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Don and Donna McCammon (pictured above), Lillian McCammon and her late husband George McCammon were awarded the Neil S. Bucklew Presidential Service Award.

MISSOULA – The University of Montana Foundation has awarded Don and Donna McCammon, Lillian McCammon and her late husband George McCammon the Neil S. Bucklew...
Presidential Service Award. The award recognizes the family’s continuous support of UM since their first gift in support of the President’s Excellence Fund in 1981.

The award, named for former UM President Neil Bucklew, who served from 1981 to 1986, recognizes individuals for their extraordinary effort to deepen Montana’s understanding of UM’s needs and strengths. It has been given annually by the UM Foundation since 1988.

The McCammons received the award Sept. 22 at the UM Foundation’s annual fall event honoring and celebrating UM’s most loyal supporters. The College of the Arts and Media also honored the McCammons on campus during its Homecoming celebrations. Recent honorees of the Bucklew Award include Mary Olson in 2021, Summerfield and Julie Baldridge in 2020, and Eric Sprunk and Dennis and Gretchen Eck in 2019.

Lillian, originally from Warwick, New York, participated in the Aquamaids, the University’s synchronized swimming team, and graduated in 1959 with a degree in Spanish and minors in history, political science and business education. She later returned to UM to earn a master’s degree. While attending UM, she met her late husband George, who graduated with an accounting degree in 1962. After selling the 2nd Street Texaco Station in Missoula, George worked for the Montana Highway Department until he retired. For 30 years, Lillian taught high school and vocational education in Missoula, Victor and Helena.

Lillian and George’s late daughter Barbara Lynne McCammon attended UM before graduating from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City. She led an accomplished career in the New York City Police Department and the Idaho Air National Guard. In 2003, she was killed in an on-duty accident after being called to service at MacDill Air Force Base Central Command in Florida. As a master sergeant, Barbara received the Joint Command’s Meritorious Service Medal posthumously, and the IDANG A-10 Squadron awarded her family the first U.S. flag flown over Baghdad for her service. It is in her memory that the McCammons’ family created the fund for the Music Building renovation.

Lillian and George’s son Don, of Missoula, attended UM in the 1970s before earning a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering from Montana State University. At UM, Don studied history, political science and voice, was a member of the Theta Chi Fraternity, was a leader in the UM Ambassador Program and sang with the Jubileers.

Don started his career with Burlington Northern Railroad Co. before becoming director of operations for HNTB in Denver. Since 1997, he has worked for HDR, an employee-owned
architectural, engineering and consulting firm in Missoula. He currently serves as vice president and senior rail project manager for the firm in Missoula and internationally. His wife Donna, from Sidney, worked at Missoula County’s Community and Planning Services Department before retiring earlier this year.

The McCammon family, all passionate musicians, are one of three families who have generously made lead gifts in support of transformative renovations to UM’s School of Music. The upgrades, which began in spring 2021, are elevating the UM Music Building to align with the quality of academic and performing arts programs that draw undergraduate and graduate students and faculty members to UM.

“After almost 70 years, we are demonstrating to our students that we care,” Don said. “We have started providing them with state-of-the-art facilities. This work must continue to create the world-class learning institution our students deserve.”

The reconstruction also will help the School of Music accommodate the many professional community musicians who use the facility throughout the year. The updates will support the school’s mission to prepare students for wide-ranging careers in music industries, provide a safe and inspiring working space for students, and maintain the school’s accreditation from the National Association of Schools of Music. Additionally, the McCammons have established music scholarships to honor Barbara and Don, as well as support UM’s woodwind performers.

“As musicians themselves, the McCammons innately understand the power of music to transform lives,” said Laurie Baefsky, dean of the College of the Arts and Media. “They inspire others to make a difference, as they have impacted so many students’ lives. They are part of the very heartbeat of music in Missoula.”

Don is a member of the College of the Arts and Media Advisory Council and chairs the Music Building Renovation Campaign Committee. From 2015 to 2020, he served on the college’s Campaign Montana Fundraising Committee. He sings with the Missoula Symphony and Community Chorales, as well as the Mendelssohn Club, and he has performed with the Montana Opera Company. Don also is a former president of the United Way of Missoula County.

Additionally, he served as a director of the American Railway Bridge and Building Association, as chair of an American Railway Maintenance of Way Association’s structural design committee, and on the Bridge Committee of the American Short Line and Regional Railroad
Association. He serves as a delegate to the United Methodist General Conference and has served as a lay leader for the church’s Mountain Sky Conference.

Donna McCammon shares her husband’s love for music. She inspired Don to learn the bagpipes, and both have performed with the Celtic Dragon Pipe Band.

“The University has had such a meaningful impact on our family, and music is a big factor in our life,” Don said. “We are honored to receive this award and to help UM continue inspiring generations.”

###

Contact: Elizabeth Willy, director of communications, UM Foundation, 406-243-5320, elizabeth.willy@supportum.org.

Launch UM virtual tour.
UM Foundation Honors McCammon Family with Bucklew Service Award
To help law enforcement officers better recognize, understand and help veterans in distress, Cindi Laukes, director of UM’s Neural Injury Center, partnered with representatives from Cascade County, home to Malmstrom Air Force Base, to develop a new three-hour course that looks at the lasting effects of combat on members of the military.

MISSOULA – As director of the University of Montana’s Neural Injury Center, Cindi Laukes knows the signs are subtle but distinct between someone who is inebriated and someone with past head injuries.
She also knows that, for a law enforcement officer interacting with a military veteran on the street, recognizing those differences can lead to a meaningful outcome or to a confrontation that could ultimately end in tragedy.

To help officers better recognize, understand and help veterans in distress, Laukes recently partnered with representatives from Cascade County, home to Malmstrom Air Force Base near Great Falls, to develop a new three-hour course that looks at the lasting effects of combat in military veterans.

“We take a deeper look at the challenges veterans face in the legal system when it comes not only to post-traumatic stress disorder and brain injury, but also substance abuse,” Laukes said. “And we talk about what these look like in the field and what resources are available to veterans.”

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, up to 12% of Desert Storm veterans suffer from PTSD in a given year. That number rises to as high as 20% for those serving in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. Almost one of every three veterans seeking help for substance abuse disorders also has PTSD. The Department of Defense also reported more than 458,000 TBIs among U.S. service members worldwide between 2000 and late 2022.

For help with the curriculum and to promote the course, Laukes worked with U.S. Sen. Steve Daines’ office, Cascade County Sheriff Jesse Slaughter and Detective Shawn Baker, a senior deputy and an 11-year Army veteran.
Baker, who co-teaches with Laukes, said the course helps bridge the gap between combat veterans and law enforcement officers – many of whom also are veterans.

“With Cindi’s help, we’re trying to turn back the tide to make officers aware of what can happen with vets experiencing programs before it becomes an incident,” Baker said. “It’s helping officers get a better understanding of what is going on, as well as the ability to see the bigger experience and help them to deescalate situations.”

The new class also reviews programs available to help veterans in crisis such as Veterans Treatment Court. These courts – there is one in both Cascade and Missoula Counties – provide mental health and substance abuse services for veterans on supervised release and probation.

