We celebrate the generosity of our many donors whose gifts positively impact the lives of Georgians through UGA Public Service and Outreach.

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“The idea is to better serve the community and meet people where they are with hot meals, specifically folks who are experiencing homelessness,” said Andie Bisceglia, Campus Kitchen coordinator.

Constructed by Athens area food truck operator and builder Max Watkins, the Campus Kitchen food trailer was made possible thanks primarily to a $38,270 grant from the UGA Parents Leadership Council.

A longtime supporter of the Office of Service-Learning, which reports to the Vice President for Public Service and Outreach and the Vice President for Instruction, the council awards yearly grants to UGA organizations with “a clear commitment to enhancing the undergraduate student experience” and for programs that have “a direct and positive impact on student life at UGA.”

The remaining $4,730 needed for the project was raised by members of the UGA Young Alumni network.

“We’re so grateful to the Parents Leadership Council for this investment and also to the alumni network that provided additional funding,” said Shannon Brooks, director of the Office of Service–Learning. “I think it makes this project even more special that UGA alumni and parents are the ones funding it.”

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Truist Bank provides funding for Savannah area entrepreneurship academy

The UGA Small Business Development Center received a grant from the Truist Foundation to establish a training and development program for small business owners and entrepreneurs in the Savannah area.

The Truist Entrepreneurship Academy is a two-year program that will, through a series of eight modules, guide participants through topics necessary to grow a successful business. The modules have been developed and will be delivered by experienced SBDC faculty.

“This generous grant from Truist Foundation enables us to bring a new program with high-level business training to Savannah-area businesses,” said Becky Brownlee, area director of the SBDC office in Savannah. “We are looking forward to launching the Truist Entrepreneurship Academy in January 2022.”

The grant will enable 40 business owners from the Savannah area to participate in the program at no cost. Interested business owners are invited to apply online. Ideal program participants can create economic impact through job creation and increased revenue.

“At Truist, our purpose of inspiring and building better lives and communities aligns directly with efforts of the University of Georgia Small Business Development Center,” said Patton Dugas, Savannah market president at Truist, on behalf of Truist Foundation.

“The Truist Entrepreneurship Academy will help entrepreneurs and small businesses prosper in our community and add to the economic vitality of our region.”

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For 30 years, John “Crawfish” Crawford has regaled campers and school children on field trips to the UGA Aquarium, guiding them on nature walks through the salt marsh and introducing them to the many creatures that call coastal Georgia home.

Crawford’s tenure officially ended Dec. 1, 2020 when he retired from the University of Georgia. But his legacy will continue through an endowed educator position at UGA Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant, funded by a generous estate gift made by longtime supporters.

The endowed funds will also enhance the faculty fellow’s ability to make a difference in the lives of students and help fulfill the university’s public service and outreach mission—as Crawford has.

“Someone who gets the endowed fellowship will need to know who John is, what he cared about, and what he’s like,” says Ruth McMullin, who, with her husband Tom, made the gift. “We want to make sure the way (John) teaches, his enthusiasm, and his methodology remain when he’s no longer here.”

McMullin, who lives on Skidaway Island, has been volunteering at the UGA Marine Education Center and Aquarium for 23 years. She is inspired by Crawford’s curiosity, enthusiasm and ability to mold minds and develop stewards of Georgia’s coastal environments.
“He’s just so special,” McMullin said. “I was really happy to volunteer because I knew I would get to spend more time learning from him.”

“I have learned an awful lot from watching how he interacts with children and adults and how he shares his excitement with other people. You can’t be somebody you admire, but you can copy them.”

Crawford grew up in Savannah, where he explored the coast’s mud flats and maritime forests, discovering corn snakes, fiddler crabs and other animals that often found their way into his house. At age 15, he had dozens of pet snakes, all of which he kept in his room.

He cultivated his knowledge of coastal resources at Armstrong State College and Florida Keys Community College in the late 1960s and early 1970s. After his time in Florida, he made his way back to the Georgia coast where he continued to make his mark on the conservation and environmental education community.

He joined UGA Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant in 1990, where as a marine educator he has spent 30 years sharing his knowledge with K-12 students, teachers, education fellows, coastal residents and conservation professionals.

“He has taught hundreds of professional educators, tens of thousands of students, and changed the landscape of environmental and marine education along the coast,” says Anne Lindsay, associate director of marine education at Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant. “He knows boats, plants, animals and people and a little about every other natural science or coastal topic you can think of.”
Lindsay, who was mentored by Crawford when she was hired at what was then the UGA Marine Extension Service in the 1990s, explains how he laid the foundation for the education programs that are still offered at the facility today.

“He has helped us expand our reach, establish new collaborations and partnerships, nurture long standing relationships with educators, scientists and citizens,” Lindsay said. “He has cemented the reputation of the Marine Education Center and Aquarium as an institution with a standard of educational quality that we aspire to uphold.”

Learn more about Crawford and the importance of this endowed position in a short film by Motion House Media, a video production company based in Athens, Ga. The film tells the story of Crawford’s impact through interviews with individuals who have been inspired by the larger than life conservationist over the years.
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home and to improve an old textile mill for use in business and social ventures — initiatives that contribute to long-term livability and resilience of Lyndhurst’s greater Chattanooga service region, which includes communities in Tennessee, Georgia and Alabama.

