Seriously Funny

Why Sara Ferguson thinks you should put your money where your mouth is

What makes leaving Jerusalem and coming to the College one of Linda Gradstein’s biggest accomplishments

Tim Fennell explains why his multiple brushes with fame are really just a laughing matter
**GARDENER’S PICK**

**TEA PLANT, CAMELLIA SINENSIS**

**ON CAMPUS:** Located on the south side of the Erckmann House, 9 College Way, just inside the passageway from Green Way.

**DESCRIPTION:** This dense, evergreen shrub is known mostly for the various teas harvested from its leaves and leaf buds. This plant is currently used to produce both black and green teas and exists in over 320 varieties on the 127-acre grounds of Wadmalaw Island’s Charleston Tea Plantation, where it is cultivated to make American Classic Tea, the only tea grown in America. This elegant plant is underrated in landscapes, however, where its dark, leathery leaves and rounded form provide yearlong interest, and its flowers’ dainty, white petals and yellow brush-like stamens add beauty and fragrance in mid-fall–early winter.

**TIPS:** Perfect for hedges, foundations and borders, the tea plant thrives in morning sun/afternoon shade and in moist but well-drained, sandy soil. Upon planting, layer 2–4” of mulch to help soil retain its moisture. Thoroughly water new plants once a week during its first season; do not let the soil dry out between waterings. Prune after flowering to encourage new growth and remove dead or weak wood.

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**WORD ON THE BRICKS**

**What are you working on right now?**

“I’m currently working on finalizing all the plans for the inaugural Diversity at CofC Week. Months of planning and coordinating, and it’s almost here! I’m also planning for spring 2011 programs for the campus community.”

*Deronda Corbin, Program Coordinator*

*Office of Institutional Diversity*

“I am upgrading the College’s reporting solution – IBM Cognos – to its latest version, which will provide better functionality, browser support and customer experience. As always, I am looking into ways to provide a better customer experience and more enjoyable and beneficial learning processes for all of our students.”

*Alex Alexandrov, Systems Administrator*

*IT Infrastructure Services*

“I’m very busy working on the third installment for bills being paid. We’re adjusting to the new system right now, too – finding flaws and correcting them, and reassuring parents and students that we’re doing everything we can to take care of them.”

*Deidra Jones, Accounting Technician*

*Treasurer’s Office*

▲ Work continues in the Cistern Yard. New underground roof drains have been connected to the Cistern, most of the new brick pavers are in place and new landscape lighting, underground wiring and irrigation piping have been installed. The fresh sod installed in the yard will be ready for foot traffic soon, but must remain off limits until all construction is complete (estimated for Dec. 6), when the final landscaping will also be done.
REPORTING FROM CHARLESTON

SHE HAS COVERED TERRORIST ATTACKS, assassinations, the intifada, Hamas in Gaza, the Persian Gulf War – yet when this veteran National Public Radio News correspondent was invited to teach two courses at the College this semester, she knew it would be a daunting challenge. Still, Linda Gradstein hauled her family from Jerusalem to Charleston, where she has been navigating the stifling humidity, the tourist attractions and even the students’ attention with quiet dexterity.

Q: What was your first impression of the College of Charleston campus?
A: My first impression of the College of Charleston was that the weather was hot! (I arrived in August.) I think the campus and the surrounding city are just beautiful and my family and I are enjoying all Charleston has to offer.

Q: How have you been spending your free time?
A: There is so much to do in Charleston and we’ve been trying to take advantage. We’ve been invited on several boats, and my sons (ages 13, 9 and 6) are big fishermen. My daughter (16) and I are less so, although we love the water. We took a carriage ride, which was fun and even more exciting when the carriage turned down our street (Queen Street).

Q: What have you enjoyed most about your time at the College thus far?
A: I’m really enjoying the challenge of teaching students. I’ve found the students to be smart and curious. It is very different from daily journalism, where I see the results at the end of every day. Here it takes longer. I wonder whether I am conveying the information and ideas in a way that is interesting to the students.

I am trying to take a less academic approach. For example, in my class on Women in Israel and Palestine, we’re visiting a synagogue and a mosque to discuss women and religion. In my class on Covering Conflict [in the Middle East], we’ve had several debates on the mosque being built near Ground Zero and on the Iraq war. I’m encouraging the students to try to look at both sides of every story.
Almost Famous

TIM FENNELL’S JUST IN IT FOR THE LAUGHS

Tim Fennell has shared a limo with Tony the Tiger and the Jolly Green Giant. He has given advice to Sally Jessy Raphaël. He’s had his tie adjusted by Steve Harvey. And – though he’s not proud of it – he’s even lied to Oprah. Twice. (“It all happened so quickly,” he laments. “It was like I was dreaming, and everything was just happening really fast.”)

But Fennell wasn’t dreaming: From the moment Full House’s Dave Coulier and Roseanne’s Michael Fishman introduced him to national television, things began moving full speed ahead. Within a year, television hosts were so familiar with his name that – when his video “How to Hide Pimples With Hand Gestures” aired on America’s Funniest Home Videos (AFV) – host Bob Saget couldn’t help punning that Fennell and his wife Liz “just keep popping these things out!”

“Suddenly, everything we did was getting on TV,” the College’s director of productions says of the scripted short comedies he and Liz were making. After their “Pet Petter” video won $3,000 and second place on the now-defunct America’s Funniest People in 1994, they immediately struck a deal with AFV, ensuring that at least three of the next four scripted videos they submitted would be aired, earning a flat rate of at least $1,500 a piece.

