

## Faculty Insights: Local Opportunities Abound

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While we saw a short pause in business on the island last March and April, things took off from there. I have been in HHI for 14 years and dealt with employers the entire time. I have not seen this much of a hiring frenzy since I have been here. It seems like people are not able to come from international agencies to fill positions on the island and it is causing a problem or an opportunity, depending on how you look at things. The bottom line is, there are more jobs for US born workers this year than any year I have witnessed in HHI and beyond.

I am the small guy, I sit back and disseminate information given to me by local employers and get it into the hands of our students. On any given day in the year, I answer between one and three requests from employers nationwide and local. I sift through that information and send out links to all jobs available to students, both present and past. This year has been exceptional in the number of employers contacting me about job availability. The majority of those requests are coming from HHI, Bluffton, and Savannah. Everyone from little mom-and-pop outlets to large multinational companies are all hurting for employees. So, students I challenge you. If you want a job, now is the time. Rise up and ride the employment wave. Who knows how long it's here to stay?

## Hilton Head Island Wine and Food Festival Scholarship Winners



Thomas Fish



Karns Hazlett



Jillian Vannoni

Congratulations to the recipients of the 2021 HHI Wine & Food Festival (HHIWFF) USCB Scholarships:

**Thomas Fish • Karns Hazlett  
Jillian Vannoni**

These outstanding students met the academic, and application requirements, and were interviewed and chosen by the HHIWFF Scholarship Committee.

These particular scholarship dollars come from proceeds from the HHI Wine & Food Festival's wine auction at the Grand and Public Tastings. These

tastings support the John & Valerie Curry Educational Scholarship Fund for college students pursuing degrees in hospitality and tourism.

Each year a group of hospitality students assist at the festival to support important HHIWFF programs. Students also gain real-world experience that can provide an immediate impact when they are employed by local hoteliers, restaurants and nonprofits by helping with setup, breakdown, and execution of the events.

*Well done Thomas, Karns and Jillian!*

## Student-Organized Virtual 5K Charity Run

The students in Prof. Keri Olivetti's Introduction to Sport and Event Management course wouldn't be deterred by covid-related restrictions this past Fall when given the task of designing and implementing a sporting event. They creatively transformed the 5K road race concept, which has been used for the course in the past, into a virtual event spanning three days and benefitting the Palmetto Animal League. Students recruited participants including faculty members Su Gibson and Tom Henz, who convinced his entire family to complete the race with him. Tom and his family chose to run through the Sea Pines Forest Preserve. He explained, "We thought we might have a better chance seeing Rudolph while running through the woods. We didn't spot Rudolph, but had a fun race!" Walking, riding bikes and running were all options. A Racing Rudolph T-shirt, a racing bib and a finisher's medal were given to participants. Suggested routes and guidelines were also provided as part of the racing package.



# Alumna Spotlight: Alexandria Connelly



Alexandria (Rivers) Connelly graduated from USCB in May 2019 with a bachelor's degree in Hospitality Management. After graduating, she completed a master's degree at Johnson and Wales University in Hospitality Management in August 2020. She got married in November and moved to nearby St. Helena Island with her husband and their rescue pit, Lani.

During her time in the HRTM program at USCB, she learned the basics of the hospitality and tourism industries. She worked multi-

ple major events to increase her knowledge and experience, including weddings, annual charity events, and local festivals like the Shrimp Fest and Beer & Wine Fest. She was taught to use critical and analytical thinking to solve problems and prevent problems from happening.

Alexandria identifies her internship as one of the most beneficial as-

pects of the program, "Through my internship at USCB, I became the training coordinator of a major corporate restaurant, opening doors of opportunity and experience enhancement. I became a Key Manager of the same restaurant and continued my duties until relocating to Beaufort." While completing the Master's degree, she used much of the knowledge attained during her time at USCB.

"My four years at USCB were not enough. If I could have continued with my graduate degree through this establishment, I 100% would have. The HRTM program at USCB has so many benefits and positive attributes that I would be here all day if I listed them all. The one point I will mention is the support and comradery. My professors and fellow classmates were always so supportive of each other and myself when new opportunities arose. And being a student within the HRTM program at USCB, the opportunities are endless."

She has just accepted a position as the Chief Marketing Officer at a start-up in Port Royal, and hopes, eventually, to teach at the college level in Hospitality Management. "I admire so much the tenacity and drive of my previous professors in the department. Not only do they teach you the ins and outs of the hospitality and tourism industry, they help you discover which sector of the industry is going to be the best fit for your career."

