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Sincerely,

Craig Lennon
Assistant Dean of Students
When Sue and Will Crocco became parents, they knew they wanted to spend summers with their children, building sand castles, splashing in the water, and collecting sea shells. But beachfront property isn’t cheap, so the couple had to find ways to maximize their budget.

After a search, they bought a ramshackle building just blocks away from Fairfield Beach. They planned to demolish the structure and build a house that was suitable to rent to college students in the fall, winter, and spring to “cover costs and . . . have a nice place to go to in the summer as a family,” said Sue Crocco.

Rather than hiring an architect, though, Will Crocco said he and his wife knew that “universities can be great places to find talent” for free, so they went to UB’s Shintaro Akatsu School of Design (SASD) in search of help.

That led them to Marsha Matto, chairperson of SASD’s Interior Design Program and owner of Point of View Interiors in Bridgeport. When Matto met the couple, she quickly accepted the invitation to have four interior design majors devote the 2015-2016 academic year to the project.

They decided the couple would hire an engineering firm to build the shell of a building, but SASD interior design students, working under Matto’s guidance, would do “everything else,” she said.

Everything else turned out to be considerable, as students Katy Chevalier, Madelyn Hopkins, Jillian Allen and Kimberly McLeod quickly learned. The four began by choosing siding and roofing materials for the shell of the house. Then they space planned the interior of the 1800 square-foot, three-story structure, working with an engineer, contractors, and tradesmen to determine the location of walls, rooms, lights, and windows. In the spring of 2016, the four curated hundreds of housing materials to recommend options for doors, sinks, paint colors, tiling, and every fixture down to the last light switch and doorknob.

“IT was kind of overwhelming. We had to do a lot of research, but it was a good learning experience. We’d never picked out siding for a house or roofing before,” said Allen ’16, adding that the Croccos were “happy with what we gave them. It was also helpful to them because they were on a budget. It was a win-win.”

Allen benefitted, too. When she interviewed for a job at DC Design, a Hamden, Connecticut, interior design firm, she made sure she talked about the Crocco’s summer house. “It helped that I had real experience,” she said. Soon thereafter, she was offered the full-time job, and began working after graduating in May. Chevalier and McLeod, who graduated, too, also found interior design jobs.

“It was a perfect ending to the yearlong project, which wrapped up in May, when the Croccos hosted a party to officially open the house. “I love working with students,” said Will Crocco, as the group stood on the rooftop deck, admiring the view of the beach below. “They were a part of every decision.”
Saul Almazan—a University of Bridgeport (UB) honors student who has spent much of his college career advocating for expanding access to higher-education among underserved youth—has been chosen for the GEAR UP Alumni Leadership Academy (GUALA), a prestigious national campaign that identifies exceptional student leaders throughout the United States and trains them to more effectively engage peers, lawmakers, and communities in creating a college-going culture.

GEAR UP, or Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs, is a $322 million federally-funded program that provides services to 570,000 students in low-income schools across 43 states and one territory to help increase the number of students who are prepared for and succeed in higher education.

In the Bridgeport region, GEAR UP is run by Yale-Bridgeport GEAR UP, which operates out of Yale University and Bridgeport Public Schools. UB has served as partner to the program since 2008.

Almazan, 20, is among 24 exceptional students who were selected from a national pool of applicants to be trained over the course of a year as GUALA leaders in areas related to peer-to-peer outreach and mentoring, social-media engagement, public speaking, and education policy.

Dr. Nadia Ward, project director of the Yale-Bridgeport GEAR UP Program, called Almazan “the perfect choice to represent the State of Connecticut in this prestigious youth leadership training opportunity. He is a natural leader among his peers. His powerful personal story is one that must be heard by policymakers in Washington.”

Almazan began participating in GEAR UP as a seventh grader at John F. Kennedy Magnet High School in Bridgeport and later completed GEAR UP college-preparatory programs when he attended Central Magnet High School in Bridgeport. After graduating from Central in 2014, Almazan enrolled at UB and is currently in his junior year majoring in psychology.

At UB, Almazan’s top grades have qualified him for both the Dean’s and President’s List in multiple semesters. He is a student ambassador for the Purple Knight Society and previously served as senator for the School of Arts and Sciences Student Government Association for the 2016-2017 academic year and run as a resident assistant on campus, one of two jobs he manages as a full-time student.

In January 2016, Asmerom teamed up with Sodexo Dining Services, the University’s meals vendor, to create the student Food Recovery Network Club to donate meals to those in need. Within five months, the Food Recovery Network Club collected over 1,300 pounds of surplus food to feed the homeless and financially vulnerable individuals, including the elderly and children, who are served by the United Church of Christ in Bridgeport.

In the spring of 2016, Asmerom won the Dean’s Award for Exceptional Junior Student for his significant positive impact on student life.

“You work exemplifies NABA’s mantra of ‘Lifting as We Climb’ and serves as an inspiration to everyone,” NABA Greater Hartford Chapter President Troy Woolery wrote to Asmerom informing him of the scholarship award.

“My motivation is my family,” said Asmerom, who moved to Harlem from Ethiopia with his mother and siblings when he was seven. The transition to a new culture, where he wasn’t welcomed by peers, was initially difficult, he said, but his mother encouraged him to pursue his dreams to become the CEO of his own company.

“Through her example—she earned her nursing degree while working at a hotel—'she taught me the importance of education early on in life,'” Asmerom wrote in his NABA scholarship application.
Building Bridge for New Transition

Program Spotlight

UB’s new transition program for incoming students helped them get off to a great start.

University of Bridgeport’s new Bridge Program makes a dramatic difference in preparing freshmen to succeed in college, according to 80 percent of freshmen who said they felt “significantly more prepared” for college life after participating in the program. The other 20 percent of Bridge Program participants felt “more prepared” than non-participants.

The students were polled after they completed the Summer Bridge Program at UB from July 31 to August 19.

With a holistic approach to student success, the Bridge Program provided 27 students who applied to participate in the three-week program with the opportunity to take three-hour workshops and classes devoted to academic, social, and life skills.

All of the Bridge students at UB earned 3 credits after successfully completing English 100, which focuses on written communications that underpin coursework across academic disciplines.

Bridge students also earned 1 credit and obtained pivotal life and academic skills for completing First-Year Experience, the Bridge Program workshop series devoted to time management, study skills, personal finance, and related topics. In August, the students culminated their experience with a day at the Adventure Park, a ropes and zip line course in Bridgeport.

“It’s a metaphor for academics, when you can feel alone but in reality you have people to support you physically and mentally,” said Assistant Dean of Students and Bridge Program Coordinator Craig Lennon.

Costs for the Bridge Program were paid for by UB.

UB Assistant Dean of Students Craig Lennon (lower center) and student Stanley St. Rose (lower right) make their way through a ropes course during a Bridge Program trust-building exercise.

UB incoming freshmen Kayla Mills, Caitlin Maloney, and Jane Borrero participated in the Bridge Program.

Important Dates

- Thanksgiving recess: 11/23–11/27
- 11th Annual Holiday Concert: 12/7
- Last day of classes: 12/9
- Midnight Breakfast: 12/12
- Final examination week: 12/12–12/16
- Final grades due: 12/19
- Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service: 1/16
- Classes begin: 1/17
- Last day of classes: 1/19
- Final examination week: 1/21–1/26
- MLK Day of Service: 1/16
- First-year Experience: 1/17
- 11th Annual Holiday Concert: 1/23–1/27

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