Kory Larsen, chief criminal deputy county attorney for Cascade County, has spent the past four years working in the county’s Veterans Treatment Court and shares what he has learned with Laukes’ and Baker’s students.

“I’ve met officers who think Veterans Treatment Court is catch-and-release court, but it really is a valuable service for veterans and for law enforcement,” said Larsen, a UM law school graduate. “We take individuals who have served our country and give them the tools to get their life back together. Then we aren’t seeing them on the street at 2 a.m. every Saturday night.”

The positive responses he has gotten on the class, Larsen said, show a willingness among officers to understand the unique circumstances of veterans in crisis.

This better understanding, he and Laukes contend, may even prompt officers facing similar issues in their own lives to access services for mental health issues.

“Officers who take this class and use what they’ve learned just might save a vet on the way to suicide,” Larsen said, “and they might get help themselves. That’s the goal of this class.”

Laukes said the course, Tools for Law Enforcement Understanding PTSD, TBI and Suicide Risk in Veterans and Law Enforcement: Overlapping Risks and Psychological Challenges, comes with three Peace Officers Standards and Training-approved credits and is free of charge to law enforcement members.
“We are hoping to get funding so we can take it statewide and still keep it free for officers,” Laukes said.

The next class will be held in Great Falls from 8 to 11 a.m. Wednesday, Oct. 12. To register, officers should email Laukes at cindi.laukes@mso.umt.edu or Baker at sbaker@cascadecountymt.gov.

###

**Contact:** Cindi Laukes, director and chief operational officer, UM Neural Injury Center, 406-243-4017, cindi.laukes@mso.umt.edu.
UM Course Equips Law Enforcement to Help Veterans in Crisis
MISSOULA – The author Sierra Crane Murdoch, a Pulitzer Prize finalist, will serve as the 2023 Kittredge Distinguished Visiting Writer in Environmental Studies at the University of Montana.
Her nonfiction book, “Yellow Bird,” chronicles a murder during the oil boom on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in North Dakota. Part true crime, part social criticism, the book traces the steps of an Arikara woman, Lissa Yellow Bird, as she searches for a young, white oil worker who went missing. Named one of the best books of 2020 by The New York Times and NPR, it also was nominated for the Edgar Award, won an Oregon Book Award and is being developed as a TV series for Paramount+.

“Murdoch is pushing the boundaries of environmental writing in all the right ways,” said Mark Sundeen, a UM assistant professor of Environmental Studies. “By weaving a murder mystery into a story of ecological degradation and centuries of broken treaties and genocide against indigenous people, she is educating a whole new swath of readers about our society’s most pressing concerns.”

Murdoch, of Hood River, Oregon, researched the book for eight years, beginning with her first reporting job just out of college, covering the fracking industry on the reservation for High Country News. Her journalism and essays have appeared in Harper’s, The Atlantic, “This American Life” and The New Yorker online.

“What she brings to our graduate students is the rare ability to distill profound truths about history and humanity into page-turning readable prose,” said Sundeen.

Murdoch will teach a graduate workshop in environmental writing in spring semester of 2023.
“I’m honored to serve in a position previously held by writers who had such a profound influence on my own early career,” she said. “I’ll guide students in how to use reporting in personal writing to generate depth and expansiveness and to clarify their voices, discovering more honest and transparent positions in the stories they choose to tell.”

Previous Kittredge Distinguished Visiting Writers in Environmental Studies include Terry Tempest Williams, Rebecca Solnit, Craig Childs, and most recently, Latria Graham.

Graduate students interested in taking the course should email mark.sundeen@umontana.edu.

###

Contact: Mark Sundeen, UM Environmental Studies assistant professor, 406-243-6272, mark.sundeen@mso.umt.edu.

Launch UM virtual tour.
Pulitzer Finalist Joins UM as Kittredge Visiting Writer
Izabela Garcia-Arce, a UM graduate student in Environmental Studies, looks out over the Pacific from a volcano near San Quintin, Baja California. (Photo by Justine Holden)
MISSOULA – When Izabela Garcia-Arce was an undergraduate in California, she read “A River Runs Through It” for a class. This set her on a journey to graduate school at the University of Montana in Missoula, and recently culminated in an epic summer of learning – one in which she found no clear line between writing and surfing.

Because it turns out Garcia-Arce, too, is haunted by waters.

“Without the writing experiences I’ve gotten here at UM and the classes I’ve taken, I don’t know where I would be,” she said. “I didn’t even consider becoming a writer before applying here – I really didn’t see that in myself. I definitely wouldn’t have gotten to do all the cool things I did this past summer.”

A native of San Diego, Garcia-Arce is in her last year of earning a UM master’s degree in environmental studies. She said her writing was sparked and encouraged by UM Assistant Professor Mark Sundeen, the author of books about the West and the relationship between humans and nature. She found herself writing about her interests: outdoor adventure, the ocean, gender identity, social justice and her Mexican-American heritage.

Eventually, she became editor of Camas magazine, UM’s student-run literary magazine. And a piece she wrote about lobster diving off the coast of California – one of her favorite pastimes – recently was accepted by Outside magazine.
Her success opened doors this past spring and summer. She was awarded scholarships to two prestigious writing workshops that were held in stunning natural settings. Later, inspired by UM’s Ethics and Restoration class, she designed and executed her own research project along the coast of Mexico – all while meeting long-lost members of her family and exploring some of the best surfing spots on the Baja Peninsula.

Her first stop was a Freeflow Institute workshop in the San Juan Islands off the coast of Washington state. Directed by UM Environmental Studies alumna and Missoula resident Chandra Brown, the institute mixes water adventure with writing. Garcia-Arce found her creativity inspired by kayaking between wooded islands in the Salish Sea. Her group included about 10 other writers who were facilitated by a professional wordsmith. Guides provided food and logistics for the weeklong experience.

“You bring your work and you workshop and you do generative exercises,” she said. “We also would have little 2,000-word pieces that we would read to one another around the campfire in the evening. Or maybe you would be on a bench overlooking the Salish Sea or down on the beach. With the guides, the experience really lets you focus on writing, so it’s a little like glamping.”

Garcia-Arce’s next earned workshop was the weeklong Broadleaf Writers Conference in Vermont, where she workshopped her writing in the forests of New England.

“You have craft lectures with people working on similar things to you,” she said. “It helps you build a network of friends who come from everywhere in the world.”

The best was yet to come. In a UM class taught by the recently retired Dan Spencer, Garcia-Arce became interested in how people get into ecological restoration – especially in remote, rural parts of the world. This inspired her to self-fund a trip to Baja California, where she had family members she had never met. Soon she strapped three surfboards to the roof of her stick-shift Subaru, coordinated with friends who would join her for parts of the journey, and headed south.

Garcia-Arce writes on the beach in San Quintin, Mexico.
(Photo by Justine Holden)
“It came out of curiosity,” she said. “I didn’t know what I would find down there or what would happen. I thought I could at least do some surfing in case everything else failed. But I had the greatest time and met some amazing people.”

After 12 hours of driving south of the border, she arrived at the tiny, remote fishing town of Bahía Asunción. She met a long-lost cousin, and many others in the village shared her last name.

