

Friends of the
University of Georgia
**Marine
Institute**

Sapelo Island, Georgia, USA

Martha Odum

ISSUE 2 JANUARY 2006

AN INTERVIEW WITH A FRIEND:

**Meet Cherri Disque from Colorado
Spring, Colorado**

by Beth Richardson

Q1. I'm grateful to you for being the first Friend of the UGA Marine Institute (MI). In addition to your generous pledge of \$2000 for five years tell me more about your connection to the University of Georgia.

A1. I graduated from UGa in 1968 with an AB degree in English. For most of my life, I have had an interest in the sciences, but my lack of ability in math caused me to lean in the direction of the arts. At one time, I had wanted to be a marine biologist and I still have an interest in the subject. Since I was very young, I have been collecting shells and I enjoy spending time beachcombing whenever possible. I enjoy knowing something about each of the items I pick up along beaches. Needless to say, living in Colorado is not conducive to beachcombing. However, I have learned that it is possible to find fossils, including shells, in Colorado.

Q2. I'm starting to collect Sapelo Island/MI adventure stories from members of the Friends. Do you have a favorite experience or story you'd like to share?

A2. The only experiences I have had

on Sapelo were during two brief visits there. During the first visit, which was an overnight one, there were 4 of us staying in one of the trailers and we drove out to the beach for a walk. There is nothing more special than being the only ones on a lovely, long stretch of beach. We initially used flashlights and then



Cherri Disque and her husband Mike on the bench she dedicated to her parents.

remembered it was turtle nesting season so our walk was mostly by moonlight.

Q3. I'd like to propose that the Friends make an annual award of \$1000 to a graduate student working at the Marine Institute. All students working on the island would be eligible to apply. Would you support that proposal? And, do you have a project in mind that you would like to propose to the Friends?

A3. I think the idea of presenting \$1,000 to a graduate student in order

to facilitate his/her work is a wonderful idea. Not knowing the specific needs of the researchers, I have no particular suggestions at the moment. It would be nice to get the turkey fountain finally set up and running again, since it is such a focal point for all who visit the MI. They do not want to spend their money frivolously, so maybe the Friends could find a way to do that.

Q4. Congratulations on your appointment to the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences Board of Advisors. I know you don't live in Athens-Clarke County so I must commend you on your commitment to service for the University of Georgia. Would you comment on your decision to serve?

A4. I am thrilled at the opportunity to be a member of the Board of Advisors. No, Frequent Flyer miles are not a goal, but new life experience would be my main goal.

I have already found new friends and the experience is invaluable to me. Along the way, I hope to be able to assist the Franklin College in locating new donors.

Q5. If you had one wish for the future of the MI, what would it be?

A5. I wish the MI would finally be able to complete the projects they have on their agenda. The MI is located on a very special property, but the
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OUTSTANDING IN THE FIELD

Dr. David Porter is a Professor in the Plant Biology Department at UGA. He and his wife Jean recently joined the Friends of the UGAMI. David will retire in June 2006. We discussed his popular Maymester class *Life and Death in the Salt Marsh*.

Tell me how you came up with the idea for your Maymester class.

When I co-taught a marine Botany class in the 1970s with Marshall Darley and Lloyd Dunn we took students to the coast for a couple of weekends. It was a very positive experience and one that planted the idea of a Sapelo-based class in my head. When the University switched over to semesters from quarters in 1998, I realized that the short term that was being proposed in May was a perfect time of year and length of time for an intensive coastal biology class. Clif Pannell was helpful with the mechanics of setting up the class in a non-traditional format and Jon Garbisch has been invaluable in facilitating the program at the Marine Institute. I have offered the class every year since 1999. It has been popular with Biology undergrads and has always been fully subscribed.

Yes, I've heard that it is a very popular class. Specifically what subjects do you cover? And, what sort of projects do you have the students complete?

