Member of the band
Singing star Taylor Swift gained a new, temporary member for her band on Monday, when she made a surprise visit to Auburn. The Grammy winner slipped into town for an impromptu performance at The Hotel at Auburn University to reward students Ryan Leander and Michael Wekall with long-sought hugs for their "A Hug from Taylor Swift" social media campaign. With Aubie providing silent but eager backup, Swift and her band entertained several hundred fans, who turned out almost immediately after Facebook and twitter alerts. For details, see page 4.

Apple senior exec Tim Cook to speak at May graduation

Auburn University alumnus Tim Cook, chief operations officer for Apple Inc., will deliver the commencement address at Auburn’s spring ceremony on Friday, May 14. The university will award approximately 2,967 degrees at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. ceremonies at Beard-Eaves-Memorial Coliseum. A 1982 industrial engineering graduate of Auburn, Cook will speak at both ceremonies.

Looking ahead to the occasion, Cook said, “It is a tremendous honor and pleasure for me to be Auburn’s commencement speaker this year. I love Auburn and the unique spirit that pervades the university and look forward to playing a small role in a very big day for the Class of 2010.”

At Apple, one of the successful and most lauded companies in the information technology field, Cook is second in command to CEO Steve Jobs and has led the company during two extended absences by Jobs.

See Commencement speaker, page 2

Fulbright Distinguished Chair awarded to Auburn professor

Alexander Vazsonyi of the College of Human Sciences at Auburn University has been awarded a Fulbright Distinguished Chair in the Czech Republic for this fall. A professor in the Auburn college’s Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Vazsonyi will hold the Distinguished Chair in Social Studies at Masaryk University, the second largest university in the Czech Republic.

Fulbright Distinguished Chairs are the most prestigious appointment awarded by the United States Department of State. Of approximately 800 Fulbright grants annually, only 40 are for Fulbright Distinguished Chairs at 22 universities around the world. A presidentially appointed 12-member board selects faculty for the chairs, which are reserved for “eminent scholars with substantial experience and publications in their respective fields.” Of the 40 Fulbright Distinguished Chairs, only 13 are designated for the social sciences.

“The Fulbright Distinguished Scholar Chair recognizes a limited number of scholars whose work has global significance, and Dr. Vazsonyi certainly is a faculty member of that stature,” said Auburn Provost Mary Ellen Mazey. “He has a distinguished record of teaching, research and service at Auburn University that helps connect Alabama to the world and will have a tremendous long-term impact on his students.”

The Michigan native has established an international reputation for his research and teaching concerning adolescent development and behavior, as well as studies in related academic disciplines. His studies of youth across cultures, across ethnic and racial groups and across economic groups have highlighted many similarities among teens around the globe.

See Fulbright Chair, page 2
Cook is responsible for all of Apple’s sales and operations, including worldwide management of Apple’s supply chain, sales, service and support for all its products. He also heads Apple’s Macintosh division. He has been widely credited with streamlining company operations, enabling Apple to build an international business reputation to match the company’s standing as the industry leader for quality and design innovation.

The Robertsdale native joined Apple in 1998, after a rapid rise through the corporate ranks with other major information technology companies, including IBM and Compaq. While working for companies in the Research Triangle of North Carolina, he earned an M.B.A. from Duke University.

Since 2005, Cook has served on Nike’s board of directors, and earlier this year he was elected to the board of directors for the National Football Foundation.

At Auburn, the 1982 alumnus has served as chair of the Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering Alumni Council, and he has established the endowed Fund for Excellence and the Tim Cook Leadership Scholarship.

The 10 a.m. commencement ceremony on May 14 will include the colleges and schools of Engineering; Forestry and Wildlife Sciences; Liberal Arts; and Sciences and Mathematics. The 2 p.m. ceremony will be for the colleges and schools of Agriculture; Architecture, Design and Construction; Business; Education; Human Sciences; and Nursing.

The ceremonies can be viewed live through the university’s website at www.auburn.edu/graduationlive. Auburn’s professional schools, the School of Pharmacy and the College of Veterinary Medicine, will hold separate ceremonies for their graduates.

