collegiate athletics program on the rise. Someday, down the road, we’ll also reminisce about our first bowl game win. Because there are many more to come.

Sincerely,

Mark P. Becker
President
The first issue of the Georgia State Research Magazine is hot off the press. To read a digital version or subscribe, visit researchmagazine.gsu.edu.

Paul Stephen Benjamin
M.F.A. ’13

Paul Stephen Benjamin took home the prestigious South Arts Southern Prize, which celebrates the finest artistic work in the American South. He was awarded $25,000 and a two-week residence at The Hambridge Center for the Creative Arts and Sciences, one of the first artist communities in the U.S.

Rival Entertainment founder Lucy Lawler-Freas (B.A. ’02) (left) poses for photographer Steven Thackston (right) inside Atlanta’s historic Fox Theatre, where she works as director of programming. Read the exchange between Lawler-Freas and editor William Inman about her rock-star job on p. 14.

A universal vaccine could put an end to the seasonal flu shot. How a project from 1971 changed the field of ape language research forever. Professor Ann-Margaret Esnard is making cities less vulnerable to natural disasters.

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IN THE LAST YEAR, Georgia State diverted 866 tons of material from landfills, enough to pack more than 57 10-wheeler dump trucks to the brim. The mass of that material trumps the tonnage of four full-grown blue whales.

That spared waste includes composted and recovered food, paper, plastic, metal, Styrofoam, furniture, electronics and more. As a result, Georgia State saved almost $20,000 in 2017 and reduced its landfill waste by 31 percent.

That’s just one example of how Georgia State is saving green by going green, says Jennifer Asman, sustainability program manager for the university. “As a state-funded institution, it’s our duty to look at how we’re using our resources and spending our money,” Asman said. “But we shouldn’t think of sustainability as an added thing. We should infuse it into everything we do.”

Five years after creating an Office of Sustainability, the university has positioned itself as a leader in environmental ethics. Now, it’s moving the needle in novel ways.

The university’s waste reduction measures are widespread and well developed. Its single-stream recycling system allows recycling bins on any campus and at Georgia State Stadium to accept various materials, including cardboard, metal, plastic and paper. The stadium houses the university’s recycling center.

Recycling capabilities have expanded to include hard-to-recycle materials, too, such as electronics, wooden pallets, appliances, textiles and clothing, scrap metal, ink and toner cartridges, light bulbs, batteries and more.

The university also recently added several BigBelly and SmartBelly solar-powered trash and recycling bins on campus and around tailgating areas at the stadium. The BigBelly compactor is as small as an ordinary trash can but can hold five times as much. The SmartBelly bin indicates how full it is in real time, which cuts down on unnecessary collections and prevents overflow.
Georgia State purchased an Expanded Polystyrene Densifier last fall to enable Styrofoam recycling across campus. The densifier pulverizes the Styrofoam into miniscule pieces and then melts the waste into molds. In the end, a single scrap of Styrofoam is compacted into 1/90th of its original size, and the environment is spared any pollutants.

Because the densification process significantly cuts down the amount of trash, Georgia State saves money on waste collection and trips to the landfill while reducing emissions from hauler trucks. The molds are then collected by third-party companies for reproduction into other materials such as picture frames. As one of only three colleges in the nation to employ a densifier, the university has curtailed waste and hauling costs, and generated new revenue streams by selling the recycled Styrofoam molds.

Georgia State is flexing its green thumb, too. Since 2016, PantherDining has been growing lettuce and other greens in a hydroponic farming system known as the “Leafy Green Machine.”

The farm is within an upcycled shipping container behind the Piedmont North residence hall. Inside, hydroponics, growing equipment, LED lighting and climate controls cultivate an ideal environment for food growth 365 days a year. As many as 4,500 plants can flourish there while requiring only 10 gallons of water a day. Any unused water gets recycled back into the farm.

Campus eateries have been able to serve farm-to-table fare thanks to the Leafy Green Machine, and Asman has high hopes for the future of hydroponic agriculture on and around campus. “We hope not only to expand urban farming here but also to share our success throughout the community,” she said.

The university’s fleet vehicles and shuttles will soon be powered by biodiesel fuel blended from used cooking oil collected from campus dining halls and retail areas. The fuel blend known as B20, short for “20 percent biodiesel,” is produced from waste cooking oil using solar energy. A renewable clean-diesel energy source, B20 offers plenty of benefits. It’s biodegradable, nontoxic and domestically sourced, and can be used in existing diesel engines without requiring any modifications. Powering vehicles with B20 reduces the output of carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons, sulfates and particulate matter by 10 to 20 percent.

A 12,000-gallon biofuel tank will be installed on campus to collect the oil and blend up the B20.
SIGNATURE MOMENTS

Desron Dorset (M.S. ’11), vice president of business development for the Philadelphia 76ers, trusts the process.

BY MONICA ELLIOTT

The Philadelphia 76ers won 28 games in the 2016–17 NBA season. By the end of the following season, star players Joel Embiid and Ben Simmons had led the team to nearly twice as many victories (52) and into the second round of the NBA playoffs. Dorset couldn't be happier about it.

As the Sixers’ vice president of business development, Dorset helped advance the organization’s business interests across several losing seasons.

So, just like Simmons and Embiid, Dorset has bought into the team’s motto: “Trust the process.” The phrase has become the Sixers’ mantra for all works in progress. Since joining the program’s front office in 2014, Dorset has secured traditional sponsorships and partnerships and also developed deals for creative collaborations. One such venture is the Sixers Innovation Lab Crafted by Kimball, an incubator for early-stage startups housed in the Sixers’ headquarters and training facility in Camden, N.J.

Dorset also oversees the franchise’s merchandising strategy, including relationships with NBA licensees like Nike, and leads sponsorship and tenant acquisitions for the 76ers Fieldhouse — an elite youth training facility that will soon house the Sixers’ G League team, the Delaware Blue Coats, in Wilmington, Del.

Now that the Sixers have made the NBA playoffs for the first time since 2012, Dorset’s job has gotten a lot better.

“I always tell people we have the easy job — especially once the guys on the court are playing well and representing the brand,” he said. “It’s just up to us to accentuate it.”
Just a year into his thirties, Dorset has been named to Georgia State’s 40 Under 40 class of 2018. It’s a group of the university’s most influential and innovative alumni under 40 years of age.

When asked what he loves most about his job, Dorset cites Philadelphia’s passionate fan base and the chance he’s had to inspire community youth.

His office’s outreach efforts include basketball camps and the Sixers Youth Foundation, a program committed to keeping children 14 years old and younger on successful paths.

“I always tell people we have the easy job — especially once the guys on the court are playing well and representing the brand. It’s just up to us accentuate it.”

“Even if it’s as simple as giving a kid his first Sixers T-shirt or introducing him to his favorite Sixers player, those moments, which I call ‘signature moments,’ really make me think we’re doing something special here,” he said.

One of those signature moments materialized amid a Sixers losing streak, when the team took on their slogan. But Dorset says “Trust the process” was never a marketing strategy. “It’s actually not our marketing tagline by any means,” he said. “For us, it’s something that we believe belongs to the fans. Our actual marketing tagline is, ‘Welcome to the moment.’

“I think people have been waiting for this moment awhile.”

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**WELCOME SITE**

*The university will build a new Convocation Center near Georgia State Stadium.*

Georgia State has acquired more real estate. The property at the northwest corner of Fulton Street and Capitol Avenue, just north of Georgia State Stadium, is the latest addition to the university’s growing footprint. The University System of Georgia Board of Regents voted Jan. 11 to transfer the plot from the Georgia Building Authority to Georgia State.