The class is called 'Life and Death in

the Salt Marsh' and I ask the students to read the *Teals'* (John and Mildred) book 'Life and Death of the Salt Marsh' before class actually begins. The *Teals'* book, written in the 1970s (Ballantine Books, NY) was a documentation of the importance of salt marshes in coastal ecology and an important plea for salt marsh conservation. Today, in part, as a result of their book, salt marshes are being protected. The topics that I cover in the class are less conservation related and more geared to introduce the students to the biological and ecological interactions among salt marsh organisms. The awareness of the importance of conservation flows from this.

We use the marsh, the boardwalks, the forest and the beaches as our classroom. During the first three days that the class is on the island, we walk about and visit the various habitats and environments making close observations of organisms and their situations and interactions. I encourage the students to generate questions and hypotheses about what we see. What happens to the *Fundulus* at low tide? What advantage do the periwinkles obtain by climbing the stalks of cord grass at high tide? Why don't blue crabs eat all the mud snails? What environmental factors affect the distribution of marsh plants? Then during the second half of the class the students pair up and focus on a particular research question of their choosing that they then try to answer with experimentation and/or close observation. These projects are often open-ended with results that are new to science. The students present their results to the rest of the class and write up the research as scientific papers suitable for publication. Topics that have been investigated in the past couple of years include: feeding preferences of marsh periwinkles, patterns of *Spartina* regrowth in dieback areas, mud snails' effect on *Euglena* populations in the marsh sediment, circadian behavior of the wharf crab, *Armases cinereum*, comparative morphology of fiddler crab burrows, distribution and behavior of ants in the salt marsh, amount of spore production by *Spartina* decomposer fungi.

How is the housing situation? What improvements would you like to see?

We stay in the dorm/apartments that are on the East side of the UGAMI quadrangle. We use one of the kitchens for meals preparation and set up one of the larger rooms for a dining room. The facilities are adequate, but often show the results of minimal clean up as there is limited resident staff and clean up depends on the efforts of a previous group. The new dormitory facility will be a great improvement.

The class has use of the visitors laboratories and microscopes and the wet lab with the flowing sea water system. These are invaluable for many of the observations and experiments that the class performs.

What is your overall impression of this experience for the students? If you have direct quotes from students I would love that info. I hope they leave with a deep appreciation for the coastal environment, Sapelo Island and the UGAMI.

The students come away from the class with a profound understanding of the coastal environment and a real appreciation of the benefits and limitations of field research.

STUDENT COMMENTS

The information I learned in Dr. Porter's class has stuck with me more than that from most of my other undergraduate classes. Dr. Porter has a capacity for making his lectures memorable: a talk on the physiology of salt marsh grasses is much more interesting when the professor is standing knee-deep in marsh mud. *Stephen W. Scott*



Snail enclosure in the marsh.

Read more student comments on page 3



Friends NEWS

ON THE JOB WITH DR. BILL MILLER

Bill Miller, the Director of the UGA Marine Institute on Sapelo Island has been on the job for two years now. He is settling into a new position that has him dividing his time between the main campus in Athens and at the MI on Sapelo Island. According to Bill so far this new model is going fairly well but still has many details to be resolved. Since Bill's arrival, the administration of the MI (still a B budget unit) has switched its reporting line from the Office of the Vice President for Research (OVPR) to Franklin College, and Dean Garnett Stokes. Gordon Patel, the Vice President for Research, who championed the cause for improvements at the MI for many years recently retired. Dean Stokes follows yet another supporter of the

MI, Wyatt Anderson, into the position of Dean of Franklin College. Bill looks forward to establishing a new, productive relationship with Dean Stokes and he is hopeful that the dean will visit the MI within the year.

Two items topped the excitement list for the new director of the MI. First and foremost was the approval to hire two new research positions at the MI – one Research Scientist and one Post-doctoral scientist. Secondly, but similarly important, was the groundbreaking ceremony that occurred on March 29, 2005 for the new Barrier Island Research and Learning (BIRL) facilities (see related story below and photos in this issue).

