GLEBE STREET ADIOS

THEY’RE THE SAME LYRICS HE’S ALWAYS SUNG - THE SAME words he’s always used. But, as Paul Allen leans against the corner lamppost and gazes up at the porch that adjoins his soon-to-be former office, this time it’s really hitting home: The Times They Are a-Changin’.

After 36 years at the College, it’s time for the English professor, poet, singer-songwriter and Bob Dylan aficionado to pack up his guitar picks and his pens and start writing his next chapter: retirement.

“It’s a little disorienting,” admits Allen. “The College of Charleston is the only place that I know I belong. I’d never felt a connection anywhere else – even as a kid. But the College felt like home right away. I don’t think that will change. Even if I’m not around, this will always be my true home.”

In which case, it will soon be his only home: This summer he’s terminating the lease on his apartment, moving his “junk” into storage and taking his songs and his poetry on the road.

It’s just the kind of exploration a creative spirit needs – although Allen insists the arrangement is just a matter of practicality.

“I figured my TERI money wouldn’t pay my rent for long, so I decided to buy a camper – that way, I’ll always have a roof over my head,” he says. “It’s a dressier way of being homeless – a little classier.”

With a bedroom, a kitchen and a full bath – not to mention a fold-down couch and a drop-down queen-size guest bed – the 21’ travel trailer is definitely a step up from the streets. And, by the time Allen picks it up in Arizona, it will even be customized with a study to accommodate his grandmother’s desk and an old lamp.

“That’s all I need for writing,” he points out, adding that the “toy hauler” also features a fully recessing rear wall. “So on nice nights, I can open it and get a nice breeze. It’s the best of both worlds – inside and out. Plus, it’s a little more fun because you can move it around.”

And that’s what makes it ideal for touring around the country reading his poetry and playing his music (and maybe even selling a few copies of his newest CD, Glebe Street Adios, due out in July) at coffeehouses, community centers and open mikes.

“In my life as a professor, I’m always sharing what I’m thinking, what I’m doing. This is just another way for me to do that,” he says. “I’ve got some big writing projects, so the main goal is to write. But I’ll always be sharing what I’m doing – and hopefully making some money here and there to pay for the campgrounds.”

He’s not too worried, though. (“You can always find a Wal-Mart parking lot or a truck stop to camp out in.”) Besides, he already has some gigs lined up, which will frame his itinerary and – together with visits with friends, family and former students – keep him moving from the Southwest to upstate New York and down the East Coast through October or so, when he’ll return to Charleston for a couple of months before setting out for “Loop Two”: Florida, the Northeast, Seattle and maybe down to California.

“That’s the plan, anyway,” he says. “It could be I only make it to Goose Creek. Or I could come back after a month and never leave again. But if I come back, at least I’ll know what it’s like. Right now, I have no idea what to expect.”

The only thing he’s sure of? He’s going to miss his students.

“It’s going to be hard for me not to be around young people. It hasn’t hit me yet because they’re gone for the summer anyway, but in the fall I’m not sure what I’m going to do. I might have to buy my meds,” he says. “Here it’s safe. I know someone wherever I go – I might only know one kid at the table, but that’s all I need to sit down and hang out. But I can’t be doing that in Oklahoma.”

Which is why he’s pretty sure he won’t be settling in Oklahoma.

“One way or another, I’ll come back to Charleston,” promises Allen. “This will always be my home.”

Thankfully, somethings just don’t change.

Congratulations to all faculty retiring this spring: Chip Condon (economics), José Escobar (Hispanic studies), Linda Fitzharris (teacher education), Thomas Langley (health and human performance), David Mann (political science), Frank Morris (Classics), Jack Parson (political science) and Hugh Wilder (philosophy).
THERE’S NO QUESTION THAT MUSIC feeds the soul – and, whether it’s home-cooking or five-star dining, the richest flavors and freshest tastes always come from locally grown ingredients.

