

## Letter from Dr. Smith, Department Head



Dr. Eva Smith

Hello from the beautiful USCB Hilton Head Island campus. What a wonderful place to be to start this new chapter! I have been here roughly five months and it has

already been a fun and crazy ride. Classes started mid-August and we have students from all over the US eager to learn more about the hospitality industry. As faculty members, we are making the island a classroom experience. Students are working in resorts, marinas, and restaurants all over Beaufort, Bluffton, and Jasper Counties. We are so proud of these hard-working young people. Students are also collecting data for the area chambers. We have been at the Gullah Festival, The Concours d' Elegance and the Oyster Festival. These were my first festivals in Hilton Head, and I had great fun people watching and partaking in the most wonderful food and festivities. What are we looking forward to? Spring semester will bring the Food and Wine Festival, the Heritage Classic, and several events ahead of graduation. The University with confer degrees in a Fall graduation ceremony for the first time on Dec 10th. I look forward to celebrating these students who have completed their journey with the University.

I am looking forward to all the exciting things to come. Have a wonderful Holiday season.

Warm Wishes,  
Eva

## Center for Strategic Planning: Helping organizations go from “now” to “WOW!”

All organizations – big or small, public or private, for profit or nonprofit – will benefit from strategic planning. A strategic plan that is reviewed and updated periodically enables an organization to look outward and inward, establish goals, allocate limited resources, focus the team's efforts, and steer toward a desired future.

The USCB Center for Strategic Planning helps organizations of all types develop and/or update their strategic plans. The Center was founded by Tom Henz, Hospitality Management adjunct professor. Tom is joined by fellow facilitators Ray Warco and Tom Lennox, retired business executives and community leaders. Their mission is “To empower businesses and organizations to achieve their vision.”

“It has been enjoyable and rewarding to help our clients facilitate their plans,” said Tom. “We developed a unique, ten-step process called Bridge to Better that has proven to be very effective. It includes an initial meeting with senior management where we review the mission and vision of the organization. Next, we survey members of the team and selected customers to obtain a diversity of information and ideas. The fun part comes when

we host a full-day retreat, held at one of our campus locations, with foodservice provided by Ara-mark. Following a teambuilding exercise, we ask the participants to *Brainstorm Bridges*, or strategic initiatives. They are encouraged to envision many possible options, use creativity and intuition, consider diverse perspectives and all viewpoints, seek hidden ideas, think big, think different, and have fun!” Once the ideas are fully explored, a decision is made on the way forward, and the bridge is built using SMART goals, strategies, and tactics. A tool for the plan implementation is also provided.

“The clients so far have all expressed great satisfaction with the process and the resulting plans. In all cases the new plans have proven to be transformative in establishing a new way forward.”

The Center's advisory committee includes fellow USCB Hospitality Management Instructor, Su Gibson, and USCB alumni, Charlie Stone, who also hosts the Center's podcasts. You can find these podcasts, along with the Center's published newspaper articles and presentations, at [www.uscb.edu/csp](http://www.uscb.edu/csp).



## Finnegan Lit Up the Night at the Lantern Parade

The Introduction to Event Management class took a beautiful stroll down the Hilton Head Island beaches as part of the Hilton Head Island Lantern Parade. The students were accompanied by none other than our beloved sand shark mascot, Finnegan. As part of their course, the students learned about the planning and implementing of a community event such as the Lantern Parade, including creating their own Finnegan lantern. The night proved to be a bit windy, and the class clearly learned that sharks belong in the water and not on the beach!



# Alumni Spotlight: Kelli Brunson

In this issue, we'd like to highlight Kelli Brunson, one of the many superstars who have graduated from our Hospitality Management degree program. Kelli, class of 2016, has proven herself to be a true leader of hospitality. Currently working as the Programs and Events Manager with the Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce, Kelli acts as a liaison for many of the chamber's programs, engages with members and plans and executes all Chamber events. She earned her Master's degree in Learning, Leadership and Organizational Development from the University of Georgia earlier this year and is part of the US Chamber of Commerce's Business Leads Fellowship Program.