Bill listed several things he would like to accomplish in 2006. One is to renew the MI's relationship with the Sapelo Foundation, an organization originally established by the family of the late RJ Reynolds to support research at the MI. Another is to continue to build on the good relation between the MI, DNR, and SINERR for island management

and logistical support. In general he is thinking about changes that would make life easier and more productive for the people working at the MI. "I want to invest in people, put money into faculty positions, breathe new life into the Institute by rebuilding the sense of community at the institute. This may require some belt tightening in other areas but I think things are much improved from a facilities point of view. We are going in a good direction. I am encouraged by the participation at the groundbreaking of UGA President Mike Adams, Gordon Patel, Representative Jack Kingston, island residents and many others, that plans to turn this place around are being supported at both the administrative and grassroots level. The operating budget is just enough to get by and the staff size is at a minimum right now. Short of a windfall private donation, we must build our overhead income to go forward and new research personnel are the answer. Building a strong research staff brings money and excitement to the island. It is the next required step and we are ready to take it."

WELCOME NEW HIRES:

Dr. Melissa G. Booth (Ph.D., Oklahoma State University, Microbiology & Molecular Genetics). Currently, Melissa is an Assistant Professor in Biology at Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia. She begins her job at the Marine Institute in January 2006. No stranger to the Georgia coast, she did a postdoc at Skidaway and some teaching at Savannah State.

Melissa said, "I'm getting really excited about the move! My area of expertise is marine microbiology. I've currently been working on the involvement of bacteria in the cycling of NO₃⁻ in coastal and open ocean systems with a consortium of people at Skidaway and VIMS. I've been teaching and researching at Roanoke College in the Roanoke Valley of Virginia for almost three years now, and am really excited to be returning to South Georgia." **Dr. Rebecca Effler:** MI Director Bill Miller stated that Becky is our new postdoc from LSU. She studies forested wetlands, insect-environmental interactions and forest ecology. She will be looking at the forests on Sapelo Island and relations to adjacent marshes. Welcome Melissa and Becky! 🌿

Cherri Discque Continued from Page 1

facility itself has been in great need of improvements in order to enable the researchers, etc. to be able to live and work in more comfort. Not enough people are aware of the research being conducted on the premises of the MI, so perhaps more information could be distributed to those who are potential donors. I am finding that directing my monies to the MI is a very rewarding experience. Having been able to actually see the facility has been a key factor in this.

Thank you, Cherri, for your generosity and for taking the time to answer my questions and for being such a good Friend! 🌿