Overall, Auburn will award 2,240 bachelor’s degrees, 424 master’s degrees, 226 professional degrees, eight specialist degrees and 69 doctorates.

The College of Liberal Arts will award the most degrees, 519, followed by the College of Business with 496 and the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering with 302. The College of Sciences and Mathematics will award 238 degrees; College of Education, 220; College of Human Sciences, 115; College of Architecture, Design and Construction, 159; College of Agriculture, 94; School of Nursing, 65; and School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, 32.

The School of Pharmacy will present 123 doctor of pharmacy degrees, and the College of Veterinary Medicine will present 94 doctor of veterinary medicine degrees. Nine professional degrees in audiology will also be awarded.

— Roy Summerford and Charles Martin
Topping out
The Office of Information Technology recently celebrated the “topping out” installation of the final horizontal beam on its new building. Veronica Chaloupka, at right, was among OIT staff members to sign the bright orange beam before its installation. Above, the horizontal beam can be seen just above the crane.

Writing Initiative
Sharon Roberts named to first Shug Jordan Professorship of Writing

Biological Sciences Professor Sharon Roberts, co-chair of a task force that helped craft new writing requirements and expand writing support at Auburn University, has been named as the university’s first recipient of the Ralph “Shug” Jordan Professorship of Writing. “Dr. Roberts has provided leadership and vision to the development of Auburn University’s writing program, and I am confident that our students will continue to benefit from her continuing role with writing instruction across the curriculum,” said Provost Mary Ellen Mazey.

As co-chair of the Writing Initiative Task Force, Roberts helped formulate a plan for moving the goal of good writing into a set of practices designed to reach undergraduates in all curricula and support faculty as they learn to incorporate writing into their content. Over a two-year period, the task force played a key role in creating the Office of University Writing and developing criteria for the Writing across the Majors requirement that the University Senate recently passed and sent to the administration for final approval.

Both the expanded Miller Writing Center and the Jordan Professorship are the latest manifestations of a commitment by the university faculty, administration and Board of Trustees to ensuring that all students, regardless of field of study, graduate with superior writing skills. The Miller Center, which will support students in any undergraduate course this fall, is named for the late John C.H. “Jack” Miller Jr., who as an Auburn trustee, championed the cause of clear and effective writing for inclusion in the university’s strategic plan.

The Athletic Department, meanwhile, endowed the Jordan Professorship as a statement of support for academics and in memory of the legendary football coach. The professorship, with an annual stipend of $12,000, supports faculty efforts to integrate innovative writing assignments into course content.

“We are committed to supporting the academic mission of Auburn University not only for our student-athletes, but for the campus as a whole,” said Athletics Director Jay Jacobs. “There is no better way for us to do that than to endow a professorship in honor and memory of Coach Shug Jordan, the most successful coach in Auburn history and one of the finest gentlemen to ever serve the university.”

“My job has certainly been made easier because of the commitment and thoughtfulness of the Writing Initiative Task Force and the continued leadership Sharon Roberts has displayed in this endeavor,” said Director of University Writing Margaret Marshall.

Citing the position’s requirements, Marshall added, “Sharon has clearly ‘demonstrated a commitment to student success through effective and innovative writing assignments integrated into the content’ of her courses. Best of all, she continues to experiment with approaches to writing, to ask important questions about her own teaching and about student learning.”

In her new role, Roberts will co-chair the University Writing Committee, present faculty-development workshops, promote undergraduate writing and writing instruction across the university and assist faculty in developing strategies for incorporating writing into their own courses.

Roberts has been a faculty member in the College of Sciences and Mathematics since 1996. Biological Sciences Department Chair Jack Feminella said Roberts’ influence can be seen within the department and across the campus. “Her involvement over the past two years with the Writing Initiative Task Force, as interim Writing Program administrator and, most recently, as the co-chair of the Writing Program Committee collectively have positioned Sharon at the epicenter of the transformation of the Auburn campus to a place where writing becomes a focal point of student general education,” he explained.

Noting that he and Roberts had frequently discussed strategies for improving student writing within Biological Sciences, Feminella said, “These discussions have caused me to restructure my own courses regarding use of writing and related rubrics to enhance learning. I believe that, as Shug Jordan Professor, Sharon can have similar positive influence on many Auburn faculty and students.”

