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Parker College of Business' VITA program saves Bulloch County residents \$33K in tax prep fees in 2021

October 27, 2021



Senior lecturer in the School of Accountancy, Gloria Stuart, left, assists students as part of the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program.

Bulloch County residents who participated in the 2021 Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program through the Parker College of Business at Georgia Southern University saved an estimated \$33,000 in tax preparation fees and received a total of \$128,679 in refunds.

Additionally, the IRS estimated Georgia Southern's VITA services contributed to an economic impact of more than \$225,000.

"Qualifying taxpayers in our community are able to receive free tax preparation and e-file services," said Gloria Stuart, senior lecturer in the School of Accountancy and advisor for the

VITA program. “Our program helps taxpayers comply with the tax law while ensuring they claim the proper tax credits and possible tax refunds. Taxpayers are able to save money on tax preparation fees. The cost savings plus the financial impact of the credits and refunds help boost the local economy.”

Local taxpayers aren’t the only ones who benefit from the VITA program. Undergraduate and graduate students in the School of Accountancy work one-on-one with community members who use the service to gain experience for their accounting careers.

Alumna Katie Mancil (‘20, ‘21) volunteered with the VITA program as an undergraduate and graduate student. Not only did it provide her with real-world experience when a tax preparation internship didn’t fit with her schedule, but the program also helped her land a full-time job with a CPA firm, which she began in August.

“The VITA program taught me how to be professional and helped me retain the variety of tax rules and issues,” she said. “It also helped me realize the importance of working well with your coworkers and being very comfortable with constructive criticism.”

The mentorship Mancil received from Georgia Southern faculty also made an impact in her career.

“The professors who helped with the VITA program also helped prepare me for my career,” she said. “They gave me advice, pushed me to be better and even provided a reference to me while I was applying for jobs. I had two great job offers from different accounting firms because of two of the professors that worked with the program.”

The VITA program at Georgia Southern began in 2020 but was cut short due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When the 2021 tax season began, the VITA program volunteers were prepared and increased their tax returns by more than 100 percent.

“We were only able to complete 62 tax returns our first year because we had to stop in mid-March,” Stuart said. “For the 2021 filing season, we addressed the COVID-19 environment by utilizing drop-off sites and virtual services. We completed 132 tax returns during the 2021 filing season.”

Easing an overwhelming situation for members of the community is another reason Mancil enjoyed participating in the VITA program.

“Taxes can be very intimidating to people, although it’s really not that bad,” said Mancil. “But it is nice to be able to take that weight and time off of someone. We are able to give clients peace of mind that they will be taken care of.”

The VITA program exemplifies Georgia Southern University’s commitment to community engagement, Stuart added.

“The Georgia Southern VITA program is an excellent example of our partnership with the local community,” Stuart said. “Our students enjoy meeting and helping people in our community while enhancing their educational experience. Taxpayers in our community receive a valuable, free service while helping our students become career-ready.”

Knowing she made an impact in the community was the ultimate reward for Mancil.

“As a college student, it is hard to be able to give money to people in need,” she said. “The VITA tax program gives us an avenue to be able to help people save money and live more comfortably. This made me feel like I was able to make a small difference in the community. I felt accomplished that I was able to help at least one person not have to worry about something that can be so tedious. It also left me feeling encouraged to continue to help serve others in the community in different capacities.”

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[Celebrate Together brings festivities and fun to the Armstrong Campus](#)

October 27, 2021



Last Thursday, more than 1,000 people came out for Celebrate Together, a festival celebrating the Georgia Southern University community on the Armstrong Campus in Savannah.

Students, faculty, staff, alumni and members of the local community filled Residential Plaza for a sunshine-drenched day of fun among the 90 vendor booths that showcased University departments, programs and student associations, as well as local businesses, who handed out free swag, snacks and T-shirts. A live DJ and dance team performances entertained the crowd, who also enjoyed free hot dogs and soft drinks, a rock climbing wall, mechanical bull, rounds of archery tag and time with animals from the University’s Center for Wildlife Education.

In a fundraiser for the Armstrong Commitment Fund, President Kyle Marrero and other University leaders braved the dunk tank in good fun, as they were plunged into the cold-water temperatures after rounds of shots hit the bull’s-eye mark.

“It was a pleasure working with the Georgia Southern administrators to return Celebrate Together to campus,” said event chair Patricia Holt, Ph.D. “We had a wonderful Armstrong team that worked so hard to make it all come together, but it was the faculty, staff and students who really made it a success.”



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Georgia Southern professor, alumnus honored at Regents Scholarship Gala

October 27, 2021



Georgia Southern University President Kyle Marrero, Associate Professor Arpita Saha, and Lt. Gen. Leslie C. Smith

A Georgia Southern University professor and graduate were among the distinguished honorees at the recent 17th annual Regents' Scholarship Gala that raised more than \$625,000 to support and provide need-based scholarships for University System of Georgia (USG) students across the state.

Hosted by the USG Foundation, the event included Governor Brian P. Kemp and First Lady Marty Kemp as well as supporters, donors, alumni, legislators, members of the Board of Regents and presidents from USG's 26 public colleges and universities.