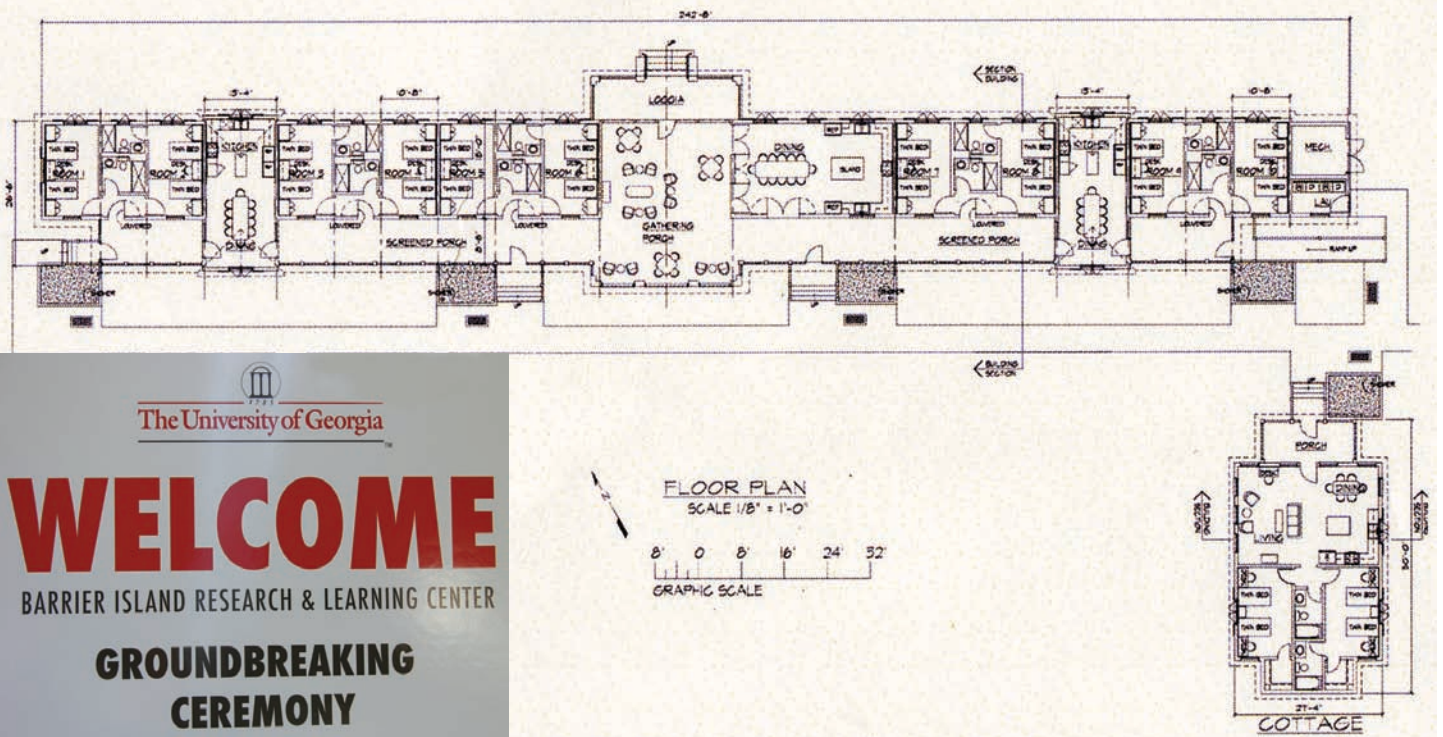
Turtle crawl - on Nanny Goat beach
Maymester students observe tracks left by a sea turtle.

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Dr. Porter utilized the University's Marine Institute on Sapelo as a base of operations for our amazing learning experience. During our stay, he incorporated a multifaceted approach to learning about Sapelo. We learned about the history and the character of the island as well as the ecology of the salt marshes. As a class, we exchanged ideas and personal perspectives as we enjoyed the hard and muddy work in the marshes during the day, the excitement of being on the Marine Institute's research vessel discovering what came up in its nets, and evenings punctuated by lively dialog and debate. He was able to make us eager to learn. *Ivy N Cadle 🌿*



March 29, 2005



TOP - UGAMI personnel break ground for the new dormitory. BOTTOM LEFT Rep. Jack Kingston, who helped secure funding for the project, addressed the crowd. BOTTOM RIGHT - Tim Holibaugh, Arnett Mace, Bill Miller, UGA President Mike Adams and Tom Landrum discuss the renovation plan for the MI.





Jon's Wish List

A request for golf cart donations:

Getting ready for the spring golf season? Are you planning to upgrade to a new set of wheels? The Marine Institute is looking for gas powered golf carts in good working order to develop a more environmentally friendly guest fleet. Your donation would be fully tax-deductible and we can arrange a memorial or a commemorative plaque to be affixed to the dashboard. ☘

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Cherri Disque

Michael Griffith

For their renewed support

And to Ron Clay and Sharon

Barnhart for website support

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS:

Lloyd Dunn

Joanne M. Sharpe

Marshall & Priscilla Darley

Steve Hilliard & Amy Edwards

Eugene & Charlsie Keferl

David & Jean Porter

Maggie Kiley & Gregg Bayard

James & Brenda Kitchens

Mark & Daphne Murphy

Thank you for joining the Friends

and for making a financial

contribution to the Friends!

FUNDRAISING IDEAS?

We'd love to hear from you!

Contact Bill Miller

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FRIENDS MEMBERSHIP FORM - JOIN TODAY!



Yes! I want to join the Friends of the University of Georgia Marine Institute!