## Chamber of Commerce Adopts Destination Management Plan

To ensure Hilton Head Island remains a premier destination in today's highly competitive and changing travel market, the Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce recently adopted a Destination Management Plan, a 10-year strategic roadmap designed to enhance resident quality of life and protect the island's ecosystem in balance with tourism—the island's top economic driver.

As stewards of the Hilton Head Island brand, the chamber's mission was to create a shared, inspirational concept of the island and a plan to achieve it. Over a period of more than a year, in partnership with MMGY NextFactor, a comprehensive assessment was done that included a survey of stakeholders, nine focus groups, two town hall sessions and 25 one-on-one interviews.

Based on feedback from the community engagement sessions, the group identified three destination signatures unique to the island: its legacy of sustainable development in harmony with the natural environment, pride of local culture, community values and multigenerational family gatherings, and a deep appreciation for active lifestyles.

With those key attributes in mind, a consensus was reached on the destination vision: "A welcoming island community embracing nature, culture and wellbeing."

To realize the vision, the plan sets out five strategic goals centered around inclusiveness and collaboration, preparing for tomorrow's trav-



eler both leisure and corporate, and enhancing island mobility.

The Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce launched this ambitious initiative in the fall of 2019 to develop a collaborative, innovative and forward-thinking vision for the future. The plan builds on and complements several existing plans, including the 2020-2040 Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Hilton Head Island, the Parks & Recreation Master Plan and Workforce Housing Strategic Plan. It is designed to be an ongoing platform for the community to cooperatively fulfill the shared vision for Hilton Head Island and the surrounding area.

# Industry Corner: Lowcountry Fresh Market & Café has Ambitious Mission to Positively Impact Our Community

Adjunct Faculty Member, Laurie Savidge, recently had a fascinating conversation with the founders and opening team of the Lowcountry Fresh Market & Café, which is coming soon to Bluffton. An excerpt of their discussion is below, and a video of it can be viewed on the "Education Center" page of the USCB Center for Event Adjunct Faculty Member, Laurie Savidge, recently had a fascinating conversation with the founders and opening team of the Lowcountry Fresh Market & Café, which is coming soon to Bluffton. An excerpt of their discussion is below, and a video of it can be viewed on the "Education Center" page of the USCB Center for Event Management and Hospitality Training's website.

Please describe for our students and faculty at USCB the genesis of Lowcountry Fresh Market & Café and why the two of you wanted to create a culinary experience like this in the South Carolina Lowcountry.

## Andy Rolfe:

We are in the next chapter of our lives and in this country, there are lots and lots of great things but there is not an equality of opportunity. We wanted make our own dent in that problem and thought about what kind of business we could create that could provide people with opportunities. We met many individuals that have great skills and capabilities but are just missing an opportunity. For example, we were introduced to a group in St. Helena, the Gullah Farmers Co-op: a group of 17 family farms. They have terrific agricultural land, farming skill, have a great product but not very many places to sell. As a result, they do not grow on all their land. When we met with them, we asked, what if we were to open a market where you could grow on all your land, we could buy as much of your product as possible with good margins. We could also provide opportunities for people in our community to work in our market, with a good living wage, leverage their talents and develop new skills.

Does creating a market/business like this align with social responsibility? Why do you think this is important?

## Cindy Rolfe:

When Andy & I wanted to start something after our long careers, we felt it was pretty important that it be about giving back. We believe there is a way to be successful in business while also building up your community and creating career opportunities for people. Not just good paying jobs, but a job where people can learn new skills and try different things. When people on the team are encouraged to try new things and supported when they take on challenges then they give their best to the team. We think that social mission, a shared purpose, is part of being a good business.

Jumping ahead 5 years, what do you hope for Lowcountry Fresh Market and Café and its impact on South Carolina?

## Andy Rolfe:

We hope that this will not just be successful in its own right, but 5 years from now we are hoping the supplier partners that we are working with today will be able to grow and develop their own businesses, maybe spawn new businesses, maybe give them the confidence that their products have a market in the Lowcountry so that they can increase their own positive impact in the community. We get a chance in 5 years to see people that have come to work with us grow and develop. That is part of the fun of all of this to see people grow and become what we believe they can become.