“They are all these fishing people who are really great surfers, divers and conservationists,” Garcia-Arce said. “They maintain some of the most-pristine underwater kingdoms in Baja and provide some of the most fish to Baja as well.”

In small communities on the peninsula, she discovered rural people doing their own conservation work from the ground up with little or no help from the government. Some would do 24-hour surveillance to protect fishing areas from poachers. Many used rod-and-reel fishing for everything instead of long-line fishing or nets.

If she had to pick the best day of her summer, it was this:

“We arrived in a surf spot called Scorpion Bay, which is one of the most famous longboarding spots in the world. I got there with my best friend from childhood during Hurricane Estelle,
which meant giant swells. It was so fun! Then we went out for drinks with fishermen in a
cantina and bonded over – of all things – the UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship). They are
into lobster diving, and they invited me back to do some citizen-based lobster research in the
winter. They would like to increase their yields in December and January, and I volunteered to
do some diving for them.

“That was one of the coolest days, because we spent six hours surfing and then made friends
with people who could talk lobster with me.”

Garcia-Arce started surfing at age 12 and always has had a deep affinity for the ocean. This
made her an outlier among her immediate family in San Diego, where her dad doesn’t even
swim. She said finding blood relatives who also were creatures of the sea was a revelation.

“It was really cool to meet people I was related to who also shared my love for the ocean,” she
said. “They were covered with these ocean tattoos and would spend every day in the boat on
the water. It was awesome to meet other Mexican people who shared passions that sometimes
made me feel isolated.”

Garcia-Arce said Montana definitely has impacted her outdoor pursuits. She is drawn to trail
running (including the occasional ultramarathon), fly-fishing and especially snowboarding. She
said Missoula may remain her home after graduation, but she definitely plans to write about
those remote Baja communities and return there often.

“I hope my trip is the start of some kind of book,” she said. “It would be great to do some
adventure writing that weaves in elements of social justice. In Baja, there were a lot of cultural
and economic disparities in regard to the Americans that I encountered down there. Maybe I
could earn a Fulbright Fellowship to provide more time living in Baja to explore this.

“Because I didn’t realize I could become so attached to a place, but it happened.”

###

Contact: Dave Kuntz, UM strategic communications director, 406-243-5659,
dave.kuntz@umontana.edu.
UM Student Dives Into Summer of Writing, Surfing, Self-Discovery

Launch UM virtual tour.
Helicopter pilot Rod Snider, 92, will attend the Oct. 6 premiere of “Higgins Ridge,” which recounts his harrowing rescue of 20 smokejumpers in 1961.

Tom Kovalicky, who served as the Nez Perce National Forest supervisor from 1982 to 1991, was a smokejumper first. In 1961, he and 19 others
MISSOULA – Smokejumpers who survived a “gobbler” of a wildfire in 1961 will recount their harrowing experience during a special panel event at the University of Montana celebrating an upcoming film featuring the story on Montana PBS.

“Higgins Ridge,” named for the location of the fire in Idaho’s Selway Bitterroot Wilderness, will screen at the Wilma in downtown Missoula on Thursday, Oct. 6. Doors open at 7 p.m. The UM Alumni Association will host a panel discussion with the survivors at 11 a.m. Friday, Oct. 7, in the Brantly Hall Presidents Room. Both events are free and open to the public.

In the film, 12 of the 20 smokejumpers who jumped onto Higgins Ridge on Aug. 4, 1961, share the story of how the fire surrounded them, forcing them to shelter in place. About three hours later, helicopter pilot Rod Snider managed to land on the ridge in smoke and wind and shuttle the smokejumpers to safety. Snider, now 92 years old, is featured in the documentary, along with many of his original photos taken in 1961.

Snider and several of the Higgins Ridge smokejumpers plan to attend the Thursday premiere. More than half of the Higgins Ridge smokejumpers were UM college students in the late 1950s and early ’60s, who spent their summer jumping from airplanes and fighting fire for the U.S. Forest Service. Friday’s 30-minute discussion will center on the smokejumpers’ time in Missoula, with an opportunity to meet and mingle with the panelists from 11:30 a.m. to noon.

Most of the interviews in the film were collected in 2019 as part of the National Museum of Forest Service History’s Higgins Ridge Oral History Project. The museum partnered with Montana PBS producer and UM alumna Breanna McCabe for technical assistance recording.
the interviews, and McCabe collected additional interviews and materials to weave the stories into one hourlong film. Montana PBS plans to broadcast “Higgins Ridge” in early 2023.

A teaser of the film is online at https://www.montanapbs.org/programs/higgins-ridge/.

UM alumna Breanna McCabe (center) helped capture more than a dozen interviews with smokejumpers, including Roger Siemens (left) and Mark Greydanus, for her upcoming film “Higgins Ridge” for Montana PBS.

###

Contact: Breanna McCabe, “Higgins Ridge” producer, 406-243-4853, breanna.mccabe@montanapbs.org; Roni Hecker, UM Alumni Association engagement officer, 406-243-4019, veronica.hecker@umontana.edu.

Launch UM virtual tour.
UM to Celebrate 1960s-Era Smokejumper Alums at Film Premiere, Panel
UM TO HOST CONFERENCE FOR EDUCATORS ADDRESSING INDIGENOUS BOARDING SCHOOL SYSTEM

28 SEPTEMBER 2022
MISSOULA – The University of Montana will host a conference for Montana educators, "Boarding Schools: Remembering Our Resiliency and Shared Knowledge for Trauma-Informed Learning," on Friday, Sept. 30, the National Day of Remembrance for Indian Boarding Schools.

Organized by UM, the Phyllis J. Washington College of Education and the National Native Children's Trauma Center, the conference is a hybrid event combining in-person and virtual presenters and participants that will run from 8:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. with a keynote address by Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart and Dr. Deidre Longhair. Continuing education credits will be available for teachers who attend.

The conference coincides with the U.S. government’s ongoing Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, which U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland created to investigate the scope of the boarding school system, which was used as a tool of forced assimilation from the 1800s through the 1960s and severely disrupted Native families and communities.

The first installment of the investigation’s report was released in May, and the department has begun hosting gatherings to hear and document survivors’ accounts of experiences in boarding schools.

“Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart pioneered the study of the collective traumas experienced by multiple generations of Indigenous North Americans,” said Dr. Maegan Rides At The Door, director of UM’s National Native Children’s Trauma Center. “We are honored to host her and her close collaborator, Dr. Longhair, as speakers for this event, which we hope will equip Montana educators with the skills to address the ongoing effects of historical traumas in our tribal communities.”

The conference’s primary sessions will be accessible to both in-person and virtual attendees, and there will be additional breakout session workshops for in-person participants. There also will be teaching method workshops in the areas of history, language arts, science, art, media and tribal languages. All attendees are encouraged to wear orange.

Additionally, from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. there will be an Every Child Matters walk on the UM Oval and lighting Main Hall in orange to honor boarding school victims, survivors and future generations.

“A national conversation about the boarding school system is long overdue,” Rides At The Door said. “We want to take this opportunity to promote healing from collective trauma and to help
prepare Native youth for this important but potentially disturbing conversation about the deaths, abuses and intergenerational suffering created by the system. Montana educators are in a position to lead this effort.”