Make your check payable to: Arch Foundation - Friends of the Marine Institute Fund

And mail your tax-deductible donation to:

Friends of the UGA Marine Institute

Marine Programs, University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602

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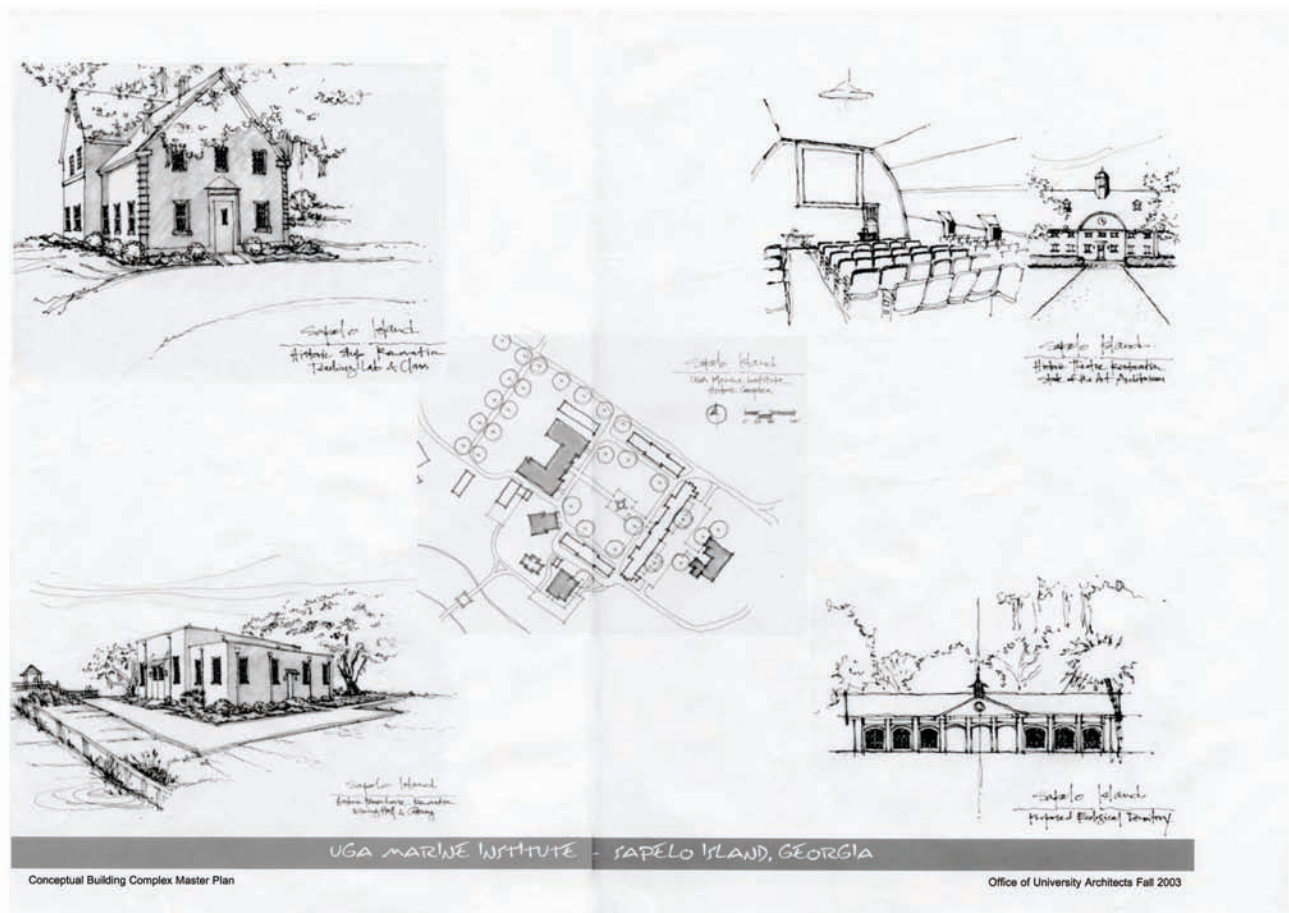
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The University of Georgia

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