It’s a special year this year as we celebrate the 30th anniversary of our Program! We began the academic year with a special anniversary dinner at the Inn at USC where many friends of the Program, alumni, special patients and University faculty gathered to reminisce about the past and anticipate the future. After enjoying a delicious dinner together, Janice reflected on our Program’s 30 years through both humor and tears and invited everyone in attendance to sign a special piece of artwork commissioned by Columbia’s infamous “Chicken Man”. This piece now hangs in our suite as a reminder to celebrate our Program’s 30 years of success!

At the end of the evening a montage of video snippets from alumni and colleagues far and wide was shown. How fun it was to hear the voices of those congratulating and celebrating with us! We took advantage of such a special night to honor our Director of 30 years, Janice Edwards. Without her guidance, teaching and leadership our Program would undoubtedly not be where it is today. We are so thankful for her vision and dedication, both of which contribute to our Program’s success daily.

What a joy and privilege it was to honor her in a room full of people that have supported the endeavors of our Program for 30 years: Together we have created a fantastic nationally renowned Genetic Counseling training Program! While we celebrate the last 30 years, we eagerly anticipate the next 30!
We are proud to award Libby Hull Malphrus with the 2016 USC School of Medicine Distinguished Master’s in Genetic Counseling Alumni Award. After receiving her undergraduate degree from Georgia Southern University, Libby graduated from our Program in 2001 and has since has served as a prenatal genetic counselor for Savannah Perinatology Associates in Savannah, GA. Described as “an essential member of the team”, her director, Dr. Arthur Baker, says “While Libby’s knowledge of clinical genetics and prenatal diagnosis are unsurpassed, it is her absolute dedication to her patients that makes her truly stand out. She always goes the extra mile to get patients the testing and follow up they need.” In addition to her clinical role seeing prenatal patients, Libby routinely lectures to medical students and residents and serves USC a prenatal rotation supervisor for our graduate students. Aside from her professional work, Libby is extremely involved in her community serving as Chair of the Board for her daughter’s school, serving on the board of the local cancer center, and writing various articles for community publications.

On a personal note, Libby and her mother were both diagnosed with a GYN cancer within two months of one another in the fall of 2010. As a result, Libby felt an overwhelming sense of responsibility to spread the word reading gynecological cancer and subsequently founded her non-profit organization ‘Help the Hoo-Hahs’ (www.helpthehoohahs.com). Libby’s mission is to bring awareness to gynecologic cancers and promote a greater understanding of warning signs as well as available screening and prevention options. ‘Help the Hoo-Hahs’ helps to provide education, support and financial assistance to women and families affected by cancer of the female reproductive organs. Libby’s ultimate dream is to take the organization to a global level and help provide funding for research.

The USC Genetic Counseling Program is extremely proud of the counselor and community leader Libby is and says, “Congratulations!” on this well-deserved award and recognition! Keep up the wonderful work you do for your patients and community day in and day out!

Libby Lives to ‘Help the Hoo-Hahs’

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Libby and her husband at the 2016 Black Tie White Coat Gala.

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Fall Symposium...Mark Your Calendar!

November 11, 2016

Our third annual Fall Symposium, Educating Next Generation Genetic Counselors was held in November 2015. Over 100 genetic professionals gathered to further their knowledge about cutting edge technology including exome sequencing in the prenatal realm and cell free DNA technology in tumor genetics. It’s always wonderful to see so many colleagues and alumni in one room! Please mark your calendar for our next Symposium, scheduled for Friday, November 11, 2016. Save the Date!
Fall 2015 semester marked our first offering of a newly developed online course, Genetic Counseling: Career for the Future, specifically designed for prospective students interested in the profession of genetic counseling.

Through readings in the professional literature, recorded lectures from genetic counselors, website reviews and various practical assignments, enrollees develop a greater understanding of the intricacies of our profession and how to best prepare for graduate school. We will finish the year with over 50 students (several of which are international!) having completed the course. Feedback for the course has been overwhelmingly positive! If you know of anyone who may be interested in learning more about what it means to be a genetic counselor, please feel free to spread the word! More information about the course, as well as a link for registration, can be found on our Program’s website.