Six USG faculty members were honored as 2021 recipients of the Felton Jenkins Jr. Hall of Fame Faculty Award. This prestigious teaching award recognizes faculty's important contributions to their schools and fields of study and for their strong commitment to teaching and

student success. Among the honorees was Arpita Saha, Ph.D., associate professor of inorganic chemistry.

Saha says she deeply values the challenges associated with the STEM disciplines for the underserved community, and focuses much of her work on equity, inclusion and excellence. She has taught chemistry to freshmen and graduate students, and everyone in between while at Georgia Southern.

She has led a Faculty Learning Community on Inclusive Teaching Practices in the classroom and developed and implemented high-impact teaching practices such as an inquiry-based laboratory course (Course-Based Undergraduate Research, CURE) for upper-level chemistry course, which was proven to be effective toward students' understanding of scientific authentic research practices. She is co-leader of her college's Diversity & Inclusion Collaborative since its inception in 2019 and a co-leader of the GS Alliances of Women in STEM and a member of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute Inclusive Excellence.

Saha co-launched the College of Science and Mathematics' Freshmen Research Program in 2019 and currently leads a team of faculty representing various disciplines within COSM to expand the program on all three campuses of Georgia Southern University. Through this program, she aims to incorporate first-year students into research, diversify STEM workforce, and provide several active interventions until their graduation for motivation, retention, and academic success.

"I am overwhelmed and feel truly special receiving such statewide recognition with the Hall of Fame Faculty Award in Excellence in Teaching," Saha said. "This would never have been possible without the support of my wonderful family, colleagues, collaborators and especially GSU administration for encouraging the visions and initiatives. With humility, I sincerely thank the University System of Georgia, Board of Regents, and Georgia Southern University for such honor and recognition!"

The USG Foundation also recognized four recipients of the Regents' Hall of Fame Alumni and Distinguished Friends Award. This award is presented to outstanding alumni and friends for their dedicated service and support to a USG institution. Among the honorees was Lt. Gen. Leslie C. Smith, nominated by Georgia Southern.

Smith, the 66th Inspector General of the Army, retired in August after more than 35 years of Army service. He is the highest-ranking military official Georgia Southern has ever produced.

Smith has served as The Inspector General (TIG) since February 2018. Before that, he served as Deputy, The Inspector General (DTIG) from April 2015 until becoming TIG.

Smith received his commission in the U.S. Army from Georgia Southern in 1983 as a field artillery officer. In 1985, he completed a bachelor's degree in accounting as a distinguished military graduate and entered the Army as a chemical officer. Smith holds a Master of Science degree in administration from Central Michigan University and a Master of Arts degree in national security strategy from the National Defense University.

No matter how far he ascended in the Army ranks or how far away his service took him, General Smith has consistently made time to invest in others, especially Georgia Southern's students. Even before his daughter Tori attended Georgia Southern and graduated in 2018, General Smith would visit his alma mater at least once a year to speak to ROTC cadets, business students, student-athletes, and many others.

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[Holiday Helper Tree returns to Georgia Southern for 28th year of giving](#)

October 27, 2021



The Holiday Helper Tree, Georgia Southern University's annual holiday tradition where the campus community joins together to provide gifts to local organizations, is returning for its 28th year beginning Nov. 1.

Sponsored by the Office of Leadership and Community Engagement (OLCE), the Holiday Helper Tree dons tags with a gift wish from someone in the community that can be pulled by a faculty, staff, student or community member. Gifts are delivered directly to the partner agencies who then wrap and distribute the gifts.

“Holiday Helper Tree is one of the longest-standing holiday traditions at Georgia Southern,” said Emily Tanner, community engagement coordinator for OLCE. “This is another way we care for our neighbors in a way that may seem small, but to some of our fellow citizens, is actually very big.”

New this year, the Holiday Helper Tree will extend its branches to the Armstrong Campus. Last year, due to the pandemic, OLCE created a virtual tree for the Georgia Southern community to continue the tradition. With such overwhelming feedback, OLCE decided to place a physical tree on the Armstrong Campus while continuing the virtual format, said Tanner.

“Since the tags are now all loaded onto the virtual tree, the tags on the physical trees will include QR codes that will take you to the virtual tree to pull a tag,” Tanner said. “However, we feel that having the tree on campus is a great symbol and reminder of the spirit of giving that the Holiday Helper Tree promotes as we enter into the holiday season.”

Tanner added the greater community can join in the spirit of giving this year virtually.

“Another update to the virtual tree this year will be access extended to the community-at-large,” said Tanner. “Last year, in order to access the tree, you had to have a Georgia Southern email account. This year, anyone can create an account and access the tree with ease.”

OLCE is also accepting gift-wrapping supplies this year to assist the agencies in their efforts to wrap the gifts before delivery.

“Anyone who would like to donate gift-wrapping supplies can bring them to the kickoff events or can drop it off at the Office of Leadership and Community Engagement on either campus throughout the month of November,” Tanner added.

OLCE will host kickoff events for the Holiday Helper Tree on the Statesboro Campus on Nov. 1, from 4 to 5 p.m. in the Russell Union, and on the Armstrong Campus on Nov. 2, from 3 to 4 p.m. in the Student Union.

For more information about the Holiday Helper Tree, visit students.GeorgiaSouthern.edu/LeadServe/hht/.

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