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New artwork added to Betty Foy Sanders Georgia Artists Collection

JULY 27, 2017



New artwork from artist Matthew Hatala has been added to Georgia Southern University's permanent art collection, the Betty Foy Sanders Georgia Artists Collection, and is currently on view at the Center for Art & Theatre.

The work, a wood vessel created by Hatala, was acquired and curated into the collection by Betty Foy Sanders in May. The vessel also will be included in the Georgia Artists Collection 50th Anniversary Exhibition beginning Sept. 25.

Hatala, of Danielsville, Georgia, is one of the Southeast's most prominent woodturners. He has been creating vessels using a variety of rare and exotic wood for nearly 27 years. The piece added to the collection was made from pippy yew wood, native to the Pacific Northwest.

"Matthew's new piece, made this past January, is a real gem of a work," says Jason Hoelscher, who, as gallery director at the Center for Art and Theatre, oversees the Georgia Artists Collection. "The form of the vessel is gorgeous in its sinuous quality, and Matthew's handling of the materials creates an interesting feel of marble or some other highly polished stone, while at the same time highlighting the features inherent to his choice of wood."

Hatala participates in dozens of national shows and crafts festivals each year. His work can be found in notable collections such as the Detroit Institute of Art, the New York Museum of Art and Design, the Bohlen Wood Art Collection at the University of Michigan Museum of Art and many private collections, including the Montalto Bohlen Collection.

Betty Foy Sanders established the Georgia Artists Collection in 1967 when she donated a painting of her own, "Coastal Sand Dunes" for permanent display. Since then, Sanders has continued to curate the collection by adding key works of art created by notable artists. Artwork is selected based on its association with Georgia—whether the artist's origin, the indigenous material used or the regional content of the work. Now in its 50th year, the Georgia Artists Collection has grown to nearly 100 works, and is an invaluable resource to the state.

For more information about the Georgia Artists Collection 50th Anniversary Exhibition and other current exhibitions, visit GeorgiaSouthern.edu/cat.

President Jaimie Hebert looks back on first year leading Georgia Southern University

JULY 27, 2017



*Georgia Southern's 13th President
Jaimie Hebert, Ph.D.*

When Georgia Southern President Jaimie Hebert, Ph.D., attended last year's annual Watermelon Cutting in July, he didn't expect it to resonate with him as much as it did.

Hebert said a mentor and friend of his in Texas told him there would be a moment in his first year where he would "absolutely fall head over heels in love" with his university. But Hebert wasn't sold.

"I really thought when he told me there would be a moment when I fell in love with the University, I thought that was hyperbole," he said. "I thought what he meant was there would be a moment when I would feel myself fully vested in the mission of the institution."

Much to his surprise, Hebert says it was in that moment, as he stood before faculty, staff and students slicing watermelon, he knew Georgia Southern was a place he loved.

"It was one family," he recalled. "There was absolutely no division amongst staff, and deans, and students. And it kind of connected all the pieces for me that day. Some of my fondest memories are on my grandparents' farm, and that's the kind of things we did — having a cold watermelon was a family event. So it brought home memories of my childhood, and it brought home what this University was about."

The moment he fell for Georgia Southern came shortly after Hebert became the president of the University on July 1. Reflecting on his first year, and first-ever, role as a university President, he described the experience as "extraordinary."

"I knew it was a chance of a lifetime when I took this job, and within this one year, it became the experience of a lifetime," he said. "That's largely due to the amazing relationships I've established, and the people — the faculty, the staff and especially the students — who I've grown to know. It's really been one of the best years of my career."

An extraordinary year didn't come without its challenges, though. Hebert said balancing his new role, learning about every facet of the University and learning about himself were all expected, and welcomed, challenges.

"I don't think I have ever been in a situation before that has led me to develop as a person or as a leader like the challenge of being the president of such a dynamic institution," said Hebert. "This year was challenging, but I also learned a great deal about myself."

His first year also brought new and lifelong friendships and an appreciation for his new community in Statesboro.

"Statesboro feels like small town America, and it's deliberate," he said. "People want to live in a friendly community, and I think one of the most wonderful things about this city and our campus is that you can walk up to a complete stranger and feel like they're one of your friends. That just doesn't happen everywhere."

As he enters his second year as president, and as the University's consolidation with Armstrong State University is underway, Hebert says he wants to spend more time working with students in various areas of campus, and continue to build relationships with faculty and staff who are the heart of the University, all of whom have inspired him since he first came to Georgia Southern.

Another priority for Hebert as the consolidation progresses is getting everyone excited about the multitude of possibilities this new university will bring to the people who live, work and learn here.

"This consolidation has been tough on an emotional level, and it's been tough on the complexity of the process itself," said Hebert. "So now, I want to get everyone focused on positive side of this consolidation, and thinking forward about vision, because that's where the fun part is. That's why we're all in higher education."