The university has chosen the site to be the home of its new Convocation Center, an 8,000-seat facility that will host Georgia State’s commencement, concerts, conferences and other large events.

The Convocation Center will also become the home court for Panthers basketball games — a huge boon for Athletics because the Sports Arena can only accommodate 3,854 guests, said Ramesh Vakamudi, vice president for facilities management services.

“The proposed facility will provide much-needed relief to other campus buildings,” Vakamudi said.

Gov. Nathan Deal recently signed off on a $5 million bond to fund the building’s design. The building should be complete in two or three years.

**RED-CARPET READY**

*Three GSUTV programs earned nominations at this year’s Southeast Emmy Awards.*

For the second year in a row, Georgia State University TV (GSUTV) will vie for glory at the Southeast Emmy Awards. Three of its programs, produced by students and staff at Georgia State, have been nominated for Emmys.

GSUTV and Georgia Public Broadcasting have teamed up to cover the past three Shuler Hensley Awards shows, which are held each April to spotlight excellence in high school musical theater throughout Georgia. Now, the duo is up for its second Emmy nomination in as many years.

In “Addicted: The Opioid Epidemic,” which ran as part of GSUTV’s “Special Edition” series, host Savannah Pratt (B.A. ‘18) — who has already won two Southeast Emmy awards for production and editing — leads viewers into the lives of recovering addicts around Georgia.

With gritty, compelling storytelling, the piece is an Emmy contender in the Documentary Topical category.

“Remembering Vietnam” is nominated in the News Special category. The Georgia State team exclusively developed and produced this documentary special, which includes accounts of the war from the perspectives of veterans, anti-war activists and Vietnamese-Americans who were driven out of their homes.
ADVANCING DEGREES

New center helps Georgia State students and alumni take the next academic step.

Georgia State is expanding its focus on student success to include graduate and professional degree programs. Through its new Center for the Advancement of Students and Alumni (CASA), the university is helping students from underrepresented populations enter advanced degree programs that will lead to academic and professional careers.

“We are working to support our strong, driven and diverse students progress into Ph.D. programs, medical schools and law schools around the nation,” said Lisa Armistead, associate provost for graduate programs.

CASA and the Office of Graduate Programs are developing an early identification system to analyze data and determine predictors of progressing to and through advanced degree programs.

These efforts will enable a more diverse student body to enter the graduate pipeline and address the lack of diversity among higher education faculty.

SHARE YOUR ROAD

Georgia State joins “Roadtrip Nation” for a trip across the Peach State.

Three Georgia State seniors recently embarked on a seven-day road trip across Georgia for the public television documentary series “Roadtrip Nation.”

During the expedition, they met with a few Georgia State alumni to interview them about their career paths. They talked to Nick Carse (J.D. ’08), founder of King of Pops; Kat Cole (MBA ’10), president of FOCUS Brands, which operates Schlotzsky’s, Moe’s Southwest Grill and other national chains; and Jessica Walden (B.A. ’00), co-founder of Rock Candy Tours in Macon, Ga., and a candidate for the Georgia House of Representatives District 144. The show premieres this fall.

In addition, the show’s producers have created an online community called “Share Your Road” where Georgia State alumni can connect with fellow and future Panthers. To see what your classmates have accomplished since turning the tassel, and to share your own journey, visit GeorgiaState.ShareYourRoad.com.

CONGRATS, GRADS

More than 2,500 undergraduates walked across the stage this spring at the first commencement held at Georgia State Stadium. Well, almost. During the College of Arts & Sciences ceremony Thursday, May 10, the threat of lightning hastened the festivities, and it was canceled before the new graduates’ names were called.

A recognition ceremony was scheduled for May 20 at the Sports Arena, and 351 — including journalism major Larry Johnson (below, center) — properly tossed their caps.

Johnson first enrolled at Georgia State in 1969, but marriage and a career interrupted his studies. He came back a few years ago after learning about the GSU-62 program, which waives tuition for students over the age of 62. During the ceremony, Dean Sara Rosen recognized him for his perseverance.

“My goal was to graduate before I reached 100 years of age. I made it with 33 years to spare.”

— Larry Johnson (B.A. ’17)
Early in the morning on July 27, 1996, a terrorist’s bomb exploded in Centennial Olympic Park during Atlanta’s Summer Olympic Games. The bomb, which killed two and injured 111, detonated despite the largest peacetime security operation in U.S. history.

It was a galvanizing moment for Robert Friedmann, who emigrated to Israel from Romania as a youth and watched as 11 of his countrymen were taken hostage and killed during the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich.

In 1990, shortly after news broke that Atlanta would host the Olympics, Friedmann, then a criminology professor and the chair of the Criminal Justice Department, began a push to enhance security at the games.

“I was concerned about public safety,” he said. “I was thinking about Munich in ’72. What could we do to keep something like that from happening again?”

Friedmann is an expert in community policing, a law enforcement strategy where officers work proactively in a specific area to foster better relationships with citizens and reduce crime. In the early 1990s, he was asked to bring senior Israeli Police officers to Georgia to brief them on constitutional and civil rights after they received a high percentage of justified complaints about excessive force.

“I then thought it made sense to take officers from Georgia to Israel to learn from their counterterrorism experts,” he said.

That exchange was the first of many he facilitated to assist with security efforts for the Olympic Games.

“We had the bomb,” Friedmann said. “We had that experience and learned from it, and people want to learn from us.”

The organization he founded, the Georgia International Law Enforcement Exchange (GILEE), has since provided public safety information and best practices to the law enforcement agencies of six other Olympic host cities.

Now in its 26th year, GILEE has formed into a much larger joint project with the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies and local, state, federal and international agencies. Its goal is to provide peer-to-peer professional training to improve security and enhance public safety.

Over the years, more than 1,500 police executives from more than 25 countries have participated in GILEE’s programs and exchanges, and GILEE has briefed more than 32,000 security and law enforcement officials on public safety concerns.

In 2008, GILEE became the only non-law-enforcement entity to receive the Georgia Governor’s Public Safety Award, and Gov. Nathan Deal was the keynote speaker at GILEE’s 25th anniversary gala last November.

For those in charge of security for events such as the 2012 Summer Olympics in London and the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, GILEE’s experience has proved invaluable — there hasn’t been another Olympic bombing since 1996.

“The lessons we learned during [the GILEE] exchange were essential for us to build better security planning for a successful Olympics in Rio,” said Col. Eduardo Duarte Dos Santos, general commander of the State Military Police of Rio de Janeiro.
COACH HILL
Former North Carolina State assistant coach Gene Hill is Georgia State’s new women’s basketball coach. With a track record full of wins, Hill helped lead the Wolfpack to three NCAA Tournament appearances in his five seasons in Raleigh.

He also coached at Georgia Tech 2009–12, leading the Yellow Jackets to four consecutive trips to the NCAA Tournament, including the program’s first Sweet 16 appearance in 2012.

“Hill is a proven coach and recruiter who knows Atlanta and what it takes to build a winning program,” said Charlie Cobb, director of athletics.

“I couldn’t be more excited to have the opportunity to lead Georgia State women’s basketball into the future and to join the Georgia State family,” Hill said.

GOING PRO
Three Georgia State football players signed free agent contracts with NFL teams in April and are in rookie training camps.

Chandon Sullivan (B.A. ’17) signed with the Philadelphia Eagles, B.J. Clay signed with the Los Angeles Chargers and Mackendy Cheridor (B.S. ’17) signed with his hometown team, the Atlanta Falcons. If they make NFL rosters, they will join four other Panthers in the league: Albert Wilson of the Miami Dolphins, Wil Lutz (B.S. ’15) of the New Orleans Saints, Ulrick John of the New England Patriots and Robert Davis (B.S. ’17) of the Washington Redskins.