Eight senior genetic counseling students are eagerly anticipating graduation in less than a month. At this point, 7 out of 8 have accepted job offers at various institutions around the country. As a whole, they have completed over twenty formal job interviews. Their future plans and positions are as follows: Katie Anderson will be a pediatric genetic counselor at Nationwide Children’s Hospital in Columbus, OH and work with the future Ohio State program; Aly Athens will be a cancer genetic counselor at the Levine Cancer Institute in Charlotte, NC and be involved with the USC program; Stephanie Galloway will be relocating to Charleston, SC; Fayth Kalb will be a pediatric genetic counselor at Lurie Children’s Hospital in Chicago, IL and will work with the Northwestern program; Natasha Rudy will be a pediatric genetic counselor at the University of Alabama, Birmingham and will work with their program; Zoe Siegel will be a cancer counselor at Memorial Medical Center, Savannah Georgia; Molly Snyder will be a pediatric neurology genetic counselor at Texas Children’s Hospital in Dallas, TX; and Amy Wardyn will be a cancer genetic counselor at University Hospital in Augusta, GA. All eight students are excited to join our distinguished group of alumni and are looking forward to becoming your colleagues.
She got married, had children, and began working. It wasn’t until years later that she felt she could take time out for herself and earn a college degree. It wasn’t easy to achieve while being a working wife and mom, but she did it. She excelled in corporate America for 20 years, “but following my head and heart, I decided to go to graduate school and get a Master’s in Genetic Counseling.” She had dreams and she chased them and her name is Peggy Walker. And nearly 10 years after beginning her “encore career”, she’s retiring this summer. She’s going to garden and play golf with her husband, Cy, and spend time with her children and grandchildren. And, knowing Peggy, still keep up with the genetic literature :) The USC faculty and alumni couldn’t be happier for her or more thankful she chose to call the University of South Carolina home for a while.

Anyone that knows Peggy knows she is a lifelong learner. Not many people would choose to begin a totally new career, much less one that required a special graduate degree, only 10 years from retirement. Such a choice is a testament to the driven, eager, and dedicated person she is. After 20 years working for 3M (this partly explains why she is the QUEEN of post-it notes!!), Peggy left her home in Minnesota and moved to SC in 2006 to attend our training program. She shined as a student and earned the “S. Robert Young Outstanding Genetic Counselor Award” upon graduation in May 2008. Shortly after, Peggy joined the USC Genetic counseling faculty. In the clinical realm, Peggy has counseled prenatal, adult and cancer patients where she listens, really listens, to her patients. With her keen ability to understand, educate and encourage others, Peggy is able to answer a resounding yes to her personal goal of “Did I make a difference in the life of at least one person today?” Many patients have taken the time to send her personal notes to confirm that she has indeed had a positive influence in their lives.

Peggy has been instrumental to the GC training program as a core professor, teaching various courses, including Human Medical Genetics and Contemporary Issues in Genetic Counseling, and serving as Director of Thesis Research. She has willingly and superbly taken on these challenges giving nothing but her best, and in turn, expecting nothing but the best of our students. Our graduate students have especially benefited from her attention to detail when it comes to thesis requirements. Many would likely admit they may not have finished their thesis research without her continual guidance, support and assistance!

In addition to educating our genetic counseling students, she has consistently educated medical students, USC Honors students and graduate students in other Programs. There may not be a more prepared and thorough educator, one our students have been fortunate to learn from both in and out of the classroom. Peggy is both creative and innovative when it comes to education, and our Program will miss her tremendously.

On behalf of the many patients and students lives you have touched, Peggy, thank you for following your heart more than ten years ago. Thank you for being a model genetic counselor and educator. And, thank you for choosing to share your work with the University of South Carolina Genetic Counseling Program. We love you!
University of South Carolina Partners with Victor Center to Reach Local Jewish Community

Written By: Matt Waldman

Janice Edwards, Professor and Director of the University of South Carolina School of Medicine’s Genetic Counseling Program, first experienced work with Jewish genetic disease screening in 1983, when the local Jewish Community Center hosted a Tay-Sachs screening. Her professional focus has for years been on prenatal and preconception genetic health, and over the last year, she partnered with the Einstein Victor Center and the Columbia Jewish Community Center, and, with the support of the Victor Center, began their effort.

She wrote three articles for the Columbia Jewish Federation’s regular publication “to build awareness and help give understanding of carrier screening” and designed educational tools, including a flyer and a bookmark, which were distributed to the city’s Jewish community. With these resources in place, the team planned events that allowed them to reach community members directly.

The University of South Carolina campus Hillel organized a pizza dinner for Jewish university students, during which Ms. Edwards and several of her genetic counseling graduate students presented on Jewish genetic diseases and the importance of screening. They later partnered with the Jewish Federation’s young adult group to host a happy hour and sponsored a successful “Ask a Genetic Counselor” event. In February of 2016, the group hosted a community screening in Columbia.