What jobs would you say could be ideal at your market for Hospitality students?



Lowcountry Fresh Market & Cafe rendering.

## Andy Rolfe:

We have both front and back of the house opportunities. In the front of the house, we have a hub of activity and opportunities for customer interaction. Whether it's seafood or meat or coffee or espresso or soups or sandwiches, all kinds of pastries. It is a chance not just to interact with customers but to help them understand what goes with what and to understand the origin of the products. The back of the house, there is a lot of excitement there. We have an all-star team. If you have baking interest or culinary interest or front of the house interest, we have all sorts of opportunities.

As the Culinary Director of Lowcountry Fresh Market & Café, what is your goal for the experience every guest has at the restaurant?

## BJ Dennis:

My goal is to give customers the best customer service, the best food and a whole feel to the experience. In the hospitality business, we want to get customers away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life, cater to the guest, eat good, drink good and enjoy that moment. It could be that someone visiting eats out once a year and we want to make the experience special to that person as well as the person that eats out every day. Treat everyone the same, with the same attention and the same heart. Lowcountry Fresh is going to be a place that is going to tell the narrative of many different places, but particularly what is so special about the lowcountry, the farms and the people that made this area great. We want people to eat great food and respect where that food came from.

BJ Dennis mentioned in a post on social media about you joining the team at Lowcountry Fresh Market and Café about cooking from the heart. What does cooking and leading a kitchen team from the heart mean for our students reading this and why is that so important?

## Chef Moudou Jaiteh:

It comes down to the fact that it can be just food or it can have meaning behind it. The example of a carpenter, he doesn't take what he is making for granted because at the end of the day someone is going to sit on that chair and it is going to break or not. With cooking, most people that do the work do not give it much attention and just look at it as just making food, but I would like to encourage people to look at it as a craft. Find the right balance, be honest with yourself and take the work seriously.

# Faculty & Student Team Present Research

When Covid-19 led to the cancellation of most local events, the research team at USCB's Center for Event Management and Hospitality training feared they wouldn't have opportunities to collect data and do tourism research. However, by late 2020 and early 2021, Dean Calvert was able to arrange onsite data collection with several small events held in the area, including the Bluffton Arts and Seafood Festival, the Hilton Head Oyster Festival and the Beaufort Oyster Festival.

The team, which included Sierra Denny and Karns Hazlett, lead research assistants, and Lauren Miller, onsite research assistant, got straight to work. They used new data collection methods that integrated pandemic-related safety measures such as using a QR code so that respondents could use their own devices to take surveys. Karns presented the new research processes in a session entitled, "Festival Research in a Pandemic: a Pilot Study," at the 6th Annual ICHRIE-SECSA conference in February. The conference was held virtually this year and included esteemed hospitality researchers, educators and industry professionals from around the world. The attendees were very impressed. Not only did USCB shine as an example of innovation in research to overcome challenges, but typically these conference presentations are conducted by faculty, researchers and graduate students. Karns, as an undergraduate junior, wow'd the audience with her confidence, professionalism and poise. She, along with her teammates, are true examples of the excellence within our hospitality sandsharks.



## Eta Sigma Delta

On Saturday, April 12th USCB hospitality majors participated with 28 other universities nationwide to induct the 2021 Eta Sigma Delta members. Eta Sigma Delta is an academic honorary fraternity in the hospitality industry that recognizes hospitality and tourism students for outstanding academic achievement, meritorious service and demonstrated professionalism. Membership is extended to students meeting the following criteria: be an official declared hospitality major with a 3.0 cumulative GPA and have completed 50% of the credit hours required for graduation. The inductees for USCB's 2021 chapter include: Aron Thomas Fish, Bridgette Anne Doherty, Caitlin Miles Toole, Abby Nicole Trojan, Charles Joe Thompson, Jackson Francis Gomes, Eleasa Marie Bradberry, Jennifer Everhart Edwards, Melisa Ann Schuessler, and Michelle Rebecca Herndon. During the ceremony, new members pledged to uphold the values of excellence, leadership, creativity, service, and ethics throughout their careers in the hospitality and tourism industries. USCB's chapter is part of 90 chapters worldwide. The faculty advisor is Dr. Nancy Hritz.

## 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 col-leagues and friends to sign up for them at [hhicenter.com/sign-up-today](https://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 and degree program 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](https://www.hhicenter.com/engagement) and let's see what we can do to help your business thrive.