Their teammate, Julien Laurent, is heading north to play in the Canadian Football League (CFL). He was picked seventh overall by the British Columbia Lions and would become the only Panther in the CFL.

ON TOP OF THEIR GAME
Kylie Ruffule (B.S. ’17) (left) and Sarah Agnew (B.S. ’17), winners of the top two student awards for graduating seniors, finish stellar collegiate careers in sports and in the classroom.

BY TORIE ROBINETTE | PHOTO BY STEVEN THACKSTON

No strangers to accolades, star student-athletes and Honors College graduates Sarah Agnew and Kylie Ruffule added the most important awards to their respective trophy cases at the spring commencement held at Georgia State Stadium.

Agnew accepted the Nell Hamilton Trotter Award, which recognizes the university’s highest level of student leadership — a quality she exemplified as captain of the women’s beach volleyball team, a member of WomenLead, and an ambassador for the Honors College and The 1913 Society.

Ruffule is the winner of the prestigious Kell Award, given to the graduating senior with the highest scholastic average for all coursework taken at the university.

Agnew was key to the young beach volleyball program’s success. She was Georgia State’s 2016–17 Academic Most Valuable Player, won the Student Athlete-Inspiration Award and represented the team on the Student-Athletic Advisory Committee.

Off the sand, Agnew fell in love with her coursework in the Kinesiology & Health Department. As of this summer, she’s back in class at Georgia State, pursuing her doctor of physical therapy degree.

“I’m so glad I’ll get to be a Panther in Atlanta for a few more years,” she said.

Like Agnew, Ruffule’s hallmark college moments came in the heat of competition, across campus and in lecture halls.

The four-year midfielder for the women’s soccer team never missed a match and was president of the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee. When her final soccer season wrapped up, she walked on to the women’s softball team.

But because she was determined to pursue a career in federal law enforcement, Ruffule devoted equal focus to her academic schedule.

It was a balancing act that earned her an array of accolades, including a place on Georgia State’s All-Academic Team for women’s soccer, the Commissioner’s List for the Sun Belt Conference and the 2017 College Sports Information Directors of America All-District Division I Women’s Soccer Team.

“Being a student and an athlete at Georgia State has meant the world to me,” she said.

Defensive back Chandon Sullivan.
ON CAMPUS / RESEARCH

THE HUNT FOR AN EBOLA DRUG

Georgia State scientists have identified a chemical compound that may work against the lethal virus.

BY JENNIFER RAINEY MARQUEZ | ILLUSTRATION BY REID SCHULZ (B.F.A. ’18)

IN DECEMBER 2013, a 2-year-old boy in a small village in Guinea fell ill and died. Days later, his 3-year-old sister and their pregnant mother followed. That was the beginning of the largest Ebola outbreak in recorded history, during which the virus spread rapidly across West Africa, killing more than 11,000 people in two years.

Since then, scientists have been working to create what would be the first vaccine or treatment for the virus to be approved by the Food & Drug Administration. At Georgia State, professor and renowned virologist Chris Basler and his colleagues are trying to uncover how filoviruses, including Ebola, replicate while evading the body’s immune system.

“By the time the immune response finally kicks in, the virus has replicated so fast you can’t fight it off,” said Priya Luthra, assistant professor in the Institute for Biomedical Sciences and a researcher in Basler’s lab. “And that’s when the disease takes hold.”

Luthra and others in the Basler lab screened a library of 200,000 small molecule compounds to find potential inhibitors of Ebola RNA synthesis, identifying 56 that impeded virus activity while showing limited toxicity to human cells. Of those 56, three were particularly potent against the Ebola virus, and one — benzoquinoline — also showed antiviral activity against other viruses, including the deadly Marburg virus and the Zika virus. The findings were published in the journal Antiviral Research this past March.

“Identifying the compounds is part of a broader scientific effort to better understand how the Ebola virus grows and to use this information to develop new treatment strategies,” Basler said.

The compound could eventually become an ingredient in a drug aimed at Ebola, but Luthra cautions there’s still a lot of work to be done.

“We need to learn more about how the compound actually works and then evaluate how a person’s genes may affect individual responses to the drug,” she said.

Researchers are also still searching for other molecules that may work against the virus.

“The search never stops,” Luthra said. “The goal is to find a drug that could be given prophylactically during the virus’s incubation period as well as a drug that could be given therapeutically after symptoms begin — and also a vaccine. You want all these things so clinicians have a full toolkit to use.”

100

Hours per year
of volunteering
— about two hours a week — can reduce early level disability, according to a new Georgia State study

TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER

Georgia State has signed a licensing deal with Pinnacle Bio, a biotechnology firm, to market a point-of-care influenza diagnostic developed by Suri Iyer, professor in the Department of Chemistry and the Center for Diagnostics & Therapeutics.

Many methods of diagnosing influenza aren’t sensitive enough and require trained personnel to administer. However, Iyer and his colleagues have designed an accurate test that can detect influenza viruses in 15 minutes using only a nasal swab. Pinnacle has developed a reader for the test, and the company hopes to begin trials in Europe in the next six months.

BETTER CARE

The Gerontology Institute has received $1.6 million from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and the State of Georgia’s Department of Human Resources in a push to improve nursing homes and their staff in Georgia.

“We need to learn more about how the compound actually works and then evaluate how a person’s genes may affect individual responses to the drug,” she said.

Researchers are also still searching for other molecules that may work against the virus.

“The search never stops,” Luthra said. “The goal is to find a drug that could be given prophylactically during the virus’s incubation period as well as a drug that could be given therapeutically after symptoms begin — and also a vaccine. You want all these things so clinicians have a full toolkit to use.”
Veteran concert promoter Lucy Lawler-Freas (B.A. ’02), director of programming at the Fox Theatre and founder of Rival Entertainment, brought the Foo Fighters to Georgia State Stadium.

INTERVIEW BY WILLIAM INMAN (M.H.P. ’16)

HOURS BEFORE THE CURTAIN PULLED ON THE FIRST CONCERT
she booked at the Fox Theatre, Lucy Lawler-Freas walked alone into the empty auditorium and wept.

“Every time you go in there, you’re just in awe,” she said. “And I stood there and cried. It was so overwhelming to know that I did it, for myself.”

That performance by the Pixies in fall 2004, the first of two sold-out shows at the Fox during the seminal alt-rockers’ legendary reunion tour, was when Lawler-Freas triumphantly planted a flag in Atlanta’s music promotion scene.

She worked her way up from a show runner — the person who drives performers and crew around — to start her own concert promotion outfit, Rival Entertainment.

Since then, Rival has booked some of Atlanta’s biggest and most memorable concerts and festivals — Lady Gaga at the Fox in 2009, OutKast at Centennial Olympic Park in 2014 and Prince at the Fox in 2017, his last performance.

In October 2015, she booked 10-time Grammy Award–winners and hard rock troubadours the Foo Fighters to play before a sellout crowd of more than 21,000 at Centennial Olympic Park. So, when the band began to plan its tour in support of its latest record, “Concrete and Gold,” they called Lawler-Frears. This time, she booked them in a new venue — Georgia State Stadium.

Lawler-Freas discusses becoming one of Atlanta’s top music promoters, landing her dream job as director of programming at the Fox and booking the Foo Fighters to perform at her alma mater.
“Johnny Cash was — by far — the coolest person on the planet. André 3000 from OutKast is also a wonderful person and nice guy. Dave Grohl from the Foo Fighters is as cool as you’d think.”
Treasures of Terminus

From its days as a railroad boomtown to Sherman's tinderbox to one of America’s great cities, Atlanta's history runs deep. The Phoenix Project, more than 100,000 artifacts collected by a team of Georgia State archaeologists in the late 1970s, tells the city's story through unearthed historical objects.