Additional sponsors for the conference include the Robert and Beverly Braig Family, UM’s Department of Native American Studies, the UM Office of the President, the UM Office of the Provost, the Association of American University Women-Missoula and Missoula’s All Nations Health Center.

Attendees can register for the conference online.

Contact: Dave Kuntz, director of strategic communication, 406-243-5659, dave.kuntz@umontana.edu.
Andrew Pitsch proposes to Linsey Trenary on the University of Montana Oval Sept. 24 while her son, Landon, looks on. 

(UM photos by Tommy Martino)
Montana alumnus Andrew Pitsch is one of those big-hearted romantic guys, so when it came time to ask his girlfriend to marry him, he wanted it to be extra special.

This is what he came up with: Pitsch purchased an engraved Centennial Circle Brick near the Grizzly Bear statue on the UM Oval. The inscription reads:

LINDSEY TRENARY
WILL YOU
MARRY ME?

He then decided to lure his bride-to-be to campus for UM’s Sept. 23 Homecoming football game. Two hours before kickoff, with the University’s signature grizzly statue looming overhead, he would point out the special brick, blow her mind, drop to one knee and verbally repeat the big question.

That was his plan anyway. This is how it really went down:

Traffic was a bit intense after the UM Homecoming parade. Pitsch, who graduated in 2015 with a degree in sociology, was all nerves from juggling multiple details to make his surprise happen. But he managed to find a parking spot near University Avenue, which provided a straight shot down to the bear statue. Then he learned the photographer he had lined up to record the moment – his buddy Tommy Martino (who happens to work for UM) – was trapped in traffic.

Pitsch started to walk slower to give Martino more time … but not too slowly. His girlfriend
already was suspicious he was up to something. A few months previous, he had rummaged in her jewelry box looking for her ring size. She noticed things had shifted.

“She's like 'Why were you in my jewelry box?'' he said. “I couldn’t believe I had been so dumb to not cover my tracks. The was kind of the first tipoff.”

The second tipoff was him bringing up the idea of officially adopting Trenary's 11-year-old son, Landon. She knew he was getting serious, and big things were afoot. But he had spun it that they would break the adoption to Landon on the UM Oval, which was why they had to go there.

Life sped up and became chaotic as they arrived at the Grizzly Bear statue. First, Trenary spotted her parents loitering around the UM Oval, which was a bit unusual. (Pitsch had formally asked them for her hand in marriage, and they had wanted to be there for the adoption and proposal. An aunt and uncle also lurked nearby.) His photographer was still missing. Then – in a surreal confluence of UM Oval love – they saw another couple getting engaged!

“We saw the whole thing go down with the other proposal,” he said. “She said yes, and they were kissing at that time. What were the chances?”

Pitsch fought to stay focused. He pushed on. He pulled Landon aside and spoke of the adoption. He had become a father figure to the boy, and they were going to make it official. Random people walked by and asked him and Trenary, “Did you two just get engaged?” He tried to ignore them.

In the midst of this, the photographer finally arrived. Martino walked up and started congratulating them – Pitsch didn’t know if it was for the adoption or proposal. He firmly
patted Martino on the shoulder and said, “I’m going to need another minute, man!”

Pitsch persevered. He told his girlfriend he had one more surprise for her. He led her to her brick – he had scouted the exact location early in the morning – and said, “Hey, Lindsey, I need you to look down and read that for me.” Then he got down on one knee.

Despite all the hints and suspicions, Trenary didn’t see the brick coming.

“I was so nervous I was shaking,” Pitsch said. “Pretty much what I said was, ‘Lindsey you are the love of my life – the woman of my dreams. Would you do me the honor and marry me?’ And I started crying when I said, ‘You are the love of my life …’ I don’t know what came over
me, but I got emotional. But I got it together when I asked her to marry me.”

After that, all the surrounding family members “came barreling in” for congratulations, hugs and pictures. Pitsch said it was a crazy, special scene he will always remember.

He got the idea to use a Centennial Circle brick for his proposal because his mother purchased one to celebrate his UM graduation, and he said the marriage brick isn’t too far from his student one.

Pitsch grew up in Billings, and Trenary is from Helena. They met working at the Montana State Fund in Helena, and they started dating in April 2019. She is currently a human resources business partner for the state Department of Administration. He still works part time for the Montana State Fund and also is a part-time student at Helena College UM.

As for their marriage brick, anyone can view it on the Oval. The bear statue faces directly toward it on the outer edge of engraved bricks. And the brick immediately below was purposely left blank. Next spring, UM will engrave it with:

SHE SAID YES.
Contact: Dave Kuntz, UM director of strategic communications, 406-243-5659, dave.kuntz@mso.umt.edu.

UM Centennial Circle Bricks are for sale online.

Launch UM virtual tour.
The University of Montana has its largest first-year class in six years.
MISSOULA – The University of Montana welcomed more than 1,351 first-year students to campus this fall, marking the largest incoming class at the state’s flagship university in six years.

In addition to this 6% increase over 2021, there are an additional 74 first-year students that came to UM with some college credit. The number of first-year students on campus this fall is 1,425.

This is the second consecutive year of sizable growth among the incoming class at UM, putting the University on a strong growth path in the years ahead. With 8,094 in total, there are more students enrolled at the UM main campus than last year.

“UM continues to show a strong enrollment trajectory,” said UM President Seth Bodnar. “With the number of first-year students increasing, the improved retention rate among our students since 2018 and continued growth on our main campus, UM is now firmly in a cycle of growth.”

In addition to incoming student headcount growth, UM also has grown exponentially in the number of students it serves through employer partnerships that aren’t reflected in the traditional census headcount.

Since launching in 2021, UM’s AccelerateMT has enrolled more than 758 students in Missoula College and short-term academic programs across the state that are taught in conjunction with local businesses to meet the emerging needs of Montana’s growing economy. AccelerateMT is embedded at UM and serves as the economic and workforce development partner for employers across the state.

“AccelerateMT’s proven track record of providing rapid training to meet key workforce needs made it an ideal partner as we seek to strengthen Montana’s pipeline of skilled workers,” said Laurie Esau, commissioner of the Montana Department of Labor & Industry. “The success we see today will help ensure a robust Montana workforce for years to come.”

With the large number of students at UM this fall, the University’s fall tuition revenue is nearly $40 million, 12.4% higher than the same period in 2021.

“UM is on sound financial footing,” said Paul Lasiter, UM’s vice president for operations and finance. “We are well positioned to continue making critical investments in our students and our campus infrastructure for years to come.”
UM reported a total student headcount of 9,955 for the fall 2022 census. Within the headcount, there is a graduate professional program that has seen a significant decrease over the past year – including a 143-student reduction in the Physical Therapy partnership program with Rehab Essentials. Since 2008, UM has partnered with Rehab Essentials to provide a “bridge” program for physical therapists across the world who seek mid-career graduate degrees.

“Now in its twelfth year, the clinical doctorate degree academic partnership program is one of the most successful in the country, with nearly 2,000 graduates who are now UM alumni,” said Reed Humphrey, dean of the UM College of Health. “As the pool of physical therapists wishing to bridge to a doctoral degree naturally declines, the number of enrolled students in this program was expected to decrease. Through the same academic partnership, UM is expanding its international reach and also launched this fall a similar bridge curriculum for occupational therapists. This expansion is expected to grow enrollment in the years ahead.”