“There’s nothing as pure as what’s homegrown in the backyard,” says Rob Taylor, associate professor of music and director of choral activities, who likens pop music to something off an Applebee’s menu (generic, artificially enhanced, “contrived and corporate”); folk music to that age-old recipe that’s been handed down from generation to generation, neighbor to neighbor, for so long it’s part of the local cuisine; and classical music to the complex cookery that formally trained chefs learn in culinary school.

“But the best chefs use the local recipes and local foods as inspiration and then give them a little creative twist employing their classical techniques,” says Taylor, who is also the president and founding director of the Taylor Music Group, a performance- and education-based organization focusing primarily on Celtic and classical music. “That’s exactly what we’re trying to do: connect the art of the people (folk music) with the ‘high art’ that’s associated with classical music or ‘art music.’ That’s our thrust: figuring out ways to make Celtic and classical music coexist.”

The group – which includes the Taylor Festival Choir, a semi-professional chamber choir made up of 28 singers from all over the country, and Na Fidireiri, an ensemble of 20 young violinists focusing primarily on Celtic fiddle music and led by Taylor’s wife – has done this by performing together every year in celebration of St. Patrick’s Day and a “Celtic Christmas” and by hosting the Taylor Music Festival every June.

“Anybody can learn how these things come together,” says Taylor, explaining that the annual festival features both performances and lessons so people can hear a world-famous musician play the Irish tin whistle and take a lesson from her. “The idea is always to promote music – and in order to do that, you have to close the gap between the performer and the audience.”

Of course, you don’t have to perfect a Celtic tune on the tin whistle to appreciate music. All you have to do is listen.

“Every time we perform, I know we’re changing lives – opening someone’s eyes and ears,” says Taylor, who also serves as the director of the College of Charleston Concert Choir (itself lauded as one of the nation’s finest collegiate choirs), the College’s Madrigal Singers, the Charleston Symphony Orchestra Chorus and the CSM Chamber Singers. Because it is named for and specifically honors his father, however, Taylor Festival Choir (which also serves as the College’s professional choir-in-residence) holds a special place in his heart. “I really feel like I’ve put something together that honors my father. And it feels good to hear it called one of the best choirs in the world.”

Having been featured at the American Choral Directors Association’s national convention for the past two years, Taylor Festival Choir has certainly made a name for itself. And, as the choir’s conductor, Taylor himself is at the forefront of it all.

“I have the best seat in the house. Not too many people get to hear these voices like I do,” he says, adding that conductors are similar to sports coaches in that they’re in charge of how the group performs. “The difference is I’m not on the sidelines. I’m in the middle of it all. I’m performing with them. I’m not making any sound, but I’m still making music.”

And the music he’s making is powerful, indeed.

“Conducting is a deeply spiritual experience. When the choir is hot, it’s like you’re communicating with God through the medium of music, like you’ve tapped into Truth or God, or whatever you call that higher being,” he says. “It’s intoxicating. But I can’t just wallow in the ecstasy of it – I have to stay in control so that I can lead them, keep them functioning and balanced. I can’t let their voices get lost or overtaken.”

After all, these voices have come together for a reason.

“We’re here for the art. We’re here because we have to be, because art is an emotional and cultural necessity,” says Taylor. “People don’t realize how lost we’d be without it.”

No question about it: A soul’s got to eat.  🎵

The 2010 Taylor Music Festival is June 14–18. For more information, visit taylormusicfestival.org.
A SWEET DEAL
Teena Ham Takes the Cake

TEENA HAM MADE A COMMITMENT.
She gave her word. And – even though it’s been 22 years since her wedding day – she stands by her vow as if it were only yesterday. That kind of devotion isn’t easy for everyone, but for Ham, it’s turned out to be a real cakewalk.

“When I saw my wedding cake and it was completely wrong – the wrong colors, the wrong everything – I said, ‘This is something I’m going to do,’” says the Faculty/Staff Helpdesk technician. “It took me two years to get around to it, but once I stumbled onto my first cake-decorating class, I was hooked.”