BY SHAUN RAVIV | PHOTOS BY CAROLYN RICHARDSON

Catalog No.: p1848/170

Swamp Root Kidney, Liver and Bladder Cure, c. 1890, manufactured by Dr. Kilmer & Co., Binghampton, N.Y.
There is buried treasure at Georgia State University. Stacked high and deep in more than 500 boxes stashed throughout the labyrinths of Kell Hall, more than 100,000 artifacts tell the story of Atlanta’s history.

These boxes contain the lost pieces of a tumultuous past that dates to the city’s earliest days — bullet casings from the Civil War, mystery tonics in antique glass bottles, creepy toys, fashion accessories, ancient grooming tools and much more. Many of them still await examination and haven’t been opened since archaeologists first packed them four decades ago.

This massive array of objects is called the Phoenix Project, and Georgia State professors and students have been methodically studying, cataloging and mapping each item since 2011.

Collected all over the city between 1976 and 1980, the objects belong to the largest archeological collection ever associated with Atlanta. They are the fruit of one of America’s earliest urban archaeological projects — the roving excavation that followed construction crews as the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) cleared land, leveled blocks and tunneled underground to build the first iteration of its rail system.

**BEET JUICE, DEMONIC DOLLS**

Jeffrey Glover, associate professor of anthropology, has curated the Phoenix Project for years in hopes of providing the public with a different kind of city history, a slice of Atlanta’s past through the lens of historical objects.

Choosing one box among hundreds, Glover removes a small amber bottle that once held Valentine’s Meat Juice, a concentrated beef tonic from the 1870s. Advertisements said it could help with gastroenteritis, dysentery and even cholera.

“It was supposed to bring vitality,” Glover says, “like an early energy drink.”

From another box, he takes out the misshapen head of a porcelain doll. Featuring dark, empty eye sockets and covered in burn marks, the scary toy looks hungry for souls. While Glover affectionately calls it the “creepy doll head,” its official artifact ID is "a3161," written in impeccable script with archival ink across its neck.

That’s because the archaeologists who bagged all this stuff in the 1970s methodically described and organized each item using a numbering system adapted from the Georgia Department of Transportation. For example, the “a” in “a3161” stands for “general artifact” while the number indicates the item was the 3,161st general artifact to be cataloged from that accession. (And there are about 100 accessions.) Containers, such as glass and pottery, begin with “p,” and building materials with “m.” Plant remains use “eb” for “ethnobotanical” while animal bones start with “ez” for “ethnozoological.”

Just one of the standard cardboard bankers boxes can contain dozens, if not hundreds, of artifacts, each wrapped in brown paper and labeled with a unique artifact ID. Though they’ve all been recorded in a logbook alongside a one-line description, unwrapping each one is like opening a birthday present because you don’t know exactly what you’ll get.

“It’s an excavation of boxes,” says Lori Thompson (M.A. ’16), assistant laboratory director at New South Associates. Thompson wrote her master’s thesis on the Phoenix Project and now comes in one day a month to help with its modernization. “You have stuff on paper and expect something to be in a box, but it can be a completely different story once you open it.”

**A CITY IN ASHES**

History can be hard to come by in a city like Atlanta. Where people are usually too busy building new things to preserve the past, a collection like the Phoenix Project becomes priceless.

With roots that stretch back to the 1830s, Atlanta began with little design or forethought as a sleepy settlement at the end of Georgia’s Western & Atlantic Railroad. Down on the far side of the tracks, it picked up the name “Terminus” and later incorporated as Atlanta in 1847.

Anchored by nothing more than a milepost and a railroad crossing, it quickly sprouted into a boosterish, slapdash town of factories, taverns and tenements in neighborhoods with names like Slabtown and Snake Nation. But after just 17 years, the entire city burned to the ground during the Civil War.

It has continuously reinvented itself ever since, evolving from a dense trolley town to a sprawling metropolis of interstates and high rises. Now the heart of the nation’s 10th largest metropolitan area, it has often been willing to raze historic structures and even entire districts to make way for new developments.

But thanks to a Georgia State project from the 1970s, that pattern was broken — at least for a moment.

By the 1960s, a century after Union forces torched every block, the population had grown large enough that a rapid transit system became necessary. MARTA was established in 1965.

Around the same time, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 was signed into law, requiring projects with federal funding to take into consideration their impact on historic or archaeological sites. According to Glover, the act created the industry of “cultural resource management” in the U.S.

A few years later, the Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act became law in 1974, which obligated agencies that received federal funding to preserve historical and archeological data that might otherwise get lost or destroyed.
ARTIFACTS UNEARTHED

Catalog No.: a548/133

Catalog No.: p413/171
Glass iodine tincture bottle, c. 1900-1920

Catalog No.: a3182/170
Porcelain doll head, c. 1900, made in Germany

Catalog No.: a82/173
Bullets from Battle of Atlanta, 1864; Union Army Williams Cleaner bullet (right)
The Phoenix Project contains more than 100,000 artifacts once buried beneath Atlanta.

Catalog No.: a56/152
Capitola flour token, five cents, Atlanta Milling Co., c. 1930

Catalog No.: a64/174
Brass makeup compact

Catalog No.: a1/172
Medallion, District Grand Lodge No. 18, Grand United Order of Odd Fellows in America, Auburn Avenue

Catalog No.: a3168/170
Kaolin clay pipe, c. 1890, manufactured by Duncan McDougall, Scotland

Catalog No.: a83/173
Pewter canteen, c. 1860

Catalog No.: a25/122
Capitola flour token, five cents, Atlanta Milling Co., c. 1900
The construction of MARTA was one of the first major urban projects to take advantage of the two preservation acts, giving archaeologists the opportunity to survey and excavate miles of Atlanta dirt, rich with buried relics, for the first time.

Built where homes, taverns and dumps once stood, where Confederates and Federals once waged war, the MARTA lines would start at the city’s center near Five Points. From there, they’d run in the four cardinal directions to follow the paths set by the early railroads that spawned Terminus.

Tasked with completing 13.7 miles of heavy rail and opening 17 stations by 1980, MARTA broke ground and started laying track in February 1975, a year after the agency demolished the first house in the train’s path. Under pressure from the new federal legislation, MARTA contracted with Georgia State in 1976 to conduct archaeological surveys during the demolition and construction phases.

Led by Roy Dickens (B.A. ’63), an associate professor of anthropology, a team of archaeologists, student assistants and volunteers spent the next five years salvaging and collecting as many items as they could before MARTA displaced them forever.

**HARD HATS AND RUBBER GLOVES**
Dickens’ goal was not only to preserve Atlanta history but also, as he wrote in the journal *Historical Archaeology*, to understand the development of American city life.

The field of urban archaeology in America was in its infancy when construction began, so Dickens and his team had to create their own procedures for collecting, excavating, preserving and cataloging the items they found. Dickens had also spent his career up to that point concentrating on prehistoric archaeology, so the project was even more unfamiliar.

Working with engineers and construction workers, the team inspected every area affected by the first phase of MARTA construction. MARTA had mapped its future rail corridors and divided them into areas called Construction Contact Units (CCUs), which ranged from about 50,000 to 100,000 square meters. Each CCU was then further divided into parcels of about 1,000 to 2,000 square meters.