More recent funding supported a unique economic development partnership with communities on the Georgia and Tennessee border. The Copper Basin Renaissance Strategic Visioning and Planning (RSVP) collaboration united key leaders from McCaysville, its twin city of Copperhill, Tenn., and nearby Ducktown, Tenn., in a community-driven alliance to help the region’s economy flourish. It was the first two-state RSVP, a component of the Georgia Downtown Renaissance Partnership, which is a revitalization initiative of the Institute of Government conducted with cooperation from the Georgia Municipal Association, the Georgia Cities Foundation and other partners.

The Copper Basin RSVP strategy complements public and private quality-of-life amenities already in place or under development. The RSVP also serve to enhance existing partnerships among the cities, all of which are members of the Fannin County Chamber of Commerce.

Georgia House Speaker David Ralston and his staff supported the work on the Copper Basin RSVP with the Institute of Government since the initial discussions about the project. Ralston, a longtime proponent of economic development initiatives like the RSVP, represents a district that includes McCaysville and Fannin County.

In 2020, UGA Public Service and Outreach (PSO) recognized Lyndhurst with its annual Donor Impact Award in recognition of its support for Georgia communities.

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**UGA gets sixth grant from Tennessee-based foundation for economic development in Northwest Georgia**

The Georgia Downtown Renaissance Partnership, a program of UGA’s Carl Vinson Institute of Government, was recently awarded $120,000 by the Lyndhurst Foundation. It is the sixth time the foundation has funded the program since 2015, bringing its total support to $590,000.

Since its first gift, the Lyndhurst Foundation, based in Chattanooga, has enabled the Institute of Government to assist local governments with revitalization efforts in northwest Georgia and southeast Tennessee. Over the course of its partnership, the foundation has empowered communities and improved the region by supporting planning and design projects in McCaysville, Trenton, Chickamauga, Chatsworth, Rossville, Ringgold, Lookout Mountain, and Murray County, Georgia, as well as Copperhill, Ducktown, and Athens, Tenn. The latest round of funding will support downtown master planning efforts for the cities of LaFayette and Fort Oglethorpe.

Funds from Lyndhurst converted a historic rail depot in Chickamauga into a welcome center, and in Rossville were used to update the grounds around the duck pond at the historic John Ross home.
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Through a gift to the University of Georgia, one couple is combining their interests in journalism and leadership development.

A gift from Craig Lesser in honor of his wife, Nancy, has endowed the Nancy Shepherd Lesser Fund for Rural Leaders in Print Media at the J.W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development. The fund will provide money to pay for newspaper reporters in rural Georgia to participate in their local community leadership program.

“I wanted to do something that would honor Nancy,” Craig Lesser said. “This fund seemed like a way to combine her passion for local journalism and my work with leadership development and economic development.”

After graduating from UGA’s Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication in 1983, Nancy worked at newspapers in Warner Robins and Augusta, covering rural counties in middle Georgia. That experience showed her the vital role that local newspapers and reporters can play in rural communities, she said.

“Local journalism matters,” Nancy Lesser said. “Especially in rural areas where newspapers are part of the community fabric, reporters need to develop both a deep understanding of their community and the skills to help foster engagement and discussion around their community’s critical challenges.”

By participating in a community leadership program, local reporters can learn more about the communities they cover; build their relationships with government, education and business leaders; and enhance their personal leadership skills.

“This will help reporters cover local issues more comprehensively and create more effective journalism, which is a pillar of a strong, engaged community,” she said.

The Lessers graduated from Leadership Georgia in 1994 and Craig Lesser, a former Georgia Commissioner of Economic Development, currently serves on the Fanning Institute’s Advisory Board. Those experiences provide a strong perspective on the importance of leadership development to community and economic development across Georgia.

“The fundamental first step of economic development is leadership development,” Craig Lesser said. “Without engaged leadership in a community, nothing happens.”
Especially in rural areas, strong leadership can help communities compete for economic opportunities, Lesser said.

“When an investor visits a location and sees a diverse leadership team from all sectors of the community supporting each other, communicating well and working together, it shows the investor that they will likely have tremendous support if they choose that community,” he said.

Private financial support to enable journalists to participate in community leadership programs will make a particular difference in rural Georgia, said Matt Bishop, director of the Fanning Institute.

“Oh, often, tuition is one of the most significant barriers to someone participating in their community’s leadership program,” Bishop said.

“This gift directly addresses that, and we appreciate Craig and Nancy for their support of the Fanning Institute, UGA and leadership development throughout Georgia.”

In creating this fund, the Lessers see a way to support things that have meant so much to them over the years.

“This fund will help reporters do their jobs better and support leadership development in rural Georgia, where we have deep roots,” Craig Lesser said. “We believe it is important to give back, and we’re proud to do so by supporting UGA and the Fanning Institute.”

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Developing these new methods for harvesting and production will be beneficial for a variety of working parties — particularly plant employees and fishermen,” Stivers said. “This will allow seasonal shrimpers and companies to develop more year-round objectives and keep their jobs. For domestic companies, it also mitigates their risk by limiting the percentage of revenue that comes from overseas business — a dangerous gamble in cases of trade wars or increased tariffs. Generating a domestic revenue stream is beneficial and allows the seafood industry to capitalize on multiple outlets of income.

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