## How did your education impact your career?

While I enjoyed all my classes, the greatest impact of my education was working as a research assistant. As a student worker, I helped manage the research data under the advisement of former USCB professor, Dr. Salazar, along with my fellow alumna, Catherine Moorman ('16). This experience allowed me to meet community stakeholders and see firsthand how festivals and events make an impact, not only for visitors, but also for our local community. This also afforded me an opportunity to have relevant experience when beginning my job search.

## Why did you choose Hospitality Management at USCB?

I visited Beaufort for the first time my junior year of high school. I fell in love with the area, and very soon after, I scheduled a campus tour. At that point, I was planning to major in business, but my campus tour guide was a Hospitality Management graduate which led me to do some research on that career path. Everything I read sounded like I would thrive in that environment, so I decided to go with it!

## What were some of your favorite parts about studying with us?

I grew up in a small town, so being able to know my fellow classmates and professors was really important to me when choosing a school. I made so many friends throughout my time at USCB, and I still keep in close contact with many of them. The professors at USCB definitely take an interest in you and your career goals. The small learning environment allowed me to easily discuss my future goals regularly with my professors.

## Where are you working now, and what are you doing?

I am currently the Programs & Events Manager for the Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce. I am responsible for all our member events - from concept, to planning, to execution (and the best part, cleanup). I also am responsible for many of our programs like Young Professionals and our Leadership programs (adult and juniors in high school). I have been with the chamber since my internship in my last semester of college (January 2016).

## What are your plans for the future?

I recently obtained my Masters in Education, specifically Learning, Leadership, and Organization Development from the University of Georgia. For now, I am becoming more involved in programs through the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives - this allows me to grow within my industry and meet like-minded people from all over!

## Recruiter Highlight for the Holiday Season: MONTAGE PALMETTO BLUFF

USCB's Center for Event Management and Hospitality Training is proud to present a series of videos showcasing local industry partners who heavily recruit our Hospitality Management students. One of those partners has long been Montage Palmetto Bluff. Students who work for Montage's five-star property in Bluffton enjoy the uniquely gorgeous working environment Palmetto Bluff offers, along with a strong company culture and focus on excellence. You can see interviews with USCB students and alumni working at Montage on the Center's website at: [www.hhicenter.com/educationcenter](http://www.hhicenter.com/educationcenter)





## Island Ambassadors Hit the 3,000 Mark

USCB's Center for Event Management and Hospitality Training has been chugging right along with the long-standing Island Ambassador program. The program is delivered as a three-part seminar and educates new residents, hospitality workers and other groups on Hilton Head Island's history, ecology and culture. It was developed as a way to improve the guest experience for those visiting the island through interactions with more knowledgeable residents and service providers, but it has expanded beyond this to delight all types of students who attend. We are happy to report that the total number of certified Island Ambassadors who have completed the program is cresting 3,000. What an accomplishment for our beautiful #1 island destination!

## Making Cookies and Memories with Pockets Full of Sunshine



On Wednesday November 9th, the Quantity Food Preparation class, led by Dr. Sean Barth, hosted the Pockets Full of Sunshine organization in the food lab of USCB's Hilton Head Island campus for a day of cookie baking. The Rays joined USCB Hospitality Management students to help make their world-famous Peanut Butter Putters to give to their board members and guests of the organization's annual fundraiser. Working with the Rays makes everything shine brighter. Fun was had by all,

and everyone enjoyed a fresh hot meal together afterward. Stories were told and memories were made for both the Rays and the students. The Quantity Foods class has partnered with Pockets Full of Sunshine since 2018 when they won the Heritage Golf Tournament's cookie competition. It was there that they got to bake cookies with PGA Tour Champion, Jim Furyk, in the USCB hospitality management demo kitchen. They went on to sell over 2000 cookies during that year's tournament.