The videos AFV didn’t air landed elsewhere: Sally, for example, aired “Honey, I Shrunk the Dog,” and invited him to the show as an expert on “homegrown TV”; and The Oprah Winfrey Show chose “Psychic Pizza Delivery Network” as the winner of its amateur commercial-spoofing contest.

“I had no idea there even was a contest,” says Fennell, who – sitting in the limo with the voice of Tony and the Green Giant on the way from the Chicago Omni Suites Hotel to Oprah’s studios –
was assured that his job making videos for the College wouldn’t infringe on the contest rules, and that Oprah wouldn’t ask him about that anyway.

Of course, as soon as the video aired, Oprah turned to Fennell and asked, “And you don’t do this for a living?”

“No,” he quickly answered (he justifies that little white lie with the fact that he doesn’t do comedies for a living).

“And you heard about the contest and just decided to enter?” she asked Fennell after talking to Liz about the inspiration for the video.

“Yes,” he answered.

Fennell sighs with regret: “I’m going to be turned away from the pearly gates. You can’t lie to Oprah and get away with it.”

So far he’s gotten by relatively unscathed – although the flurry of attention surrounding his videos did die off soon thereafter. Still, a spontaneous clip of his daughter and some pigeons at the Battery did air on America’s Funniest Animals, and – most recently – he and his family made it onto Family Feud.

“That, we never expected,” says Fennell, who sent a copy of the Family Feud spoof his family had made for his brother’s 60th birthday to the gameshow’s casting producers last spring. “I just wanted to see if it would get their attention.”

It did: The family was invited to submit an audition DVD and, upon doing so, were asked to come to auditions, where they were chosen second out of the 11 hopeful families.

“They were looking for enthusiasm, and we were all jumping up and down and hugging each other the whole time,” says Fennell, adding that they kept the antics up when they taped the show in late July. “Between jumping around and laughing at [comedian and host] Steve Harvey, it was really a good time.”

And even though winning two games – and $300 each – was pretty cool, for Fennell that was never the point.

“I was in it for the laughs, and we did a lot of laughing on that set,” he says. “It was a fun family thing that we did together.”

And that’s the memory he’ll always cherish the most.
Maybe it’s left over from her 6+ years as a student. Maybe it was triggered by her glimpse of the life of a starving artist. Maybe it comes from her innate sense of shared responsibility. Whatever the case, Sara Ferguson isn’t afraid to ask for money.

“You’ve got to have funding,” shrugs the director of the Cougar Calling Center, the student-manned headquarters from which – on any given weeknight – there are 20–25 students engaging 150–300 alumni in conversations about the College, its needs and the opportunities for giving to the College of Charleston Fund. “It’s a great way for students to gain confidence and patience, and learn how to communicate effectively. But, more than that, they start seeing themselves as productive members of the larger College of Charleston community.”

When Ferguson herself joined the College community, her background was almost exclusively in sculpture and community-based art. Still, she was plenty equipped to take on fundraising for the College.

“Community-based art is all about expanding our perspective to include our community – and that means appealing to the community, finding the support that’s out there,” says Ferguson, who is also an adjunct in the studio art department, teaching two drawing courses a semester. “That’s why, both in the classroom and in the call center, I’m always stressing the importance of investing in your community, taking ownership, contributing, giving back whenever you can.”

And, as head of the 2010 Faculty/Staff Campaign – which is featuring special incentives like free basketball tickets, coffee and hotdogs (see above) – Ferguson is calling not just on students and alumni, but on faculty and staff as well.

“If you work here, you’re already part of the community – the College’s day-to-day life, the culture,” she points out. “You’re not here to get rich. You’re here because you believe in the College – because you’re already invested in our students and our institution. I’m just asking you to invest in our community in one more way.”

After all, it can’t hurt to ask.
Already dreading all the Thanksgiving cooking? Relax! As long as you make your order by Nov. 15, your turkey and pies are already out of the way. Trenita Manigault, communication coordinator for Public Safety, is taking orders now for her homemade sweet potato pie, as well as for homemade coconut, pecan and apple pies and for fried turkey with your choice of lime marinade or Cajun seasoning. For more information and to place your order, contact Manigault at manigaultt@cofc.edu or 296.5097.

With 54 of you answering to some variation of Katherine – including Catherine (12), Cathryn (1), Kathryn (17) and Katharine (1) – this name just barely surpasses Sarah/Sara (total of 52) as the most common name among female faculty and staff.

Among male faculty and staff, John is easily the most common name, beating out Michael (58) with a total of 65.

Anton DuMars, adjunct professor of geology and environmental geosciences, is collecting used cooking oil this month. To donate, or for more information, contact him at dumarsa@cofc.edu or 813.2497.

In addition to offering faculty and staff a full schedule of CPR and first aid courses (see ems.cofc.edu/cpr), Fire and EMS will accommodate private groups of faculty/staff. For more information, e-mail ems-cpr@cofc.edu.
A. What was recently named in honor of Floyd Breeland, coordinator of the College’s Call Me MISTER Program?

B. Who is the winner of the International Council of Fine Arts Deans’ 2010 National Award for Arts Achievement and Excellence (and the director of the College’s Arts Management Program)?

C. Tim Allen, professor of real estate in the School of Business and director of the Carter Real Estate Center, co-authored a paper that earned the Best Paper Award at what annual meeting this year?

D. What philosophy faculty member wrote the winning essay in the recent Philosophical Quarterly Essay Prize Competition?

E. What do College employees need to do to receive a 10 percent discount at Reilly’s Mexican Grill in Ravenel?

F. How much of a discount do College employees get at Lilyputs Gift Baskets (lilyputs.com) if they enter the code officeperks10 at checkout?