— Ray Summerford
Facebook fans of Taylor Swift get their long-sought hugs in surprise by singer

Grammy award-winning singer and songwriter Taylor Swift made a special appearance in Auburn on Monday to surprise two students, who had been on a quest to receive a hug from her, and to give a mini-concert for those involved in the venture.

Auburn students Michael Wekall and Ryan Leander had the idea in January, and started a website, www.ahugfromtaylorswift.com/, featuring videos detailing their mission to get a hug from Swift. A Facebook group dedicated to the project has nearly 10,000 members, and an amateur video of the event quickly had 200,000 views.

On March 25, Swift posted a video of her own, issuing a challenge to Wekall and Leander to do a good deed, helping an elderly woman across the street, in order to earn their hugs. The two sought assistance from members of their “A Hug from Taylor Swift” Facebook group and their Twitter followers and created a video montage of people from all over the world helping an elderly woman across the street. In addition, they planned their own walk across the street at Toomer’s Corner, which included Aubie and a group of students and friends who showed up to help with the task.

Swift was impressed with their response and issued a second challenge asking the two to creatively incorporate the number 13, her lucky number, into their good deeds.

Wekall and Leander posted their next video response, again incorporating videos from other fans, on April 13. The video featured things like 13 doughnuts for a friend, 13 people in a car, 13 places to get a hug from Taylor Swift and an aerial view of 13 cars parked in the shape of the number 13.

Swift responded once more with her own video, telling the two that she would be e-mailing them Monday at 12:30 p.m. with their third challenge.

Wekall posted on their website, Facebook group and Twitter pages asking followers in Auburn to meet at The Hotel at Auburn University at 2 p.m. for karaoke to sing Swift’s “You Belong with Me.” As Wekall, Leander and more than 350 Auburn students sang along, Swift appeared on the video screen, said she was watching the karaoke performance and really wished she could be there. Then she said she had an idea and turned to walk away from the camera.

First, Aubie appeared onstage in a Taylor Swift T-shirt. Swift followed wearing a T-shirt that read “A Hug for Ryan and Michael.” Swift’s band members, all wearing Auburn T-shirts, joined her for a short concert.

— Carol Nelson

Audubon exhibition
This drawing of an American bison is one of a group of rare works on exhibition at Auburn’s Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art. The drawings of quadrupeds, animals with four feet, in mid-19th century America are part of the museum’s collection of works by renowned naturalist John James Audubon.

Swift cheer
Grammy-winning singer Taylor Swift and silent vocalist Aubie joined Facebook/Twitter fans Ryan Leander, left, and Michael Wekall onstage for a War Eagle cheer with hundreds of other Swift fans at Monday’s impromptu celebration.
Whitford named dean of College of Education

Betty Lou Whitford, dean of the College of Education and Human Development and professor of education at the University of Southern Maine, has been named dean of Auburn University’s College of Education, effective Aug. 1.

“Dr. Whitford brings to Auburn a deep commitment to research and outreach in education,” Auburn Provost Mary Ellen Mazey said. “She is a leader in the areas of school reform and school and university collaboration with considerable experience in professional development school partnerships and teacher education.”

Whitford has taught courses for undergraduate and graduate students in initial teacher education programs as well as courses for master’s and doctoral students in school change, secondary curriculum, qualitative field research methods and research design.

A consultant with numerous school districts and school and university partnerships, Whitford has served as an advisor to the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Lucent Technologies Foundation, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education’s Professional Development Schools Standards Project, the U.S. Office for Educational Research and Improvement, the Council of Chief State School Officers’ Arts Education Partnership, Appalachian Educational Laboratory and the Schlechty Center for Leadership in School Reform.

“I am honored to have the opportunity to serve as dean of Auburn University’s College of Education and to help shape its highly regarded academic programs in collaboration with the faculty,” Whitford said. “I am particularly impressed by Auburn’s leadership and commitment to the outreach mission as Alabama’s land-grant university.”