Missoula College reports a total student headcount 1,215, a 2% decrease from 2021. UM’s two-year affiliate still maintains a 3% increase in its total student population from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Overall, the student retention rate held steady at 74% This figure measures the rate that students persist between their first and second year at UM. Since Bodnar started as president in 2018, the student retention rate at UM has risen 6%.

Other highlights from the fall 2022 enrollment census at the UM main campus include:

- 710 first-year Montana students, an 8.4% increase over 2021.
- 610 Native American students, a 2.2% increase over 2021. This growth builds on the 23% Native American student growth at UM from 2018 to 2021.
- 279 student veterans, a 6.5% increase over 2021.
- 250 law school students, a 1.6% increase over 2021.
- 192 early admit and dual-enrollment students, a 35% increase over 2021.

UM’s fall 2022 census report is available online.
Contact: Dave Kuntz, director of strategic communication, 406-243-5659, dave.kuntz@umontana.edu.

Launch UM virtual tour.
Enrollment: UM Welcomes Largest First-Year Class to Campus in Six Years
MISSOULA – The University of Montana and UM Foundation honored Mark and Cheryl Burnham with the Order of the Grizzly Award at the President’s Fall Gathering on Thursday, Sept. 22. The award recognizes those whose leadership and philanthropy have made a significant impact on UM.
The Burnhams have supported the University for more than three decades through their generous philanthropy and service. Mark, who grew up in Helena as one of six children, has more than a dozen family members who are alumni or associates of UM. He graduated in 1984 with a degree in finance from the College of Business, and Cheryl graduated in 1986 from the Skaggs School of Pharmacy.

Due to the transformative power that college had on their life and lifelong relationships they initiated at UM, the Burnhams believe strongly in the value of higher education.

“It is a great honor to bestow this award on the Burnhams on behalf of UM and the UM Foundation,” said Cindy Williams, president and CEO of the UM Foundation. “They inspire our entire giving community through their continuous generosity and service.”

The Burnhams are Missoula residents who generously support UM by giving to enhance faculty teaching and research, student initiatives and leadership roles in the College of Business, the Skaggs School of Pharmacy in the College of Health, and Grizzly Athletics.

In 2016 the Burnhams, together with Eric and Blair Sprunk and their families, made contributions to create the College of Business Sprunk and Burnham Endowed Dean’s Chair – the first of its kind in the state. The endowment guarantees funds in perpetuity to support the dean’s vision and strategic initiatives. Additionally, they have endowed a finance professorship in the college.

The Burnhams also have supported UM’s health and pharmacy programs, with gifts to establish a faculty fellowship in pharmacy practice. In 2018, the Burnhams provided $1 million in seed funding to help UM expand its commitment to educate health care practitioners for communities across Montana. With this gift, UM Health and Medicine created the Burnham Family Population Health Fellowship for doctoral students in public health, as well as the Burnham Family Practice in Montana Scholarship, which supports UM students in health care who plan to practice in rural and underserved areas of the state.

From 2018 to 2020, the Burnhams served as co-chairs during the public phase of Campaign Montana, the most ambitious and successful higher education fundraising campaign in state history. Over seven years, the comprehensive “Campaign Montana – Think Big. Be Bold.” inspired $450.9 million in giving from more than 34,000 donors to elevate every UM student, college, school and program.
The campaign exceeded every goal, including the initial $320 million goal set during the quiet phase that began in July 2013, the $400 million goal announced when the campaign launched publicly in October 2018 and the aspirational goal of 110% ($440 million) established during the campaign’s final year. The Burnhams' leadership was a cornerstone of Campaign Montana’s success and its transformative, long-lasting effect on thousands of students and the entire UM community.

In addition to providing philanthropic support, the Burnhams remain highly engaged with UM. Mark lectures semiannually in the College of Business and served on the UM Foundation Board of Trustees. In 2018, the College of Business recognized him for outstanding career achievement.

Mark began his career in 1985 as a credit trainee at Norwest Bank in Billings. Over the next 16 years, he gained banking experience while working for Norwest (now Wells Fargo) and First Bank Systems (now U.S. Bank) in Montana, Minnesota and Colorado. In 2000, he joined Holiday Retirement Corp., the largest owner, operator and builder in the senior housing industry, based in Salem, Oregon. He served as director of finance until Holiday was sold to a private equity firm.

Through OZ Cap LLC, formed in January 2009, and other related entities, Mark has had active ownership in a variety of commercial real estate and operating investments, including community banking, senior housing, hospitality, multifamily, retail, offices, residential land development, golf courses, private lending and franchise restaurants.

Cheryl worked as a registered pharmacist for 15 years, both in a hospital and a retail setting, and serves as president of the Madrona Hill Foundation, a private family foundation.

“UM is a place where donors can make a remarkable impact,” Cheryl said. “We are honored to invest in students’ success and the future of our state.”

“We all have an opportunity to make a difference,” Mark agreed. “We are proud to give back to the University and our community.”

The UM Foundation established the Order of the Grizzly in 1965 to honor individuals who sustain an active interest in Montana and whose accomplishments contribute to the welfare of the state, nation and world. The UM Foundation and University of Montana present this award to those friends who demonstrate a deep commitment to the University, extraordinary
generosity, a distinguished career and a legacy of leadership that has made a significant impact on UM. Recipients are awarded a bronze statue of a grizzly bear, the mascot of UM, sculpted by the late artist and Professor Rudy Autio.
UM Foundation Honors Burnhams with Order of the Grizzly Award
UM President Seth Bodnar meets with Emma Lommasson in 2018. UM will present Lommasson with a posthumous Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters.
MISSOULA – Emma Bravo Lommasson often remarked that the University of Montana was her home and its students were her life.

During her exceedingly long life – she died in 2019 at the age of 107 – Lommasson spent 58 years as a UM student, teacher, staff member and the University’s first female interim registrar. Even after she retired in 1977, she continued volunteering with the University and maintaining lifelong friendships. The Emma Lommasson Center was named for her in 2001, and she wound up meeting all but the first four of UM’s 19 presidents.

Now the University will honor this treasured member of its family with a posthumous Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters, which will be presented in December during Fall Commencement. The Montana Board of Regents approved UM’s request to award the doctorate Sept. 22 during its meeting in Billings.

“Emma had a legendary career at the University of Montana, with an incredibly positive impact on generations of students,” UM President Seth Bodnar said. “There are so many stories about her grace and kindness, and her memory is an inspiration for us all. We are proud to present this icon with an honorary doctorate.”

Of the nine letters of recommendation submitted, three were by current and former UM presidents. Sheila Stearns, who led UM and also was a former Montana commissioner of higher education wrote that Lommasson “left her elegant footprint on several
generations of Montana students and on the University of Montana writ large. She was the walking definition of grace under pressure and breaking-the-mold leadership."

Lommasson came to UM in 1929 as a student from Sand Coulee, Montana. She earned an undergraduate math degree with a chemistry minor in 1933. After a brief teaching career, she returned to UM to earn an education master's in 1939 and launched a career working for her alma mater.

