A FEW GOOD COUGARS

THE COLLEGE MAY BE NESTLED SNUGLY WITHIN
Charleston’s idyllic backdrop and safely contained by the protective walls of academia, but – as advocates of higher education – we all know the value of our civil liberties and our constitutional freedoms. And, while many of us are willing to exercise and defend our unalienable rights on the battlefield of the Open Discussion Listserv, it’s the 50+ military veterans among us who’ve earned our appreciation and respect.

This Veterans Day, The Portico honors all the men and women who have given up their freedoms to serve this country – and especially salutes those who traded in their fatigue for Maroon and White. Here are the voices of but a few of the College’s own heroes.

Q: What kinds of things did you come to realize about yourself and your life back home when you entered the military?
A: “I learned pretty quickly how good I’d had it before – and I realized that I’d idealized what living on a submarine would be like. When you’re submerged for 78–80 days without seeing the light of day, and without eating a real meal or seeing your family, you just realize how much easier it is here. You swear you’ll never take anything for granted again.”

Q: How would you describe life in the military?
A: “Military life is a hard life. You have to give up a lot of freedoms. You give up the freedom of speech, the freedom of movement and the freedom of assembly. And you don’t make much money – I think at one time I figured it up that I made 25 cents an hour, considering that I was working 24 hours a day. Conditions are hard. “Still, it was good. It was the during the Cold War, so it was a little bit exciting, and I was defending the East German border just prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, so that was a cool piece of history to be a part of. It also paid my student loans, paid for my M.B.A. and funded my Ph.D. – and I met my husband [Jim Mueller, associate professor of marketing and supply chain management] there.”
– U.S. Army Sergeant Rene Mueller served 1984–1988 as a German linguist in the Military Intelligence Corps at Wildflecken, Germany. At the College, she is a professor of marketing and director of the International Business and Global Scholars Program.

Q: What skills did you acquire in the military that you still apply in your day-to-day work at the College?
A: “Adjust and adapt. You never know what to expect, but you know that – no matter what comes your way – you’re going to have to deal with it. You can’t let it get in your way. You just have to trudge forward and move on.”
– U.S. Air Force Staff Sergeant Cantrece White served 1990–2002 in personnel administration in Charleston; San Antonio, Texas; and Gunsan, Korea. She’s now the coordinator of administrative services for the Tate Center for Entrepreneurship.

Q: What do you think is the most important thing for people to remember on Veterans Day?
A: “Appreciate the price paid for our freedom throughout our nation’s history, and be grateful to those serving in our military around the world today. Also, we must always remember the families and friends of those who have given their lives in service to our country. Whenever we see someone in uniform, as we pass them, we should say, ‘Thank you!’”
GROWING CONCERN: Justin Wyatt Takes on a Hairy Situation

BETWEEN EINSTEIN, NIETZSCHE AND

Gandhi, it’s almost impossible to measure up. Throw in David Crosby, Tom Selleck and Burt Reynolds, and you can pretty much forget about it. Still, Justin Wyatt isn’t letting the stars of the facial hair fraternity scare him off. The way he sees it, anyone can rock a ‘stache … for a month, anyway.

“You can get away with anything for a few weeks,” says the associate professor of chemistry and biochemistry, who, for the third year in a row, is growing a mustache for Movember – the annual, month-long men’s health initiative that raises awareness and money for prostate and testicular cancers. And, while he admits that “not everybody looks good with a mustache,” he quickly points out that “everybody does have some experience with cancer, everyone has seen it destroy lives, and everyone knows a man who thinks he’s too tough to go to the doctor.”

Of course, no one is pretending that growing a mustache can end cancer, but it certainly can’t hurt.

“It’s just a way to put the word out certainly can’t hurt. Growing a mustache can end cancer, but it...
FOR ANDREW SOBIESUO, CHECKING voicemail can be a lot like walking into the common area of a youth hostel, stepping onto a cross-continental passenger train or waiting for a session of the U.N. General Assembly to reconvene. The medley of heavily accented English and variations of French and Spanish that greet him on any given morning, however, isn’t half as diverse as the messages’ content.