Using these maps, two or more members of the survey team would walk side by side at two-meter intervals through each sub-parcel, picking up and bagging everything they found. Sometimes this meant walking behind heavy machinery as it dug up the earth or combing an area just after old structures had been demolished. After inspecting the surface, the team used shovels, augers, and even metal detectors and backhoes to uncover items they may have missed.

The rapid pace of MARTA’s construction posed many challenges for the team, which kept detailed field notes that have been preserved as part of the Phoenix Project. As Thompson describes in her master’s thesis, the notes show how the archaeologists had to hop back and forth from one location to another, dealing with different engineers and contractors at each site, and excavate sites that had just been revealed after large earthmoving equipment had completely altered the landscape.

In one example, the notes from July 1, 1977, describe how the archaeologists excavating a single CCU near East Lake had to work on a site owned by Georgia Power alongside rerouted traffic on the recently opened Dekalb Avenue, under a bridge and by a new water main.

As the team collected items — such as the creepy doll head, which was found beneath a viaduct along MARTA’s West Line — they brought them back to Kell Hall, where they washed, sorted, counted, labeled and cataloged each one with the date and location of its discovery.

Some items received special treatment to prevent damage. Bones and shells got soaked in detergent and acetone. Iron and steel were cleaned with manganese phospholene and treated with clear acrylic. Paper got dry brushed, soaked in a magnesium bicarbonate solution and air dried before treated with fungicide.

The exact number of items collected is still unknown, but between 1976 and 1980 more than 100,000 were cataloged, wrapped in brown paper and placed into site-specific bankers boxes. While Glover and his team have fully reprocessed more than 20 percent of the artifacts, about half of them have never left their boxes.

**RESCUED OUT OF OBSCURITY**
The boxes didn’t stay at Georgia State for long, however. In 1982, Dickens took a position at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He brought most of the documentation related to the MARTA collection with him, and the boxes soon followed.

While Dickens continued to analyze the items in Chapel Hill, he died in 1986 at the age of 48. An obituary said his dedication to archaeology in the American Southeast was “unwavering.” In 2000, the 500-odd boxes of artifacts, field notes and laboratory records were moved to the Georgia Museum of Natural History at the University of Georgia in Athens, where they were mostly ignored for years.

Not long after Glover arrived at Georgia State in 2006, he heard about the MARTA collection from colleagues, including former geology professor Kenneth Terrell, who had worked at the university in the early 1980s when the artifacts were being processed.

“I recognized there was a great opportunity and, in some ways, an ethical obligation to try to use this collection for research,” Glover says. “There is a problem in archaeology where legacy collections sit neglected in storage and never receive the type of research they deserve.”

Much of Glover’s archaeological work has taken place in Mexico, where he studies ancient Maya communities. But when he comes home, the Maya antiquities stay in storage at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He brought most of the documentation related to the MARTA collection with him, and the boxes soon followed.

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The new lab will greatly facilitate our work on the collection, but so much remains to be done,” Glover says. “Our goal is to uncover and share the stories these artifacts tell about the history and development of the Southeast’s largest city, but we need support from the Atlanta and university communities to do that effectively. New resources will allow us to continue our work, fund more graduate students and acquire the supplies we need to move forward.”

Though Glover's students have been helping, the project could still take years to complete. But he and his colleagues share a dream that, once everything is digitized, residents, neighbors, students and scholars spanning a host of disciplines — from Atlanta and beyond — will have easy access to the invaluable collection and the painstaking work of its researchers and curators.

A bottle from Jacobs' Pharmacy, bullets shot during the Battle of Atlanta, the creepy doll head, a flour token and 100,000 more gems mined from the earth under our feet — these are rare clues to the wild history of a sleepy town called Terminus that grew into a leading global city.

Given Kell Hall's imminent demolition, the collection will be relocated to a new archaeology lab in Dahlberg Hall this summer, where the valuable work of reprocessing the items will continue.
Law student Allie Armbruster (J.D. ’20) fought back to overcome paralyzing addictions that claimed more than a decade of her life. Now she wants to draw from her experience in the criminal justice system to reform our approach to drug offenders.
She woke up to the steely eyes of a German Shepherd police dog glaring at her through the passenger side window of her boyfriend’s car.

Minutes before, Allie Armbruster (J.D. ’20) had plunged a needle into a vein and pulled a pinch of blood into the barrel of a syringe. After it mingled with the solution of heroin she had just cooked up in the car, she pushed it back in, watching the murky maroon fluid disappear beneath her skin. Within seconds, the drug shot through her heart to her brain, and the rush knocked her out.

Someone called the cops after seeing the young couple slumped over in a parked car on a midtown Atlanta street in the middle of the day. But before police could restrain her, Allie grabbed her stash of Xanax, a popular prescription tranquilizer that enhances the effects of other substances. As the dog barked and the cops began to raid the car, she slammed about a dozen maximum-strength, immediate-release pills down her throat.

The cops were about to haul her over to Fulton County’s Rice Street jail for the second time in as many weeks when they realized she needed a trip to the hospital first.

Steeped in a potent cocktail of pills and opioids, she blacked out and has no memories of the next three days, including her hospitalization and bail hearing. She’s heard about what happened from others, though — a dazed and disheveled heap shuffling into the courtroom, eyes leaden and glassy, hair entangled in a knot behind her head, mumbledropping and mouthing off to the judge.

This was her fourth of five felony possession arrests, all stemming from the same problem: the inveterate disease of addiction that handcuffs, jail cells and rap sheets have rarely, if ever, cured.
My dad stuck with me through all of this. He never gave up on me.

Stereotypical narratives for addiction often focus on society’s less privileged: people from low-income, high-need communities with little to no education and long family histories of mental illness. But that’s not the whole story.

“Addiction can happen to anyone,” Allie says. “These drugs are so powerful. You can be the smartest person on the planet or the best looking or the richest or whatever, but they will take you down — and quickly. I had everything. It just doesn’t matter.”

Now a first-year law student with a merit scholarship and nearly three years clean, Allie lost everything, too, and clawed her way back from a life most of us can’t even imagine.

Nevertheless, she refuses to take credit for her incredible recovery. She says she’s studying law at Georgia State, and not doing time in prison, because of the people who supported her and gave her repeated opportunities to turn her life around — chances most addicts never get.

Allie grew up in Vinings, the wealthy south Cobb borough just inside the Perimeter, and went to high school at Pace Academy, one of the city’s most elite private institutions. Her father, Kevin, is a successful business attorney and a partner at a prominent Atlanta law firm with offices that overlook downtown from the 45th floor of a Peachtree Street skyscraper. Her mother, Belinda, stayed home to raise Allie and her siblings.

“I had a great childhood,” she says. “I have nothing to complain about.”

Absent poverty, a broken home and many of the other factors typically associated with drug abuse, Allie still found burdens and stressors in other places. Nerdy, awkward and skinny in high school, she struggled with her confidence under the strain of a high-achieving environment.

“When you grow up in that kind of setting, there can be a lot of pressure to be successful,” she says. “It’s sort of the flipside to growing up with a whole lot of privilege.”

To complicate things, the guy who most encouraged her to achieve was the same person she revered above everyone else: her dad.

“I wanted to be my dad when I was a kid,” she recalls. “I just adored him. He was my hero. But he also set a hard example to follow. He avoided saying so, but I knew deep down he wanted me to go to Princeton like he did. He coached my soccer and basketball teams. He stressed the importance of grades. I thought my performance in school and sports would determine my whole life. I constantly compared myself to other people and always felt I wasn’t good enough.”

Despite these doubts and fears, she shined through her junior year at Pace, where she discovered a love for literature, played varsity soccer and became the captain of the debate team. Her interests fit a career goal she’d been chasing since her earliest days: to follow her dad into the legal profession.