Originally serving as an instructor in the Department of Mathematics, Lommasson also taught navigation and civil air regulations during World War II to prepare students for service in the U.S. Air Force. She was appointed as UM’s first veteran's adviser and then assistant registrar following the war, while also serving as adviser to the Air Force ROTC Angel Flight for 17 years. At her retirement Lommasson was serving as UM’s first female acting/interim registrar.

When Bodnar first met Lommasson on Feb. 15, 2018, she had this to say: “Life is what you make of it. Stay positive and don’t complain. I’m just another person who attended the University from a small town, and I found it to be the most wonderful place.”

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**Contact:** Dave Kuntz, UM director of strategic communications, 406-243-5659, dave.kuntz@mso.umt.edu.
Launch UM virtual tour.
UM to Present Posthumous Honorary Doctorate to Iconic Emma Lommasson
MISSOULA – Iuliia Mendel, the former press secretary to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, will launch the Fall 2022 Mansfield Dialogues at the University of Montana on Tuesday, Sept. 20.

Mendel will present “Ukraine: Our Fight for Independence” at 7 p.m. MDT via Zoom. She will share her first-person account from the ground in Ukraine during Russia’s invasion and describe from her front-row seat many of the key events preceding the 2022 Russian invasion. She attended meetings between Zelenskyy and Russian President Vladimir Putin, visited the front lines in Donbas and fielded press inquiries after the infamous phone calls between former U.S. President Donald Trump and Zelenskyy.

The event is free and open to the public, but Zoom seats are limited. Advance registration is required at https://www.umt.edu/mansfield/.

“The war in Ukraine is of critical importance to Montanans given shared challenges in oil and gas, wheat, nuclear issues and democracy,” said Deena Mansour, executive director of UM’s Mansfield Center. “We welcome former Iuliia Mendel as part of our work to support a knowledgeable and engaged citizenry.”
When Mendel, a Ukrainian journalist, got the call that she had been hired to work for Zelenskyy, she had no idea what was to come. As a young, female journalist thrust into a high-profile job on the international stage, Mendel experienced major historical events firsthand.

She saw Zelenskyy’s efforts to transform his country into a vibrant, prosperous European democracy. Mendel can shed light on the massive economic problems facing Ukraine and the entrenched corrupt oligarchs in league with Russia. She witnessed the Kremlin’s repeated attacks to discredit Zelenskyy through disinformation and an army of bots and trolls. She can detail her own life as a millennial in Zelenskyy’s new Ukraine, where she said goodbye to her fiancé who joined the front lines, like so many other Ukrainian men.

Students from high schools across Montana – including communities in Hardin, Brockton, Whitefish and Bozeman – will view the Mansfield Dialogue and submit questions. With the support of its bookseller partner, Fact and Fiction, the Mansfield Center will distribute more than 120 copies of Mendel's book, “The Fight of Our Lives,” to Montana students.

Founded by an Act of Congress in 1983, the Mansfield Center fosters globally minded leaders of integrity to honor Mike Mansfield’s legacy of patriotic statesmanship. As the U.S. Senate’s longest-serving majority leader during polarizing times, Mansfield’s steady hand was a stabilizing force for our country.

Contact: Deena Mansour, executive director, UM Mansfield Center, 406-274-0992, deena.mansour@umontana.edu.
UM's Homecoming Parade returns for 2022 Homecoming Week, Sept. 21-24, after a two-year hiatus.

MISSOULA – The University of Montana Homecoming Parade proudly returns for 2022 Homecoming Week, Sept. 21-24, after a two-year hiatus.
The UM Alumni Association promises this year's parade – although with a modified route because of construction on the Beartracks (Higgins Avenue) Bridge – will be a festive celebration of all things Griz.

“This year’s theme, ‘Might of Montana,’ is exceptionally fitting given UM’s outstanding accomplishments and growth throughout the last year,” said alumni Director LeAnn Meyer. “We can’t wait to welcome alumni and friends back to campus to gather for a week of events that celebrate our rich traditions and ignite the Griz spirit for all.”

The following events are sponsored by the UM Alumni Association during Homecoming Week. Each event is open to the public, and media are invited to attend.

- **Hello Walk** on Sept. 21 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The Hello Walk will take place on-campus in front of Turner Hall.

- **Griz on Tap** on Sept. 22 from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Griz on Tap will take place at Cranky Sam Public House at 233 W. Main St.

- **Distinguished Alumni Award** Ceremony and panel discussion on Sept. 23 at 5:30 p.m. This event will take place at the University Center Ballroom.

- **Yell Night Pep Rally** on Sept. 23 at 8 p.m. The Yell Night Pep Rally will take place on the UM Oval and feature the UM Marching Band, Grizzly Football team with Coach Bobby Hauck, Singing on the Steps and lighting of the M.

- **Homecoming Parade** on Sept. 24 at 10 a.m. Staging will be at the Missoula County Fairgrounds, and the parade will move east from Sentinel High School, along South Avenue, to south campus and Dornblaser field.

UM’s annual Homecoming football game will kick off at 2 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 24, when the Griz take on Portland State in Washington-Grizzly Stadium.

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**Contact:** LeAnn Meyer, UM Alumni Association director, 406-243-5258, leann.meyer@mso.umt.edu.
UM 2022 Homecoming Week Features Return of Beloved Parade

Launch UM virtual tour.
Distinguished UM Researcher Honored with Critical Watershed Hydrology Chairship

UM's Kelsey Jencso accepts an endowment from Dave Franke in front of the W.A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation.

08 SEPTEMBER 2022
MISSOULA – The University of Montana has announced that Kelsey Jencso, a faculty member and renowned researcher, will receive an endowed position to elevate research and teaching in water science and management.

Jencso will serve as the inaugural W.A. Franke Endowed Faculty Chair in Watershed Hydrology, a position created by the W.A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation to lead in research, teaching and community engagement about the impact of watershed health and its importance to society, conservation and local economies, both in Montana and around the world. This endowed faculty chair is made possible with generous support from Bill and Carolyn Franke and the Franke family.

“I am excited to expand on the critical work UM and the college have done in order to expand access to important hydrology education and research,” Jencso said. “This endowment will help us fulfil our mission to advance the water science that is needed to make strong decisions for Montana’s land and water users.”

As the chair of watershed hydrology, Jencso will oversee student training in watershed health and functioning and encourage field-based knowledge that prepares students for the local and global challenges emerging as a result of climate change.

“We are deeply grateful to the Franke family for once again creating unmatched opportunities for UM students and faculty,” said Alan Townsend, dean and Franke Professor at the W.A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation. “This critical support will build on the foundation that is in place and ensure generations of UM students have access to world class education and research.”

Jencso currently serves on the faculty of the Franke College and as the state climatologist with the Montana Climate Office at the UM.

In 2020, Jencso was awarded more than $20 million by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to install 205 weather stations for monitoring snowpack and soil moisture in the Upper Missouri River Basin.

Jencso and his team have worked to use those weather stations to provide critical down-
stream data to farmers, ranchers and recreationists in central and eastern Montana, as well as in North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming and Nebraska, who rely on a healthy Missouri River system for their way of life. These stations are also critical for improvements in the detection and early warning of drought and floods.