“I get inquiries from all over the world about programs at the College, academic equivalencies, working abroad, housing international students here in Charleston – it’s always very random,” laughs the director of the Center for International Education and assistant provost for international education. “People see my name online and think I am the go-to-guy for anything international.”

And, truth be told, they’re right. Whether the correspondence is from an educator in Peru, a student in Germany, a policymaker in the Netherlands or a university administrator in Mexico – Sobiesuo will always do his best not just to answer the inquiry, but to explore its potential.

“It is my role to oversee all the different study-abroad programs and international student services at the College – but it’s also my responsibility to advance the program and to develop new programming,” says Sobiesuo, adding that – in addition to developing international-education policies, coordinating programs and exchanges with international partner institutions and working on international-education issues and policies with national and international agencies – he often plays host to foreign visitors interested in establishing international-study partnerships with the College. “I’m always looking for ways to improve on what we already have and also to create new opportunities for our students.”

And, every now and then, scooping out new opportunities for students means visiting new sites himself.

“We like to be familiar with the location, the types of housing and general facilities and the services available to students at the study-abroad destinations,” he says. “We are not in the business of sending students into unknown environments that might put them in danger.”

The weight of this responsibility – the balancing act of creating new and exciting opportunities for students and keeping them safe – is not lost on Sobiesuo. He feels it every single minute of every single day.

“You’re responsible for all the hundreds of students who are abroad at all times. It’s a 24-hour job – you have to always be ready to act,” he says. “That makes it very challenging, but also very fulfilling, frankly.”

Sobiesuo taught Spanish language, literature and culture at the College for 13 years before he began splitting his time between the classroom and his post as director of the Center for International Education in 2003. In 2006, however, he turned all his attention to his current responsibilities.

“I didn’t think I was being fair to the students. I was juggling too much, and I couldn’t offer them the attention they deserved,” he says. “I miss the classroom, but I had to look out for the students.”

And that’s one thing that hasn’t changed. Whether they’re currently overseas, they’ve already returned or they’ve never even thought of studying abroad, Sobiesuo is there to ensure students are getting everything they can out of their education.

“I think study abroad is a necessary part of education. It shows students what they’re capable of doing and what they’re capable of becoming,” he says. “It gives me satisfaction to sit down with students when they come back and see how they have changed, how they’ve become a better person. That’s my favorite part: seeing what they have learned about themselves by getting to know the people and the culture of a different part of the world.”

GOING GLOBAL: Andrew Sobiesuo Is an Ambassador at Large

Jujube

AKA: Chinese date, Ziziphus jujube.
ON CAMPUS: Found behind the Robert Scott Small Building.
DESCRIPTION: This small, decorative – yet tough – deciduous tree has spiny, gnarled branches that often grow in a zigzag pattern. In late spring, it produces clusters of small, greenish-yellow flowers, which give way to green 1-2”-long drupes in the fall. Eventually turning a deep, brownish-red before softening and wrinkling, the fruit - with its thin, edible skin surrounding white flesh - is reminiscent of an apple and is eaten fresh, dried or candied. The longer the fruit ripens on the tree, the sweeter it will be – and, because it ripens non-simultaneously - the fruits can be harvested for several weeks from a single tree.
TIPS: Plant in full sun. Mow around tree to control suckers. Prune in winter for the shape and health of the tree.

GARDENER’S PICK:
THE FIRST STEP IS ADMITTING THERE’S a problem. The second step is understanding why it’s a problem. And the third step is taking responsibility and committing to turning things around. No one’s saying it’s easy, but – make it through these first few steps – and the road to recovery won’t be nearly as rough as you might think.

Just ask Meredith Gerber.

“I was pretty much addicted to lip balm. I used it all the time,” admits the Career Center counselor, whose substance of choice was a strawberry balm by Avon. “I was going through tube after tube. It was really, really bad. The more I used it, the more I needed it.”

She knew she had a problem. But what was she supposed to do? Without the stuff, her lips were constantly thirsty. With it, things weren’t much better.