Hebert says he wants the new Georgia Southern to be focused on growth, economic impact, social impact and giving our students a more competitive edge.

"What we have done by going through this consolidation is provided ourselves, all of us on all three of our campuses now, with more opportunities to grow enrollment, providing access to more students in the state of Georgia," Hebert said. "We are going to be able to grow the breadth of our curriculum and be responsive to a workforce like we never could have been in Statesboro or they never could have been in Savannah."

In conversations with folks on the three campuses, Hebert said the visions of the two universities “are not very different.”

“Regardless of how they approach it, on our campuses, the primary concern is providing hope for our students,” he said. “Hope for a better future, hope for a brighter future, and hope to chase their professions, their careers and their dreams. Bringing that common goal together with all of the opportunities this consolidation brings, I look forward to that. Because when the passion of our faculty and staff starts bubbling up over this coming year, it’s going to be just be so much fun to be a part of this.

“We are going to be able to do things that neither one of these institutions would have ever been able to do on its own.”

Georgia Southern alumnus brings Disney attractions to life

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Georgia Southern alumnus Aaron Clay ('11) stands in front of the construction wall of Pandora — The World of Avatar at Walt Disney World.

In the middle of the swampland of central Florida, a world of glowing fauna, colorful creatures and floating islands exists in part because of Georgia Southern graduate Aaron Clay ('11) who helped bring Pandora — The World of Avatar to life at Walt Disney World in Orlando.

Clay, a mechanical engineering graduate, began his career there as an intern in the Disney College Program, where he served as an attractions host and later became a supervisor in that area. He

eventually landed an engineering internship with Engineering Services at Disney’s Hollywood Studios, and later transferred to the Quality Engineering Department, where he now works full-time as an associate quality engineer.

His newfound position gave him the opportunity to work on one of Disney's newest and most advanced park attractions, Pandora.

"Pandora is truly another world, featuring both undeniable beauty and wonder with many surprises to discover," he said. "While the land is a sight to see in the daytime, it really comes alive at night. I don't want to give away any spoilers."

Working on the project was highly collaborative, he said.

"Our team partnered with several departments, such as Imagineering, Ride and Show engineering, Sustaining engineering, Engineering Services, Operations and Quality Assurance. Communication was key on this project, as it took the combined efforts of everyone working together around the clock to deliver this project on time with no delays."

He describes the experience of watching the park come to life as "nothing short of spectacular."

"The challenge of creating a fictional place in a real world setting was a daunting task," said Clay. "However, I think the incredible talents of all the teams on the project managed to pull it off."

"One of the biggest obstacles when opening Pandora was the floating mountains. A project of this scale had never been done before," he continued. "Suspending both rock work and free-hanging vines over guest's heads would be a challenge to both inspect and maintain. Our team worked diligently with our inspectors to ensure reasonable plans would be in place in order to maintain the mountains over time."

On the park's opening day, Clay and his team members anxiously awaited responses from guests.

"On the first day we opened the land to the public, a few members of my team waited at the exit to the signature attraction, Flight of Passage," he said. "The overwhelming positive responses we listened to from our guests made the whole project worthwhile. Seeing families and children so enthralled and impressed with our attractions and experiences make every bit of what I do so rewarding."

Aside from working on attractions throughout Disney, Clay works with a team that ensures all the registered attractions are in full compliance with the industry standards, helping keep attractions safe for guests and cast members.

"While our team sustains the current existing attractions, we also work closely with new projects, ensuring that the project meets all requirements throughout the stages of planning, construction and turnover," he said, adding he'll soon have the opportunity to work projects such as the recently announced Toy Story Land and Star Wars Land.

In addition to Pandora, Clay also has helped open Frozen Ever After, a attraction themed to the Disney animated hit, "Frozen."

"The ride blends seamlessly into the Norway pavilion over at Epcot," he said. "I have also worked on expanding some of our more popular attractions, such as Soarin' Around the World, and Toy Story Mania! in order to accommodate more guests," he said.

And while working with world-class attractions at Disney is a dream come true, Clay credits his time and experiences as a student at Georgia Southern for helping him reach his career goals.

"Both my education and time with Georgia Southern engineering groups, such as Formula SAE, helped set me up for success with this project," he said. "The content learned from the mechanical engineering program is continuously used for new and current attractions for both design and sustainment of safety systems. While working on the Formula SAE team, I was able to gain many leadership skills in an engineering setting, such as communication, trust, inclusion and coaching."

Georgia Southern University, a public Carnegie Doctoral/Research University founded in 1906, offers 118 degree programs serving 20,673 students. Through eight colleges, the University offers bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree programs built on more than a century of academic achievement. Georgia Southern is recognized for its student-centered and hands-on approach to education. Visit GeorgiaSouthern.edu.