The W.A. Franke Endowed Faculty Chair in Watershed Hydrology was created with the $24 million gift made by the Franke family in 2016. That gift, the single largest gift in UM history, focused on students and programs that emphasize environmental research and hands-on learning and established two faculty chair positions in FCFC.

Since launching prior to the 2020-21 school year, the Franke College of Forestry and Conservation’s new major, Environmental Science and Sustainability, is one of the fastest growing majors in the Montana University System. It includes a track for students who study water resources.

The UM Foundation is an independent nonprofit organization that has inspired philanthropic support to enhance excellence and opportunity at UM since 1950.

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**Contact:** Dave Kuntz, UM director of strategic communications, 406-243-5659, dave.kuntz@umontana.edu.

Launch UM virtual tour.
UM sociology student Luke Santore, a former wildland firefighter, studied the mental health issues surrounding those working on the frontlines of the nation’s wildfires.

MISSOULA – For seven years, University of Montana student Luke Santore worked on and off as a wildland firefighter, battling blazes in states throughout the West. The work was physically
grueling, the frontline conditions dangerous and the social life isolating at best.

But it was the off season he dreaded most.

It was then – the “winters of vice” as he calls it – that Santore went face-to-face with the mental health issues and chemical dependencies that had driven him to drop out of his studies at UM on several occasions and enroll as a firefighter for one of the many private contractors in the field.

He would go on to work for seven years in firefighting, two of those years for the U.S. Forest Service.

“I had mental health and learning disorders that went undiagnosed for a long time, and I came from a family that had access to care,” he said. “What if you don’t have that access? Undiagnosed mental conditions, of course, aren’t that unusual.”

Particularly, he has since come to learn, in a student study he conducted on firefighter mental health.

A native of Manhattan, New York, Santore moved to Missoula in 2013 and enrolled in UM’s forestry program.

“I guess you could say it was one of those ‘go west, young man moments,’” he said. “I like camping, but I really didn’t realize what forestry actually entailed.”

As he bounced in and out of school and on and off the fire line, he sought treatment for his addictions and undiagnosed ADHD. In 2020, he was back in school for good, switching his major to sociology.

“Social justice became my primary motivation in life after experiencing dramatic positive life change thanks to my privileged access to mental health care,” Santore said. “I chose sociology because it seemed like the best educational vehicle to a career focused on social justice issues.”

Santore also reconnected with the Davidson Honors College, which he left after dropping out of UM. He graduated cum laude this past spring.
When it came time to select a subject for his DHC capstone project, Santore decided to dig deeper into his own experiences in firefighting to learn what it was about the profession and all its challenges that drew his attention, and more importantly, was his experience unique?

Daisy Rooks, a professor and chair of the UM Department of Sociology, said sociologists often conduct research that is relevant to their own experience.

“What sets great sociology student projects apart from good ones is when students look beyond their own experience,” she said. “Luke put together a project that pushed beyond his own experience as a firefighter. He looked at the system. That’s a sophisticated move from an undergraduate student.”

“I know the structure was beneficial for me,” he said.

Wanting to know more about the social and organizational aspects of the job, Santore then reached out to former coworkers whose phone numbers he had kept and ultimately interviewed 13 about their experience. While he recognizes his was not a representative sample, what he learned mirrored much of his life on the fire line. That included the mental health challenges of transitioning into and out of the fire season, the difficulty in maintaining relationships and social networks at home and the work itself, which involves long days and the physical efforts of a professional athlete. The offseason, many of his interviewees noted, was the most traumatic for them mentally.

Santore said he found it particularly interesting that those he interviewed rarely mentioned the actual dangers of fighting fires as stressful. Most, in fact, loved fighting fires.

“All who left though said it was the best decision of their life for their mental health,” he said.

Based on his interviews, Santore's study offered potential solutions for making firefighting a more sustainable career. Better pay – most firefighters make $15 to $17 per hour – clearer processes for promotions and access to affordable year-round health care were frequently cited suggestions from those he interviewed. And, perhaps a system for providing work or preferences for hiring of firefighters in the offseason similar to those preferences given to veterans.
“It’s nice to be thanked at a gas station for being a firefighter,” Santore said, “but I wanted health care and better pay.”

Improved working conditions will be needed even more, Santore concluded in his study, to attract and keep firefighters as wildland fires grew more prevalent with global warming.

This month Santore entered graduate school to continue his sociological training and said he’ll likely expand upon his original work studying firefighting and mental health.

Rooks, who will continue as his adviser, said she looks forward to seeing what he does next.

“His undergraduate thesis findings were so interesting,” Rooks explained, “I look forward to what else he can learn about firefighters’ mental health, and the occupation broadly, with more time to work on this and more data to analyze.”

When his master’s is complete, Santore wants to work for nonprofits that help wildland firefighters navigate the challenges of the profession.

Santore fought his last fire in 2021 and knows, like those he interviewed, that the job kept him out jail and might have saved his life. But so, too, did leaving it.

Contact: Dave Kuntz, UM strategic communications director, 406-243-5659, dave.kuntz@umontana.edu.
Managing the Heat: UM Student Studies Mental Health Effects of Firefighting
MISSOULA – As a student at the University of Montana School of Journalism, Jacob Baynham found inspiration in a visiting professor who pushed him to be a better writer and reporter. Now, Baynham is returning to encourage a new generation as UM’s next T. Anthony Pollner Distinguished Professor.

After graduating in 2007,
Award-Winning UM Journalist Returns to Teach

Jacob Baynham freelanced around Asia for The San Francisco Chronicle, Newsweek and other publications. He reported from Myanmar with a grant from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting. Now he writes for magazines such as Outside, GQ, National Parks and Men’s Health. In 2020, he won a National Magazine Award in profile writing for an essay published in The Georgia Review.

“Jacob is the first alum who was taught by a Pollner professor to be selected as one, and I cannot think of a better person to hold that honor,” said Lee Banville, director of the School of Journalism. “He is such an impressive writer and thorough reporter, but he is also an empathetic editor and teacher who will be a powerful presence at the school.”

This semester he will teach a mix of undergraduates and graduate students about the art of profile writing, breaking down each component of what makes a compelling story, including interviews, research and writing.

Despite the awards and his experience, Baynham said, he has a lot to live up to based on how a former Pollner professor affected him.

“I graduated from this school in 2007, and when I was a senior, I was taught by Pollner Professor Henriette Lowisch,” Baynham said. “She treated her students like professionals, and we all grew under her guidance. There are so many incredibly talented people on the list of former Pollner professors. They are big shoes to fill. I’m humbled but also excited to be working with students – to help get them excited about the power and possibilities of journalism.”
In addition to his class, he will work with the student newspaper, the Montana Kaimin, helping guide and edit the publication along with faculty adviser Jule Banville.

Although it is the students at the Kaimin and in his class who will benefit the most from Baynham’s presence, the general public will get its chance to hear from the journalist in September.

Baynham will present a public lecture at 7 p.m. Monday, Sept. 26, in the University Center Theater. The talk is titled “Curiosity is the Cure: Journalism and Humanity in Divided Times.”