Whitford has directed national conferences focused on professional development school partnerships at the University of Louisville and the impact of high-stakes testing at Columbia University, and has regularly presented scholarly papers at the American Educational Research Association’s annual meetings. She served two terms as chair of the awards committee for the American Educational Research Association’s Division K: Teaching and Teacher Education, and she served as co-chair of the Division K program planning committee’s section on professional development.

She published “Accountability, Assessment and Teacher Commitment: Lessons from Kentucky’s Reform Efforts” with Ken Jones in 2000, and this year published “Teachers Learning in Community: Realities and Possibilities” with Diane R. Wood.

Whitford has held academic and research positions at Teachers College, Columbia University, the University of Louisville and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she earned her bachelor’s in social studies education, her master’s in teaching in political science and her Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction and sociology of education.

College of Education climbs five spots in U.S. News graduate school rankings

Auburn’s College of Education moved higher in the U.S. News & World Report’s rankings of “America’s Best Graduate Schools” in the publication’s 2011 survey.

The Auburn college advanced into the number 66 ranking, a five-spot improvement from 2010, and placed among the top 25 percent of schools surveyed for the fourth consecutive year. The College of Education holds the top national ranking among schools of education in Alabama, public or private, and ranks 46th nationally among public institutions.

The college’s Rehabilitation Counseling program remains at its number 17 ranking nationally — 14th among public institutions — as determined by U.S. News in 2007. The program is part of the publication’s health rankings, which are reconsidered every two years. Doctoral programs in the college’s Department of Kinesiology currently remain no. 28 in the country as determined by the American Academy of Kinesiology and Physical Education.

Christine Eick wins national honor for risk management

Christine Eick, executive director of Auburn’s Office of Risk Management and Safety, has been named to the 2010 Risk Management Honor Roll by the Business Insurance and the Risk and Insurance Management Society. Eick was honored Tuesday in Boston at the annual Risk and Insurance Management conference.

The Risk Management Honor Roll awards are among the highest honors for the risk management profession. The awards recognize outstanding accomplishment in the risk management field by individuals and their organizations.

Auburn was the only university selected of the three honorees for this year’s Risk Management Honor Roll. Other honorees were from ARAMARK Corporation and Johnson & Johnson.

“Auburn University is a complex organization in that we run major events with 100,000 people on campus at one time,” Eick said. “It is not like a private corporation where only a certain population is allowed access. This is an open campus and this provides many risks and hazards, but we prepare in advance to manage these risks.”

A feature article on Eick and Auburn University appears in the April 26 issue of Business Insurance magazine as well as online at www.businessinsurance.com. Business Insurance has a 40,000 print circulation and an online circulation of 80,000.
Auburn researchers in the Animal Health and Performance Program and its Canine Detection Research Institute have taken standard explosives detection to another level through development of their Vapor Wake Detection training program. The Vapor Wake Detection canine team is a standard explosives detection team with an additional detection application to sense carried or body-worn explosives. The Vapor Wake Detection canine samples the plume of air coming off a person and what they are carrying as the person passes through a choke point or within a crowd. They can also detect an explosive’s vapor wake after a person has carried an explosive through an area, and can follow the vapor wake to the explosive source.

“One of the key benefits of the Vapor Wake Detection dog is that they are non-invasive,” said John Pearce, associate director of the Canine Detection Research Institute. “In an environment like a crowded venue, the dog can detect the odor of explosives on a moving person and trace the explosive to the source.”

The canine is specifically bred and prepared for this type of work. Sporting breeds are primarily used because of their close proximity to people during the vapor wake activity; these dogs customarily create less anxiety and fewer disruptions in a crowd.

The Vapor Wake canine is planned before breeding and its entire puppy life is engineered to succeed at this form of detection. The puppy enters the program at birth, and is exposed to specific environments and conditions over its first year of life. The canine receives six weeks of basic explosives training and six weeks of basic Vapor Wake training at the Canine Detection Training Center before being assigned a handler. Each canine and handler team then receives 10 weeks in the basic explosives handler course, and upon graduation, advances to an additional two weeks of Vapor Wake team training at the center. Finally, the team returns to its operational environment accompanied by a center instructor and completes two weeks of operational Vapor Wake training in that environment.