“Then I found out that one of the ingredients in most lip balms is alcohol – and what does alcohol do? It dries you out,” says Gerber. “So, basically, every time you use it, you’re making it worse – so it keeps you coming back for more.”

Armed with the knowledge of why her lip-moisturizing habit had gotten out of hand, Gerber acknowledged her own role in breaking the vicious cycle and vowed to do whatever it took to turn herself around. Turns out, all it’d really take was a do-it-yourself lip-balm kit.

“It had everything you needed: the tubes, the wax, the flavoring, the labels, recipes – the works,” says Gerber. “It was a great way to get started.”

And once she’d started, it became easier and easier.

“The first few tubes I made were waxier than what I like, but I adjusted the mix and played with it until it evolved into what I wanted,” she says. “Now I know the exact mixture that makes me happy.”

She also knows which flavors make her happy.

“My go-to flavors are peppermint, lavender, honey, tangerine, orange, vanilla – and those give you all kinds of combinations, like lavender mint or Creamsicle,” she says. “And then sometimes I like to do the cake-flavored ones, like amaretto. Oh, and eucalyptus is a winner for guys.”

With her recipe perfected, her flavors selected and her process down pat ("you just melt your sunflower oil and beeswax together, add in your flavoring and then dip your little pipette into the mixture and squeeze it into the tube"), Gerber considers herself fully recovered.

“I don’t use it nearly as much as I used to,” she says, estimating that she makes a batch of balm about five times a year and that, since 2002, she’s made “200 tubes, easily – if not more. It’s hard to say because I’m always making them for other people and refilling recycled tubes for my mom and sister.”

In fact, these days Gerber enjoys making balm for others more than for herself – and she’s always happy to see more and more people getting on the wagon.

“If people are interested, they can bring me their used tubes and I’ll refill them,” she offers. “It can be done very easily, it doesn’t take any time at all, and it costs next to nothing.”

With a tube of homemade lip balm running around 25 cents, compared to the $3 price-tag on the store-bought stuff, that savings alone gives Gerber some serious satisfaction.

“I get a kick out of not having to buy something because I can make it myself,” she says. “I guess I get a kick out of being resourceful.”

And, hey, a girl’s got to get her kicks somewhere! ✮
CAMPUS SAFETY WALK
Make our campus a safer place by searching for unsafe conditions.

**When:** Wed., Nov. 4, 6 p.m.
**Where:** Stern Student Center lobby
**Fee:** None
**Contact:** Vernica Parker, 3.5609, parkerv@cofc.edu

MICROSOFT OUTLOOK CALENDARING
Learn some time- and effort-saving tips that your whole department can use.

**When:** Fri., Nov. 6, 9-10:15 a.m.
**Where:** AT&T Building, room 500
**Fee:** None
**Contact:** Linda McClennaghan, 3.8238, mcclennaghan@cofc.edu

ESPN CHARLESTON CLASSIC
This bracket-format tournament will include Davidson, La Salle, Miami, UNC Wilmington, Penn State, South Carolina, USF and Tulane. Times TBA, cofcsports.com.

**When:** Thurs.–Sun., Nov. 19–22
**Where:** Carolina First Arena
**Fee:** $20/session
**Contact:** Ticket Office, 3.2632, info@charlestonclassic.com

MONDAY NIGHT CONCERT SERIES
See for yourself why cellist Natalia Khoma, assistant professor of music, is hailed around the world as “magical and deeply touching.”

**When:** Mon., Nov. 23, 8 p.m.
**Where:** Simons Center, Recital Hall
**Fee:** $10
**Contact:** Daphne Hoddinott, 3.5927, hoddinott@cofc.edu

All information is subject to change. Please verify times, places and registration requirements with listed contact.