And before she knew it, she was making her own cakes – some of them quite elaborate with intricate detailing: tiny rosebuds, African violets, daffodils and calla lilies.

“It’s pretty neat to walk around and look at flowers and say, ‘Huh, I can make that out of sugar!’” says Ham, who is hoping to soon add spun sugar to her repertoire of mediums, which currently includes royal icing, gum paste and fondant. “What can I say? I just like to play around with sugar.”

Of course, that’s just the icing on the cake. For Ham, what it’s really about is creating memorable, personalized cakes for people.

“I love seeing their eyes light up when they get their cake and it’s exactly how it looked in their head,” she says, explaining that, for the past 15 years, she’s been making and decorating birthday, wedding and other special-occasion cakes for her friends, family and people they know. “I’ll do just about anything, but wedding cakes are always a big high for me because I’m creating something for the beginning of a new future.”

And yet, as happy as that makes her, teaching the students in her Wilton cake-decorating courses might just take the cake.

“I love teaching, and I love my students,” says Ham, who – as a Wilton School instructor – teaches two (two-hour, four-session) weekly courses at the A.C. Moore on Rivers Avenue. “The Wilton Method of decorating is super-fantastic. It gives you a step-by-step process that is easy and fun to follow.”

With the help of the Wilton literature and tools, students learn to perfect smooth frostings, balance complementary colors and create flawless flowers, essentially making the art of decorating – well – a piece of cake.

“The great thing about this method is that anyone can learn it,” says Ham. “You can just come in off the street without any prior knowledge of baking or cake decorating and walk out being able to do some really great stuff.”

And have fun doing it.

“Any time you get a group of people in the same room who are interested in the same thing, you really have a good time,” says Ham. “There are some people who are super-serious, but I try to lighten the mood as much as possible. I tell them, ‘I don’t care how good your cakes are, if you’re not having a good time, I’m not doing my job.’”

All indications are, however, that she’s doing her job. And doing it well. Of the 500 students she’s taught over her five years as an instructor, almost 80 percent have continued on to her second-level (Flowers and Cake Design) and third-level (Gumpaste and Fondant) courses.

“I can brag about that because the average progression rate is only 45 percent,” says Ham. “I think that shows they’re enjoying it and that they want to learn more.”

And why wouldn’t they?

“It builds self-confidence, provides the opportunity for people who share the same interests to meet and gives moms, dads and even grandmas a chance to get out of the house and spend some time doing something fun,” says Ham. “And besides that, what a great end result!”

It’s a sweet deal, any way you slice it.
THE COMEBACK KID
Travis Pigott Refuses to Miss a Beat

TRAVIS PIGOTT BELIEVES IN MIRACLES – without them he probably wouldn’t be alive. But he also believes in the power of the mind – that his determination, tenacity and outright refusal to concede are what make him a true survivor. No matter what you chalk it up to, however, it’s still hard to believe just how resilient this man has proven himself to be.

“People still ask me how I did it,” says the public safety officer, who was driving his Harley to work on I-26 that March 2008 morning, when the driver of a stolen car caused eight cars to hit him before a dually truck hauling a trailer slammed into him at 70 miles an hour, trapping him under two vehicles for an hour while EMS workers cut away the wreckage. “They thought I was dead – and, really, I shouldn’t have even survived the initial impact.”

And yet, somehow, he did.

“Something made me hold on,” he says. “I don’t know what makes us do things that are insurmountable. It could be anything: your circumstances, the people who raised you, the way you think of things. It’s something deep inside you. You’re not aware it’s happening.”

Pigott, who wasn’t wearing a helmet, certainly wasn’t aware of what was going on immediately after his accident, and has only sporadic recollection of his ambulance ride and arrival at MUSC.