“Curiosity seems like a simple concept, but it’s actually a complicated daily discipline,” he said. “To be curious is to be open to seeing things from vastly different points of view. That’s a skill that journalists have to keep sharp. It’s also a tool we all can use to have better, deeper conversations in divided times.”

The Pollner professorship was created to honor the memory of T. Anthony Pollner, a former Kaimin writer and journalism school graduate who died in a motorcycle accident. In endowing the Pollner professorship in 2001, Pollner’s parents, family and friends wanted to bring working journalists to the school to invigorate the scholarship and reporting of students and faculty members.

“Although we are now more than 20 years since the first Pollner professors came to campus, the program continues to have a tremendous impact on the lives of students here, creating connections with high-profile journalists in the field and allowing young journalists to find mentors who change their lives,” Banville said.

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**Contact:** Lee Banville, director, UM School of Journalism, 406-243-2577, lee.banville@mso.umt.edu.

Launch UM virtual tour.
Award-Winning UM Journalist Returns to Teach
Ailey Robinson, shown here in the planetarium of UM’s Payne Family Native American Center, will study black holes as part of a research project this semester. Robinson works at the planetarium, conducting shows for the public. (UM photos by Andy Kemmis)
MISSOULA – Lurking in the far reaches of outer space are immensely powerful dark monsters that eat entire star systems and swallow light itself. They are called black holes, and University of Montana student Ailey Robinson plans to conduct research this fall that adds to our knowledge of them.

Robinson is a senior from Lolo majoring in physics with an astronomy concentration. She created a research project in which she will investigate the innermost stable circular orbit (ISCO) surrounding black holes.

Nothing – not even light – can escape the immense gravity of these monsters. However, there is a point around each black hole, the ISCO, that is the smallest stable orbit for massive particles. Light there emanates from matter piling up right at the edge of an inescapable dark. And if it slips any lower … gulp!

“The ISCO is the lowest stable orbit of most particles around a black hole,” Robinson said. “As part of my project, I’ve created my own model to determine the ISCO.”

Her mentor for the project is Dr. Nate McCrady, a UM astrophysicist and professor in the Department of Physics and Astronomy. McCrady also leads UM’s involvement with MINERVA, a four-telescope array located in Arizona designed to hunt for planets around nearby stars.

Robinson said McCrady will help her test her model on a black hole whose ISCO is already known – perhaps the supermassive Sagittarius A* parked in the middle of our own Milky Way Galaxy. If her model holds up, she will work to figure the ISCOs for other gargantuan black holes at the center of galaxies.

Astronomers suspect a supermassive black hole like Sagittarius A* lurks at the heart of every large galaxy, but 10 million to a billion additional lesser black holes also may exist in our
galaxy. The lesser black holes often are the superdense remnants of collapsed stars, but McCrady said scientists don’t yet understand the origins of the big ones found at the center of galaxies.

Robinson will use existing data instead of a telescope to work on her project.

“It’s so anticlimactic – just using a computer and crunching numbers,” she laughs. “I can work on this in my PJs on the couch watching a movie.”

Robinson said she and her sister were raised by parents who instilled them with an intense scientific curiosity. By the time she was a sophomore at Hellgate High School in Missoula, she was taking a science-fair-prep course called Advanced Problems in Science. That class required her to find mentors in her chosen area of interest – in this case astrophysics – so she reached out to Dr. Paul Janzen and McCrady in UM’s physics and astronomy department.

She wound up doing research with both UM researchers for several years before setting foot on campus as a college student. Establishing those relationships made her college choice easy.

“I think this shows a lot about Dr. McCrady’s personality and patience,” she said. “Even in high school – before I had braces! – he would go through the basics of how to do science with me. In the six years that I’ve known him, he invested a lot of time in me, shepherding my curiosity for science and helping me along. Who does that? And then at UM I’ve been able to take his classes every semester, which has been amazing.”

Robinson came to UM as a Presidential Leadership Scholar, earning one of the University’s most-prestigious four-year scholarships, and she enrolled in UM’s Davidson Honors College. Her department and the DHC require capstone projects to graduate, and she said her black hole project will satisfy both those needs.

“The PLS Scholarship just provides so much peace of mind with not worrying about student debt and loans stacking up,” she said. “It allows me to pursue my academic passions and truly give projects like this my all, especially one like this that I’m not getting paid for.”

Besides satisfying UM academic requirements, Robinson intends to use the black hole project to boost her resume for her next academic adventure. She would love to study with the GRAPPA (GRavition AstroParticle Physics Amsterdam) program in Europe.
“I’m hoping to get in there and spend a few years earning my master’s and then hopefully continue on to my Ph.D. after that,” she said.

But for now, she has one more year to complete at UM. She said her older sister, Autumn Robinson, also attended UM for its STEM offerings and graduated last year with degrees in microbiology and geology. Autumn is now on the East Coast doing water-treatment research and earning a Ph.D.

Ailey Robinson said she has no regrets about taking an academic path to UM that now has her studying monstrous high-gravity celestial objects.

“I’m very biased at this point,” she said. “I’ve been treated so well by my professors and everyone in the Davidson Honors College. I think everyone should go to their smaller-town universities – especially for STEM.”

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**Contact:** Dave Kuntz, UM strategic communications director, 406-243-5659, dave.kuntz@umontana.edu.
Launch UM virtual tour.
UM’s American Indian Business Leaders chapter recently was named the best in the nation. Pictured are (left to right)
MISSOULA – American Indian Business Leaders is the only nonprofit organization solely dedicated to empowering Indigenous business students across the United States. And the nonprofit’s top chapter in the nation resides at the University of Montana College of Business.

UM took home Chapter of the Year honors for 2022 in the University Division of the recent 28th Annual AIBL Leadership Conference in Rancho Mirage, California.

“We couldn’t be prouder of our Native business students,” said Larry Gianchetta, the AIBL adviser and former dean of UM’s business college. “They demonstrated that their business acumen ranks among the best nationally.”

AIBL programs are designed to engage students in activities that stimulate, enhance and expand educational experiences beyond traditional academic methods. All students are
encouraged to participate in AIBL regardless of race, academic major or career objectives. AIBL has continued to grow since its inception and welcomed 15 new chapters in 2022.

The Chapter of the Year competition at the conference highlights the unique and dedicated work of AIBL chapters through a short video summarizing past and present activities, leadership activities, integration of Indigenous Culture, community service projects and fundraising efforts. Omaste-win Foster, UM’s AIBL chapter vice president from Rosebud, South Dakota, compiled the winning UM submission.

In addition to winning Chapter of the Year, UM AIBL also won first place in the Business Pitch Competition at the national conference. The winning pitch was made by Millie Bearleggins, the UM AIBL chapter president from Browning. By winning two of the three competitions at the conference, the UM Chapter took home $2,000 in prize money.

Both competitions were separated into three divisions: high school, tribal college and university.

Along with competitions at the conference, attendees heard from keynote speakers like Sam McKracken, founder of the Nike N7 division, participated in workshops and networked with other chapter members.

For more information on AIBL, visit www.aibl.org.

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UM American Indian Business Leaders Named Chapter of the Year