The researchers in Auburn’s College of Veterinary Medicine believe that Vapor Wake Detection technology is the most effective and economical approach available for combating threats to safety and homeland security posed by individuals carrying explosives or munitions. According to Pearce, the canines have been exceptionally successful in this form of detection in areas with a large congestion of pedestrian traffic without impeding traffic flow.

While explosives detection and checkpoint screening equipment is stationary, detection dogs can work all types of venues, and after explosives are identified, can continue to work the checkpoint or track the identified source. This mobility is a major advantage of the canine detection team.

Additionally, the canine detection team offers unpredictability. “Detection and screening equipment can be studied, calibrated and eventually compromised,” Pearce said. “Each detection canine is different; terrorists cannot predetermine their ability or responses.”

The Canine Detection Research Institute is one of the few places where dogs are trained not only to find planted or static placement of explosives, but also to detect a vapor wake left by a person carrying explosives through an area. Currently, several large police agencies with robust missions within the U.S. have purchased and are using Auburn University Vapor Wake Detection dogs.

**NSF honors COSAM professor for early career achievement**

Wei Zhan, an assistant professor in the College of Sciences and Mathematics, has received a five-year, $580,000 Faculty Early Career Development, or CAREER, award from the National Science Foundation to conduct research on solar energy.

The award supports early career development activities that combine research and education. In addition to his research, Zhan’s educational project initiatives will include classes and demonstrations to broaden awareness of alternative energy generation and outreach activities for a broad audience.

“Dr. Zhan’s CAREER award recognizes the contemporary nature of his research in solar energy conversion and materials chemistry and his commitment to teaching and science outreach,” said Sciences and Mathematics Dean Stewart Schneller.

“This award is the most prestigious award granted by the NSF to young professors like me,” Zhan said. “I feel grateful and lucky to be a recipient.”

Zhan joins Holly Ellis and Susanne Striegler as the third faculty member from the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry to receive the award for early career achievement. Marie Wooten, associate dean for research in the College of Sciences and Mathematics, attributed the research recognition achieved by new faculty to a strong tradition of research in the department and college.

Zhan’s research is designed to provide insight into a more efficient conversion of solar energy to electrical energy. Although solar energy has the potential to reduce dependence on fossil fuels, many current technologies are inefficient and costly.

“Solar energy is essentially inexhaustible and doesn’t generate greenhouse gases,” Zhan said. “The traditional, silicon-based photovoltaic panels are very efficient and durable but they are so expensive that they can’t replace fossil fuels yet as the major energy source. Low-cost alternatives are always welcome.”
Auburn opening Huntsville center to expand studies in aerospace, defense, IT, biotech, other fields

Auburn University is launching a research center in Huntsville that will partner with federal agencies and industry to advance national and homeland security, as well as space exploration.

The new center, opening July 1, will match Auburn scientists in defense, aerospace, advanced manufacturing, life sciences, biotechnology and information technology with government agencies and industry in north Alabama seeking expertise in those areas.

Rodney Robertson, who is retiring as director of the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command’s technical center, will lead the Auburn operation. He has worked in federal science and engineering leadership positions for almost 30 years, more than 21 of them in the Huntsville area.

“The connection between Auburn and Huntsville has always been strong,” said Auburn University President Jay Gogue. “The new center brings us even closer together and puts Auburn researchers in a better position to team with north Alabama leaders to strengthen the nation’s defense and space missions and help spur economic growth in the state.”

Gogue said Auburn selected Robertson to lead the center because of his track record in securing federal research and development funds and managing complex projects. “Rodney has a well-earned reputation for success,” Gogue said. “Under his leadership, we expect to develop new technologies and quickly turn them into the end products most needed by government and industry.”

John Mason, Auburn vice president for research, said the Auburn center will seek to tap into the more than $5.8 billion in research funds that flow each year into the 52 government offices at Huntsville’s Redstone Arsenal. Auburn will pursue research opportunities with the Space and Missile Defense Command, Missile Defense Agency, Missle and Space Intelligence Center, NASA and other federal agencies.

“We will start on day one reaching out to federal agencies and the industries that support them,” said Mason. “Products and services integrated across several technologies are a growing requirement in the aerospace and defense community. We will leverage the wide range of expertise and resources across campus to demonstrate that Auburn is a reliable partner in meeting those objectives.”