“I spent four days in a coma,” says Pigott, who suffered a punctured and collapsed lung and countless broken bones. “I broke my skull, all the bones in my face, my neck in three places, my eye sockets, my jaw, my back in two places, my tailbone, four ribs and my left hand.”

And, remember, he’s considered lucky.

“I tell people the reason I only broke one hand is because the other was holding onto my angel’s hand,” he smiles. “Someone was watching out for me.”

Indeed, there were a number of people looking after him – many of them from the College.

“I received so many cards from students, and my colleagues were with me day in and day out,” he says, adding that he even got visits from President and First Lady Benson. “People really were amazing.”

But – to his friends, family and medical staff – Pigott was the amazing one. Expected to be in the hospital for a couple of months and in the wheelchair for much longer, he not only went home in only nine days – he walked out!

“I wanted to be walking,” shrugs Pigott, who left the hospital with a walker, but – despite the doctors’ warnings – abandoned that after just one day. “I just don’t like being told what I can’t do. Never have.”

Born prematurely at 2.0 pounds, Pigott has always been told what he won’t achieve, and – whether it’s living a normal life, surviving back surgery or walking like everyone else – he’s always defied his prognosis.

“I’m a miracle kid. I’m a survivor,” he says. “I’ve been fighting the odds my whole life.”

Which is why he didn’t even bat an eye when the doctors said he’d be out of work for two years. He knew he’d be reporting to campus for full duty soon enough – and, nine weeks later, he was.

“Life is normal. I haven’t found anything I can’t do,” says Pigott, who switched to the night shift upon his return. “It’s like nothing ever happened.”

There is one big difference, however: “I appreciate walking more than ever before. That, and I’ll never have another bad day as long as I live.”

And, in that way, Pigott emerged from his accident better than ever.

“That’s why they call it a miracle,” he smiles.

TECHNO BYTES
A campuswide conversion to Microsoft Office 2010 will begin this summer. All computers running the Windows operating system will be upgraded – with Information Technology conducting training/upgrades for administrative departments throughout July and August and for academic departments in August and September. Classroom and lab computers will be updated during fall break. To make the transition as smooth as possible, Information Technology will offer training sessions, open houses, handouts and online tutorials throughout the process. Standardizing the College’s computers with the most current software will not only bring them up to date with the platform used by most incoming students, but also eliminate file-conversion problems and allow users to work more efficiently with more effective results.

For more information, visit it.cofc.edu/office2010 or contact the Helpdesk at helpdesk@cofc.edu or 3.3375.

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

• The remaining window sashs at Randolph Hall, Towell Library and Porters Lodge will be removed for repair over the summer; reinstallation of the sashes on the buildings’ east and south sides is underway. Structural repairs to Towell Library will continue through next month, as will the cleaning and repair of stucco on the west and north sides of Randolph Hall, where scaffolding was erected in May. All remaining work to the Cistern Yard-facing sides of the buildings will be performed from portable lifts, minimizing the need for further scaffolding there. Landscaping, irrigation, lighting and hardscaping will begin later this month, upon the completion of Spoleto Festival USA.

• Construction for the renovations and repairs to 69 Coming Street is expected to begin this month and be completed in September.
At the College of Charleston we aim for the stars. We know it’s a long way up, and we know it won’t be easy – but we also know we have what it takes to come out on top. After all, the writing is on the wall: In fact, the interior boards and the metal roofing of the old observatory at Randolph Hall are covered with the names of students, faculty and staff who’ve made it up over the years. With inscriptions from 1899, when Augustus J. Eaves (c/o 1900) announced his arrival, right next to those of current students like senior Ken Sprague, the observatory provides a living logbook for the College – the kind of historical record that otherwise wouldn’t be kept.