## A Daufuskie Island Triathlon



The Introduction to Sport and Event Management Class is planning a sprint triathlon on historic Daufuskie Island as a project for their class this Fall, so, of course a field trip to the island was necessary. The class was able to personally experience the trip to and from Daufuskie Island to help plan for triathletes and gear transportation. Many thanks to Michael Withrow and Island Head for the ride! The students explored many different options for swimming, biking and running routes, giving them a chance to see the entire island and pick the best course for their race. In addition, the students visited numerous historic sites along the way. The Bloody Point Lighthouse was a favorite. One goal for the project was to incorporate the culture of Daufuskie Island into not only the race course, but also the post-race celebration. The students finished the trip off with lunch at the Old Daufuskie Crab Company to sample post-race food options. Plus...they may or may not have had lunch in the presence of rock-music royalty. One never knows what a trip to Daufuskie will bring!

# Professionals Visit Introduction to Hospitality Industry Course to Share Experience

The HRTM 110 Introduction to Hospitality Management class, taught by Dr. Nancy Hritz, welcomed a number of hospitality professionals to class this fall semester. The students had visitors from Marriott Vacations, ADARA, Inc., Kelli Corn Weddings and Events, Newport Hospitality Group, and Disney Vacations.

The professionals shared their inside industry knowledge on topics such as professional event management, resort management, destination marketing, trends in hospitality, and corporate organizational structures. The guests also shared their career path and insider knowledge of the hospitality industry.

*Dr. Nancy Hritz welcomed Emily Phillips and Savannah Medlin, two USCB Hospitality Management alumni, back into class to speak about their work at the Disney Vacation Club Hilton Head Island Resort.*



## Welcome Back, Lori Vargo!



The office hallway upstairs on the Hilton Head campus just wasn't the same last year, when our cherished Director of e-Learning, Lori Vargo, took temporary leave. We're happy to report, however, that as of the beginning of the Fall semester she has returned home to us! The hallway once again rings with her jovial laugh as she provides support and encouragement to faculty and students navigating educational technology as it's

deployed both inside and outside of the classroom.

When asked how she was feeling, Lori enthused, "I'm excited to be back to USCB and the HHI campus! It's been great seeing students in the kitchen and hanging out in the café (without masks). In addition to supporting online faculty, I'm eager to provide training for Blackboard Ultra courses. I want the new course design to be a game changer for our online platform." Come visit Lori with your e-learning questions, big or small. Or, just pop in for a chat about tennis, dogs, grandbabies or Sand Shark happenings any day of the week.

## New Minor in Sports Management

The Hospitality Management department will be adding a new option for students interested in the sporting world: a minor in Sports Management. The minor will capitalize on the region's strength as a destination for golf, tennis, running and other sporting events, along with USCB's thriving athletic programs. Students will interact with sport organizers and sport professionals in enriching experiential learning opportunities and hear from knowledgeable, experienced leaders about current market conditions and challenges. Courses will include Sport and Event Management, Sport Law, Ethics in Sport Management, Sport Nutrition, Business and Finance in Sport, Sport Broadcasting and more. A common component of all courses within the minor will be integration of course concepts with fieldwork. The South Carolina Lowcountry offers a number of premier sporting events where students can work, shadow or be mentored in events ranging from Little League baseball to the RBC Heritage Golf Tournament. The minor will be open to all majors and is slated for an early 2023 launch.

## You Can Help Us!

Do you know of someone who might be interested in starting or completing their degree? We have in-person and online degree options. Please tell them about us!

Please also share this newsletter and encourage your colleagues and friends to sign up for them at [www.hhicenter.com/sign-up-today](http://www.hhicenter.com/sign-up-today). It's a great way to stay connected with the happenings of the department and learn about upcoming events on the Hilton Head campus.

## Engage with Us

USCB's Center for Event Management and Hospitality Training works in partnership with USCB's Hospitality Management Department to provide students with experiential learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom and to offer beneficial services to local industry partners.

From secret shopping and quality management program development to volunteer management, data collection, case studies and strategic planning, there are many ways to get involved. We are grant-funded, so most services are offered at no cost. Learn more at [www.hhicenter.com/engagement](http://www.hhicenter.com/engagement) and let's see what we can do to help your business thrive.