But a year and a half away from graduation, she started drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana when she discovered they calmed her anxieties and made her feel more comfortable in her own skin. While surveys of high school seniors in the U.S. show that about 33 percent use alcohol and about 23 percent use marijuana, Allie admits she indulged in them more than most.

“I already had an unhealthy relationship with substances — even then,” she says. “I thought they were fixing me emotionally and helping me to be social. I was already relying on them.”

Even though she still graduated cum laude from Pace, she had ramped up her drug use throughout her senior year, adding cocaine to her shortlist of preferred chemicals. As her apprehensions dissipated, so did her passions and ambitions. She changed all her friends. She stopped caring about grades and soccer and lost interest in debate.

“I think people knew what was going on,” she says. “I didn’t know they knew. But they knew.”

Growing more and more concerned for their daughter, Allie’s parents kept her on a short leash. They sent her to a therapist and a treatment program, but their efforts only put her drug use on a brief hold.

“I’ve always been a perfectionist to a huge fault — where failure scares me so much I don’t even want to do stuff,” she says. “But drugs allowed me to stop caring about being successful or perfect, and that was a huge relief. It was like a built-in excuse for not having to deal with myself anymore.”

And yet, she still made it to Princeton. There, instead of getting away from the habits she cultivated in Atlanta and experiencing all Princeton had to offer, she found some like-minded comrades with the same appetites.

“I didn’t see I had a problem because I rationalized that everybody else was doing it, too — and in my circle, they were,” she says. “It’s just that everybody else stopped, and I couldn’t.”

“But that’s how addiction works. It sneaks up on you. All of a sudden, you realize, ‘Oh, I’m addicted,’ and you can’t even figure out how that could have happened because none of the steps leading up to it seemed like a problem. And then it’s too late.”

While she initially performed well at Princeton, she stopped attending class by the end of her junior year, and her grades tanked. Her addictions spiraling out of control, she fell into a deep depression. Then, with just seven classes left, she dropped out and made the long drive back to Atlanta.

A return to her old haunts. A steady grind of drink, smoke and blow. To keep her busy, a job with a roofing company, which she soon lost. To keep her company, a boy, who introduced her to heroin. A new habit of speedballing, the off-lethal intravenous delivery of heroin and cocaine together — each drug complementing the other in an endless loop that has claimed countless lives. Eight years lost in the rubble of arrests, overdoses, jails and clinics.

Between 2008 and 2015, Allie overdosed four times, each requiring an emergency trip to the hospital to save her life. She got locked up six times, once for shoplifting to support her habit and the rest for possession. She did seven stints in rehab and saw the inside of nearly every halfway house in Atlanta.

“I was a crazy person, a sociopath,” she says. “There was no soul left. I was dead — not living, just existing.”

She hit rock bottom repeatedly, each time worse than the last. Her dad, Kevin, grew
terrified of her and the company she kept. Her mom and stepdad bought a shotgun.

“Those years were a rollercoaster of hope, despair, worries and sleepless nights,” Kevin remembers. “You end up doing things that are totally against your moral compass,” Allie says. “The stuff I did to keep this habit going — that’s not how I grew up and I don’t think it’s OK, but I was somehow able to justify it in my addiction. I never had any money. I had to steal all the time. Living like that sucks. It’s shameful and creates so much regret. It was hard to get past and come to terms with — the terrible stuff I did, the kind of person I was.”

And yet, it could have been so much worse. After her first felony possession arrest, her boyfriend took the blame, and the Cherokee County Sheriff’s Office dropped the charges and let her go. The boyfriend later died from an overdose, joining a tragic company of victims from Allie’s former life.

“All this death — it’s insane, and the worst part is I’m almost getting used to it,” she says. “Every time another person dies, I can’t help but think how it so easily could have been me.”

After another bust, Allie walked into her arraignment expecting a nasty sentence when the solicitor announced he was dropping the charges because of an illegal search. She got off with a pretrial diversion program following another arrest and first-offender probation another time after that — her run-in with the German Shepherd — despite her deranged behavior in the courtroom and the fact it was actually her fourth felony possession arrest.

Both sentences “dead docket” the cases, essentially suspending prosecution and releasing defendants from custody as long as they participate in supervision, go to treatment and stay out of trouble.

But in Allie’s case, it didn’t work out that way. No sooner had she walked out of jail on first-offender probation than she immediately drove back to the same midtown dealer and overdosed in her car. She had minutes to live when a fellow addict broke into her vehicle and used her phone to call for help. With paramedics coming to save her life, he ran off to pawn the phone — and then, months down the road, saw her again outside a familiar doorway.

“You’re Allie Armbruster. I saved your life,” he told her. It turns out they both shopped at the same dealer.

And then it happened: another felony arrest, this time in Cherokee County. With no lawyer and no one to bail her out — Kevin decided to stop bonding her out of jail after her first arrest — she earned a felony conviction and four months in the county lockup.

There, she detoxed in jail for the sixth and last time. Her fellow inmates watched her curl up into a ball and writhe around on the ground — arms clamped across her stomach, knees scraping against the concrete — and throw up in a metal toilet.

“I was in jail a long time — Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year’s,” she recalls. “When my parents came to see me, we had to talk on the telephone through a plexiglass window. It was hard on them.”

Kevin never missed a visit, though, and came to see her every week for four straight months. He mailed her books to keep her productive and occupied, too.

“My dad stuck with me through all of this,” Allie says. “He never gave up on me.”

Her parents’ decision to let Allie stay locked up played no small part in her recovery. “Jail sounds hard, but it was easier than what we had all been living through for a long time,” Kevin says. “As strange as this may sound, I slept soundly for the first time in a long time knowing Allie was detoxed and safe.”

While conflicted about the idea of treating a public health crisis with police and penitentiaries, she realizes her time in jail gave her four months of forced abstinence from a drug that was quickly killing her. But for many opioid addicts, getting clean in jail is a death sentence. Once they’re released, they often return to their routine doses even though their time on the inside reset their tolerance. Many die within just two weeks of regaining their freedom.
“I think there’s a huge problem with punishing people who have a disease instead of giving them the option to get help,” she says. “That being said, going to jail for those four months got me off of heroin. In some instances, you have to separate addicts from their substance long enough for them to make up their mind they want treatment. I had to be locked up to get off heroin. I couldn’t do it by myself.”

She walked out of jail sober but not cured. Her parents made her get on Vivitrol, a medication that blocks the body’s opioid receptors, preventing addicts from getting high and helping them stay clean. She didn’t touch heroin for two years but soon returned to a steady diet of alcohol, Xanax, marijuana and cocaine.

After another trip to rehab, she curtailed those habits, too. But then, after months of sobriety, she thought she could safely go out for a drink, hoping her problems were behind her. She woke up at Piedmont Hospital days later following the worst overdose of her life.

“The person who called the ambulance said I was blue and foaming at the mouth, and the nurse at the hospital told me I was very lucky to be alive,” she recalls. “I have no idea how long I was out, but when I came out of it, I told myself, ‘I’m done, I’m so f–ing done. Either I’m going to get my life together, or I’m going to die.”

GONE A DECADE

While she’d made some progress and sustained brief periods of sobriety, nothing had been able to pull her fully out of the throes of addiction.

All that changed, however, when she started going to Alcholics Anonymous (A.A.) meetings in October 2015. She got a sponsor. She worked through the 12 steps. She started practicing yoga, mindfulness and meditation.

“It’s just a straight-up miracle I’m still alive,” she says. “I have no other way to explain how I ended up getting sober because, of my own accord, I would have used heroin until I died.”