Built behind Randolph Hall’s left portico in the 1870s, the observatory was used primarily by Lewis R. Gibbes, a professor of mathematics and natural philosophy who was also an astronomer. But it was after the hand-cranked revolving roof was thoroughly overhauled in 1898 that the first noticeable inscription appears – and, from that point forward, there was a lot more being recorded than planetary movement and barometric pressure (e.g., “Read the barometer on this place on Dec. 17, 1899 and found it to be 77.1”). From pledges to roofers to physicians: Everyone who visited made it known they were part of the “Up Above Club” (so dubbed in a carving by then-students Alexander Campbell Heyward, 1914; Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, 1913; and Joseph Augustus Tolbert, 1912). Of course, membership is more exclusive these days: Easy access to the observatory stairs, which curve upward within the portico’s roof, was reportedly first closed off in the early 1970s, and the only way up today is through a small square in the ceiling outside the Office of Legal Affairs. But – even though it takes two ladders, a rickety boardwalk and some swift maneuvers to get to the now-inoperative observatory – it’s easy to see the writing on the wall. There’s just no stopping the College.

**NEWS BRIEFS: News You Can Use**

- Seismic-Micro Technologies gave the School of Sciences and Mathematics a $4.1 million software package for analyzing complex geological data.
- Google Inc. gave the Department of Computer Science 30 computers (in addition to the 20 earlier this year).
- President P. George Benson was elected to the board of directors for financial-services company Primerica.
- Jack DiTullio, professor of biology, received a $1.27-million National Science Foundation grant for a sea-going laboratory facility supporting biogeochemical oceanography research.
- As part of the “Hundred for $100” campaign, employees who join the Cougar Club at the Maroon ($100) level will receive $200 worth of game tickets, merchandise and private receptions. For more information, contact Vince Benigni, 3.7019 or benigni@cofc.edu.
- The following campus dining locations have summer hours, Monday-Friday: Fresh Food Company (11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.), Stern Center Food Court (9 a.m.-1:30 p.m.) and Market 159 (8 a.m.-5 p.m.). All other locations will be closed throughout June and July. For more information, visit cofc.edu/diningservices.
Thanks to everyone who participated in the last photo quiz, and congratulations to Cheryl Connor, director of the Copy Center, who was the first to guess that the object in question was the glass dish filled with pebbles that’s on the coffee table at the front of the newly revamped College of Charleston Bookstore. With its cozy seating areas and convenient coffee bar, the bookstore feels more like a real bookstore than ever before. “It’s a really inviting, welcoming space now,” says Jan Brewton, director of business and auxiliary services, adding that the new look and layout was designed and created by Barnes & Noble College Booksellers, which took over the operation and management of the store in February. “They wanted people to feel comfortable coming in, having coffee and hanging out for a while – and I think they did a really good job!”

Take a look at the picture above. The object can be found on campus. Do you know what it is? The first person to submit the correct answer will win a T-shirt of their choosing from the College of Charleston Bookstore, compliments of Barnes & Noble. Good luck!

Send your submission to lutza@cofc.edu Friday, July 9, 2010. The contest is open to all College faculty and staff. One submission per person, please.

What summer camps or activities did you attend as a kid?

Sue Sommer-Kresse
Senior Vice President of Strategic Plan Operations in the President’s Office

“My Girl Scout camping trips to Norway Point on Cross Lake at Pine City, Minn., provide fond memories. We made ’sit-upons,’ sang around the campfire and learned how to survive in the wilderness. The Girl Scouts brought young women together and taught teamwork along with independence, confidence and leadership.”

Yum Nguyen
Assistant Professor of Health and Human Performance

“My most memorable thing about summers was not necessarily attending any organized activity but simply playing outside with the other neighborhood kids during the long summer evenings until it was dark, without any care in the world.”

Kimberly Taylor
Academic Adviser

“I attended Fellowship of Christian Athletes Summer Leadership Camp on St. Simons Island, Ga. I learned how to live with integrity and lead by example, and how to dive into a pool full of pudding and Jell-O at the Slip ’N Slide–finish line of the final Camp Adventure Race!”