Robertson holds a bachelor’s degree in engineering from Auburn, and he received a master’s and doctorate in engineering from the University of Alabama at Huntsville.

Former New York mayor, presidential candidate Giuliani to discuss leadership in change, crisis

Former New York mayor and former presidential candidate Rudolph Giuliani will speak on “Principled Leadership in the Face of Change and Crisis,” at 7 p.m. Monday, May 3, in Beard-Eaves-Memorial Coliseum.

Although he served two terms as mayor of the nation’s largest city — with a population larger than that of several states, Giuliani is best known for rallying the city and the nation following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001.

The lecture is part of Perspectives on the Plains, a student-led lecture series founded last year by the Student Government Association. The organization describes its goal as “to provide Auburn students the community service efforts of its more than 500 student-athletes who have made volunteer work in the community a priority.

Coaches, Athletics staff devote day to special projects in community

More than 100 Auburn Athletics Department employees fanned out to 13 work sites in Auburn and Opelika on April 19 for the Second Annual Tigers Give Back Community Service Day.

Athletics Department coaches, administrators and staff members stocked shelves at the East Alabama Food Bank, sorted clothes at the Salvation Army, planted flowers at Town Creek Cemetery and pulled weeds to make way for an edible garden at Wright’s Mill Road Elementary School.

Director of Athletics Jay Jacobs said the department started Tigers Give Back a year ago to support the community service efforts of its more than 500 student-athletes who have made volunteer work in the community a priority.
Achievements

Association honors Johnson for best institutional research paper

The Association for Institutional Research has presented its prize for best paper of 2009 to Iryna Johnson, associate director for assessment in Auburn’s Office of Institutional Research and Assessment. Her paper, “Class Size and Student Performance at a Public Research University: A Cross-Classified Model” was developed to address Auburn’s strategic plan goal to improve graduation rates by identifying appropriate class sizes by discipline. A revised version of that AIR paper will be published later this year in AIR’s peer-reviewed journal, Research in Higher Education.

Experiment station directors from across the region honor Guthrie

Richard Guthrie, retiring dean of the College of Agriculture and director of the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station, was recently presented with the Excellence in Leadership award from the Southern Association of Agricultural Experiment Station Directors. The award recognizes those who have served the Southern Experiment Stations, SAAESD and the national land-grant system with exemplary distinction. The awards committee cited Guthrie for the breadth of his work in Alabama, nationwide and internationally and noted that Guthrie’s greatest contribution to the land-grant mission and the national and regional experiment station systems was accomplished through his “quiet but decisive leadership.”

Auburn Forestry professor testifies before Canadian government panel

Daowei Zhang, professor of forest economics and policy in the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, testified April 22 before the Agriculture and Forestry Committee of the Senate of Canada on the U.S.-Canada softwood lumber trade dispute. Zhang is the author of an authoritative book on the subject, “The Softwood Lumber War: Politics, Economics, and the Long U.S.-Canadian Trade Dispute,” published , in 2007 by Resources for the Future Press of Washington, D.C. The book was labeled as “required reading for every Canadian and U.S. politician” by the Vancouver Sun and “the standard by which other books on forest trade policy are judged” by the Journal of Forestry.

Business professor participates in Milken Institute Global Conference

James Barth, Lowder Eminent Scholar in Finance in the College of Business, was among a select group invited to participate in the recent 2010 Milken Institute Global Conference in Los Angeles. He participated on a panel on financial regulation moderated by Matthew Bishop, business editor and New York bureau chief of The Economist. The Global Conference brings together scientists, business executives, philanthropists, journalists, academics and Nobel laureates to discuss, debate and deliberate today’s most pressing social, political and economic challenges.

Senior in COSAM selected for Phi Kappa Phi fellowship for 2010-11

Dan Mazzaferro, a senior in the College of Sciences and Mathematics, has been awarded a Phi Kappa Phi fellowship to pursue an M.B.A. degree at Auburn during the 2010-11 academic year. The Phi Kappa Phi Fellowship, with a $5,000 stipend, is the highest award bestowed by the national honor society.

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