She enrolled at Oglethorpe University in 2015 and graduated summa cum laude two years later with a degree in English. Returning to a project she had started at Princeton, she wrote her undergraduate thesis on the collapse of the American Beat movement, which she attributed to the writers’ unsustainable reliance on drugs as a shortcut to the self-awareness and “beatific experiences” they sought to find.

“Going back to school was so crucial to my sobriety because it gave me something to be proud of again,” she says.

Sound, sober and with a degree in tow, she could finally return to her childhood dream, the courtroom. But to do that, she’d have to stare down her past again — all of it.

Law schools tend to vet their future lawyers for legal troubles. With every application, she had to include her seven-page rap sheet and address her criminal history in her personal statement.

“Sending out those law school applications was one of the scariest moments I’ve had in sobriety,” she says. “They don’t have a whole lot of felons who come through law school.”

While other law schools waitlisted the girl with a 3.92 grade point average, stellar LSAT scores and a long criminal record, Georgia State was willing to take a chance on her.

The university didn’t just let her in, though. They also awarded her a Catherine C. Henson Law Scholarship, good for $1,500 a year until she graduates.

The subject can make her emotional — and for good reason.

“I love this school,” she says, eyes welling and voice cracking. “I don’t have to hide from my past anymore, and that’s been the biggest relief of my life.”

Unsurprisingly, she’s done nothing but excel. She just wrapped up her first year in May and earned the highest grade in Timothy Lytton’s torts class last fall. A Distinguished University Professor and the associate dean for research and faculty development at the College of Law, Lytton thinks Allie has a lot to offer.

“Allie’s struggle to recover from addiction has given her knowledge, wisdom and extraordinary resilience,” says Lytton. “She’s got our strong support. We’re already proud of her.”

LIFE AND DEATH

Despite her longstanding desire to practice law, Allie didn’t know exactly what she wanted to accomplish with her career until going through recovery.

That hard work — doing the steps in A.A., getting sober, learning how to be an adult and reintegrating with society — led her to find purpose in her calling. Informed by her scrapes with judges and jails as a down-and-out addict, she wants to become a criminal defense litigator who can work to transform the prevailing mindset about addiction — and save lives.

“I feel like I’m in an amazing position because I’ll be able to talk to lawmakers and authorities as both a lawyer and an addict in recovery,” Allie says. “This is personal for me because I was given a lot of chances most addicts never get and was ultimately able to get treatment and turn my life around. I want other people like me who suffer from addiction to have the chance to do what I’m doing. That’s why I want to be a lawyer.”

Determined to be part of the solution no matter what, Allie has found allies among Georgia State Law alumni, such as Shawn Ellen LaGrua (J.D. ’87), a Fulton County Superior Court judge who founded a novel probation program called “My Journey Matters.” Providing supervision, counseling, job training and education in lieu of incarceration, LaGrua intervenes in the lives of young offenders to steer them away from crime and shepherd them through the process of becoming productive members of society.

Introduced to Allie by another Georgia State Law alum, LaGrua found her story inspiring and asked her to speak to a packed courtroom of My Journey Matters participants, mostly minors.

Though she had little time to prepare, Allie was ready to address LaGrua’s court before she approached the bench. Because, even as she was finishing up a rigorous first year of law school, Allie had returned to Pace Academy just weeks before to deliver a 45-minute speech to the entire high school: 450 students plus teachers, administrators and more.

It was her idea, but she still had misgivings.

“I speak pretty frequently, but talking to teenagers is still the scariest thing,” she says. “I’m just about the lamest person ever to come tell them to be sober. But I think it went really well.”

Sara Eden, a counselor at Pace, can confirm — partly because of the standing ovation and partly because of how many students came up to her afterwards to say how deeply Allie’s address had affected them.

“We’ve had dozens of don’t do drugs assemblies here, many of them given by former addicts, but this one struck a chord,” Eden says. “The auditorium was completely silent. The students hung on every word.”

Her testimony moved someone else in the audience, too: a friend of Pace named Tom Johnson, the former CEO of CNN and publisher of the Los Angeles Times, who’s active in the fight against addiction.

“It was the most powerful speech I’ve ever heard, and that is no exaggeration,” says Johnson. “Many people were wiping tears from their eyes as she told her story. I sure was.”
Allie got off probation in February 2017. She has two years of law school left. She’ll be able to apply for a pardon to expunge her felony convictions and restore her civil rights around the same time she takes the bar exam.

When she sits for that test, she won’t just have a solid law education to rely on. She’ll be able to draw from, once again, those invaluable skills her recovery has taught her: communication, collaboration, persistence, accountability, self-awareness. Every time she uses them to clear another hurdle, she’s reminded why she’s doing all this — because few, if any, have ever picked up those qualities in a jail cell.

“My recovery allowed me to build character,” she says, “and more people need the opportunity to go through that experience, too — in the hope that, given the chance to recover, they won’t go back to prison or die.”

Given her intellect and diligence, her biggest challenge probably won’t be passing the written portion of the exam. Rather, it’ll be clearing the State Bar of Georgia’s Character and Fitness Committee, which will evaluate and investigate every aspect of her life to make sure she’s still sober and is who she claims to be. Even though she’s come so far, there’s still no guarantee she’ll make the cut.

She’s been expecting this. As soon as she made the commitment to get clean nearly three years ago, Allie started taking frequent, voluntary drug tests so she’d have a thick file of maintained sobriety to present to anyone who question ever arise.

“When you set up voluntary drug tests for yourself, you’re creating a system that will catch you and alert others if you relapse,” she explains. “I’m terrified of relapsing. If I don’t stay sober, I will lose everything, and I’ll probably die. These are pretty high stakes for me.”

For Allie, the hardest part of law school isn’t the heavy workload. It’s balancing those arduous classes with her equally demanding and time-consuming commitment to stay sober. Bolstered by the people who saw her through when she was at her worst, however, she’s up for the challenge.

“If I ever feel discombobulated or like my life is in total upheaval, I know I have people who helped me before and will do it again,” she says. “I know my support system is in place, I know it’s going to work and I know I’m going to be OK.”

Few people could ever brave such a crucible and then find a way to draw inspiration from it. Tom Johnson sees that, too.

“I so admire those at Georgia State who reviewed her record, saw her extraordinary potential and accepted her,” he says. “Not many law schools would have the courage and wisdom to admit a person with Allie’s past mistakes. I predict she’ll influence thousands in a positive and constructive way.”

As she hoists her enormous black backpack bulging with books and heads off to study, contracts and civil procedure aren’t the only things on her mind.

She’s also thinking about how far her path will take her — the lives at stake, the systems that have to change, the law school scholarship she hopes to fund one day for addicts in recovery like herself.

“Being here — this is what I’ve always wanted, but I thought I’d lost the ability to do it when I was getting high and going to jail,” she says. “I’m so happy to be back.”
Georgia State’s World Heritage Initiative is working to create global recognition for significant sites associated with the Civil Rights Movement. By nominating places such as Little Rock Central High School and the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Park for permanent designation on the prestigious World Heritage List, the scholars will elevate the sites of the American freedom struggle to the same international level as the historic center of Rome and Stonehenge.

BY CHARLES MCNAIR

The Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Park

Atlanta
Encompassing the civil rights leader’s birth home, the church where he was pastor – Ebenezer Baptist Church – and his grave site, the 70-acre park is also home to the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change and the Sweet Auburn Historic District.

Mourners fill Auburn Avenue on April 9, 1968, during the funeral service for Martin Luther King Jr. at Ebenezer Baptist Church.

Photo courtesy of Atlanta Journal-Constitution Photographic Archives. Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library
The World Heritage Initiative project aims to nominate historic sites that were important to the Civil Rights Movement for permanent designation on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) World Heritage List.