Ms. Edwards stresses the importance of genetic counselors bringing their work to the community, something she requires of all of her genetic counseling students. She says, “You aren’t just in your office seeing people. People see you.” She lauded the experience as important to the community itself and beneficial to all of the organizations involved, adding, “This was good for everyone. There was so much value, on multiple levels, and it’s reciprocal.” Ms. Edwards is grateful for the support she received from the Victor Center, the Columbia Jewish community, and the University of South Carolina School of Medicine, and she is sure the effort will be repeated in the coming years.
Libby Malphrus (’01): Professionally, I received the 2016 University of South Carolina School of Medicine Distinguished Master’s in Genetic Counseling Alumni Award and the 2015 Georgia Medical Society Healthcare Hero Award. On a personal note, with the collaboration of the Memorial Health Foundation at Memorial University Medical Center, my non-profit organization “Help the Hoo-Hahs” has raised over $105,000 for financial assistance and support of local women battling gynecological cancer. Our annual 5K run is held in Savannah in September (GYN cancer awareness month).

Michele Jacobs Gabree (’06): My biggest update is my son Henry, who was born in September of 2014. Genetic counselor-related, I left the clinic after almost 9 years to become a cancer reporting genetic counselor at Ambry Genetics.

Karen Echerd Corneliussen (’07): I am still enjoying my position as a prenatal genetic counselor with Wake Forest Baptist Health in North Carolina. Family life is busy and fun with one year old twin boys and a three and a half year old girl.

Allison Bellomo (’09): We had our second son, Luke Evan Bellomo, on November 19th!

Renee Hilber Milinovich (’09): I took a new job in May with GeneDx. I am now a report writer for the Cardiology team and I am enjoying working from home and the challenges that come with this job, a nice change from clinic. I got married in June; my husband is an ER and family medicine resident and we have a year and a half remaining until he finishes his residency, we are both looking forward to that day! Otherwise things are stable and we are enjoying a relatively mild Michigan winter.

Spencer Wood (’10): Liz and I have relocated to Charleston, SC where I joined the high risk Ob group at MUSC! After buying our first house near the beach, we decided to start filling up the rooms: We are expecting a baby boy in early July. We are very blessed and excited. I’ve spoken with the Olympic Committee and they’ve agreed to preemptively award the gold medal in Men’s Beach Volleyball to USA in summer 2040.

Megan Mann Pollard (’11): I am now working a faculty member at The University of North Carolina in the department of Pediatrics, division of Genetics and Metabolism. In addition, I am a core faculty member for the North Carolina Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and related disabilities (LEND) program. The NC-LEND program has developed a relationship with the University of North Carolina at Greensboro’s genetic counseling program to incorporate genetic counseling as a discipline in NC-LEND. We are so excited to have genetic counseling represented in the NC-LEND program and provide this additional training for a genetic counseling trainee! Last, but certainly not least, I got married to my wonderful husband, Kesler, in April 2015 and we are enjoying each day of married life!

Courtney Downtain (’11): It has been a busy season for us. Eric and I bought a house and have been busy getting settled. We just welcomed our son, Owen David Pickersgill, a month early on February 12, 2016. We are so in love with him! I am still loving my job at GeneDx and have been working our ever growing neurology team.
Emily Rosebrough Jordon ('11): We welcomed our son, Oliver K Jordon, into the world on June 8, 2015!

Audra Bettinelli ('12): In March of 2015, I joined GeneDx as a Genomics Consultant. In this new role, I provide scientific support for the sales team and get to travel the country providing education. I am truly loving this new position! My husband Jerome and I are still enjoying our home in New Orleans with our fur baby, Piper! However, we try to get back to South Carolina to see friends and family as often as we can!

John Abernethy ('13): I got married to Kayla (Glasscock) Abernethy in October 2015 - I met Kayla in Columbia while in the program.

Margo Faust ('14): I recently bought a house in Annapolis, MD and got engaged to my boyfriend of 7 years, Kyle. Also passed the certification exam this past August. As far as my job I’m coming up on 2 years at Children’s, working on multiple studies for children with Down syndrome.

Sarah King ('14): Since graduating in 2014, I have been busy! I have had two different jobs. The first was as a Pediatric Genetic Counselor at Spectrum Health in Grand Rapids, Michigan where I focused on fetal alcohol syndrome, cystic fibrosis, and general genetics. My second job is as a Cancer and Cardiovascular genetic counselor at Parkview Health in Fort Wayne, Indiana. I discovered that my true passion is cancer genetics and I have thoroughly enjoyed moving closer to my family who lives in Indiana. I also passed boards, got engaged, bought my first house, and got married! I am so grateful to have attended USC where I was able to meet all of my wonderful classmates. I enjoy hearing all of their life experiences and counseling conundrums as we all still keep in touch via group text!

Melissa Racobaldo ('15): Pediatric Genetic Counselor at the University of South Florida Division of Genetics and Metabolism as of August 2015, Certified Genetic Counselor as of February 2016.
$30 for 30

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