SAVE THE DATE

It’s impossible to leave Raisa Gomer’s office in a bad mood. Between the hot tea she serves and the warm conversation she offers, a visit with the senior instructor of Russian is a real treat. “It is important that we take time to enjoy each other,” she says. “You must find something to lift your spirit.” And, chances are, you’ll find it in Gomer’s office – “the office of treasures” is full of fine examples of Russia’s most cherished craftwork: decorative eggs, plates of the Kohklima craft, lacquered papier-mâché boxes from Palekh and, of course, the nesting dolls, or matryoshkas, that pepper her bookshelves with splashes of bright red, deep blue and lively yellows, purples, oranges and greens. “The colors are beautiful. In Russia, you have snow forever, until it meets the gray sky, so you need some color,” says Gomer. “Color affects a mood. It’s good to have something bright to keep from feeling blue.” And, if the dolls’ vivid colors don’t do the trick, perhaps the process of playing with them will. “It is good to take care of your stress,” she says, opening and reassembling the set of matryoshkas in front of her. “It keeps your hands busy. It takes attention away from what is in your head and gives it to the matryoshka.”

Most of the hollowed birch dolls in Gomer’s collection depict the traditional rosy-cheeked, curly-haired young maiden, opening up to another, smaller, young maiden inside, and so on and so forth – typically with five nested figures in all. “But this one is special,” says Gomer, picking up a figure with the face of an old woman. She opens the doll to reveal an old man, and then again to uncover a young girl. “And then you see a little cat, and then a little chick,” she says, lining the figures up in a row. “Isn’t it wonderful?” Each and every one of the hand-painted dolls is indeed wonderful – the intricate handwork that goes into painting the tiny, elaborate details shows true artistry and skill. “It is an art form that is Russia’s own.”

Still, it wasn’t until she left her native Ukraine that Gomer herself took an interest in the matryoshkas. “We brought some with us to show people, to represent Russia,” she says, joking that she “took all the color” from the country when she left. Fortunately there was plenty more to pick up when she visited again in 2001, and she returned to Charleston with about 25 new dolls. But, because she gives them away to friends and students, her “collection gets smaller instead of bigger.” She shrugs: “They deserve to be passed around for other people to see. They are beautiful, so they make people smile.”

And everyone deserves to smile – whether visiting Gomer’s office or not.

NEWS BRIEFS: News You Can Use

- **Kenny Greene,** director of mail services, received the National Association of College and University Mail Services’ Excellence in Management Award.
- **Clifton Peacock,** associate professor of studio art, has been named a finalist in the Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition 2009, securing a place for his painting, “Writer,” in the juried exhibition at the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery through Aug. 22, 2010.
- **The Rarest of Rare: Stories Behind the Treasures at the Harvard Museum of Natural History,** an exhibition featuring the photography of Mark Sloan, director and curator of the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art, is on view at the National Academy of Sciences through Jan. 7, 2010.
- **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.
GUESS WHAT?

Thanks to everyone who participated in the last photo quiz, and congratulations to Alexa Thacker, assistant in the Office of the First Lady, who was the first to guess that the object in question was the waffle iron at Liberty Fresh Foods Company.

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 tasty lunch for two at Liberty Street Fresh Food Company, compliments of ARAMARK. Good luck!

Send your submission to lutza@cofc.edu by Monday, November 16, 2009. The contest is open to all College faculty and staff. One submission per person, please.

WORD ON THE BRICKS

What’s your favorite part about Lowcountry living?

Clara Hodges
Administrative Assistant in Academic Affairs

“Actually there are several things: the history, the peaceful and tranquil nature of living in a rural area of South Carolina (near Walterboro), the opportunity of being able to grow and harvest a plethora of garden-fresh veggies and share them with friends and, finally, learning every day about something or someone that has helped to form the South Carolina Lowcountry into being the great place that it has become.”

Roy Snipe
Audio/Visual Events Support Coordinator in the Office of the First Lady

“I love the four seasons, the fresh food, the slow-paced life - but most of all, the rivers. In just a matter of minutes I can find myself enjoying my favorite fishing spots or just enjoying a calm day on the waters. I am living in an area where most people long to vacation.”

Margaret Puckhaber
Admissions Representative

“I just love being able to go outside and walk and enjoy nature. I love being out in nature.”