If successful, the initiative would elevate landmarks of the American freedom struggle — places like Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala., and Central High School in Little Rock, Ark. — to the same international status as the Great Wall of China, Stonehenge and the Grand Canyon.

The global community deems these sites as essential to humankind — places of inspiration for the world to cherish, respect and share.

“Inscription on the World Heritage List is a first step toward safeguarding sites where the Civil Rights Movement took
Eskew grew up in Birmingham, Ala., dubbed “Bombingham” for the exploitive violence leveled there last century at blacks seeking to end segregation. His life’s work has been an exploration of the roots and fruits of the freedom struggle. He grew up among the churches, parks and buildings that held the crucible of change that transformed our nation.

About a decade ago, he consulted with the State of Alabama to protect several churches that were vital to the movement. His connections with that work led to a significant grant in 2016 by the Alabama Department of Tourism for the World Heritage Initiative work at Georgia State.

With a deep bench of scholars and other experts, Eskew’s team looks into historic sites designated by the National Park Service, listed on the National Register of Historic Places and more. The initiative primarily limits its scope to the 1950s and 1960s, the decades most critical to the movement for justice.

The work of examining and evaluating scores of locations associated with the Civil Rights Movement is monumental, of course. And monumentally challenging.

In April 2017, the World Heritage Initiative team hosted a World Heritage and U.S. Civil Rights Sites Symposium at Georgia State. More than 100 experts converged to share ideas and hear the goals of the initiative. Attendees there first learned of the designation of the U.S. Civil Rights Trail, rich with potential heritage sites, among other announcements.

Around the same time, Eskew, Farrisee and Laub drove through 13 states – 12,000 miles in all – making stops in dozens of towns to examine the first 80 or so properties.

It won’t be an easy, or fast, task. There are 1,073 places worldwide that have earned the World Heritage Sites designation. The U.S. has just 23 of them. Joining a list like this entails a lot of homework, planning and focus.

**Edmund Pettus Bridge**

*National Historic Landmark*  
*Selma, Ala.*

The Edmund Pettus Bridge, named for a Confederate brigadier general, former U.S. Senator and a Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, was the site of one of the most violent moments of the Civil Rights era. On March 7, 1965 – a day that came to be known as “Bloody Sunday” – more than 600 voting rights activists en route to the Alabama state capitol in Montgomery were met by local lawmen who beat and tear-gassed them, chasing them back across the bridge.

Coretta Scott King, widow of Martin Luther King Jr., and Civil Rights leader John Lewis (center, in vest) cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge in 1975, commemorating a decade since the brutal events of Bloody Sunday. 

*AP photo*
WITH A LIFELONG CAREER IN PRESERVATION, Laub believes the World Heritage Initiative stands out. "In the last two or three years, we have seen much more focus on the preservation of historic civil rights sites and their marketing to the public," Laub says. "Until recently, mainly the African-American community was involved in preserving some of these places. But it's now become a much more universal approach as awareness of the Civil Rights Movement grows."

Eskew knows the bar is set high. "It's daunting, but it should be," he says. "We'll do our best to show why our nominations deserve the World Heritage Site designation. It seems very bureaucratic, but we're talking about joining the

THERE'S A WORLD OF MEANING in the fact that Georgia State is leading an effort to establish new World Heritage Sites. It's an appropriate role for a major university in Atlanta, says Umoja. "This city is not only the birthplace of Dr. King but also of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee," he says of two more prominent players in the Civil Rights Movement. "Atlanta had a leadership role in the struggle for freedom, and now Georgia State has a leadership role in preserving that story."

Anne Farrisee agrees. "This brings the work of Georgia State to the world stage," she says. "World Heritage designation is the highest possible recognition for places, and international visitors look for World Heritage Sites when they go to different countries. This would put the sites of the Civil Rights struggle on the same level as Machu Picchu or Bruges."

Farrisee manages the exhaustive task of wrangling details such as organizing site visits and scholarly meetings, and keeping schedules and arranging other logistics for the team. "The fact Georgia State was selected for this work means we have the right components in place to do large, complex, important projects," Farrisee says. "It means our funders recognize our scholarship and think we're a worthy investment."

The project has also brought in a lot of funding and meaningful work for graduate students. One of those young researchers, Caitlin Mee, will step into the workforce later this year as a cultural resources manager. "This project has really expanded my understanding of civil rights history," Mee says. "My experience working with the team has been intrinsically valuable and will be in the future, too."

Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site
Little Rock, Ark.
The 1957 desegregation of the all-white Little Rock Central High School by nine African-American students was the flashpoint of the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education U.S. Supreme Court decision that racial segregation in public education was unconstitutional.

The students, who became known as the Little Rock Nine, were initially denied entry by the Arkansas National Guard under the order of Arkansas Gov. Orval Faubus. President Dwight D. Eisenhower sent troops of the 101st Airborne Division of the U.S. Army to enforce the court order and escort the students into the school.

AP photo
stands around it, a tiny hamlet at the edge of the fields. I stood there and realized just how isolated that site was and how vulnerable African-Americans were in the Delta in those times.

“You can read about the event a hundred times but standing where it happened has such an emotional impact. It’s not a place that often made international headlines, but so much of the struggle happened there. You stand there, and you’re moved to tears.”

Bryant’s Grocery may not be one of the dozen or so Civil Rights Movement sites ultimately selected for World Heritage Site designation.

Still, nearly all of them, with their stories and stains, can move the world to tears.

Charles McNair publishes nationally and internationally. The author of two novels, “Pickett’s Charge” and “Land O’ Goshen,” McNair was books editor at Paste Magazine between 2005 and 2015. He lives in Bogota, Colombia.
The motto, “Veritas Valet et Vincet” (“Great is the truth, and it shall prevail”) appears for the first time on the university’s coat of arms. The coat of arms was created Sept. 20, 1968, and recorded in the College of Arms in London to celebrate Georgia State College’s anticipated approval for university status. A faculty committee developed the design and picked the motto. University System of Georgia Chancellor George L. Simpson made the formal request to create the coat of arms with approval from Georgia’s governor. The Board of Regents voted to grant university status Sept. 10, 1969.

The original document displaying the coat of arms is perhaps the most important artifact in University Archives. Its image is incorporated into the university’s official seal, which appears on each graduate’s diploma.

Do you have a question about Georgia State history? Ask Laurel Bowen, university archivist. Send an email to archives@gsu.edu or contact @gsu_archives on Twitter or Instagram. We’ll include a few of the top questions and answers here in our next issue.
Nominations for the Alumni Association's 40 Under 40 Class of 2019 open this fall.

Learn about the Class of 2018 and future nominations at pantheralumni.com/40under40.

Adebola Akinola-Aguda (B.S. ’15)
Robotics and Process Automation Consultant
Ernst & Young
and an inaugural 40 Under 40 Class of 2018 Honoree

KNOW A STANDOUT GRADUATE WHO’S UNDER 40?

Nominations for the Alumni Association’s 40 Under 40 Class of 2019 open this fall.

Learn about the Class of 2018 and future nominations at pantheralumni.com/40under40.
GEORGIA STATE

AUGUST
KENNESAW STATE VS 30
Kенная STATE AT 08
MEMPHIS AT 14
WMU VS 22
ULM VS 29

SEPTEMBER
NC STATE AT 08
*ARKANSAS STATE VS 18
*COASTAL CAROLINA AT 27

OCTOBER
*TROY AT 04

NOVEMBER
*TEXAS STATE AT 03
*LOUISIANA AT 10
*APPALACHIAN STATE AT 17
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