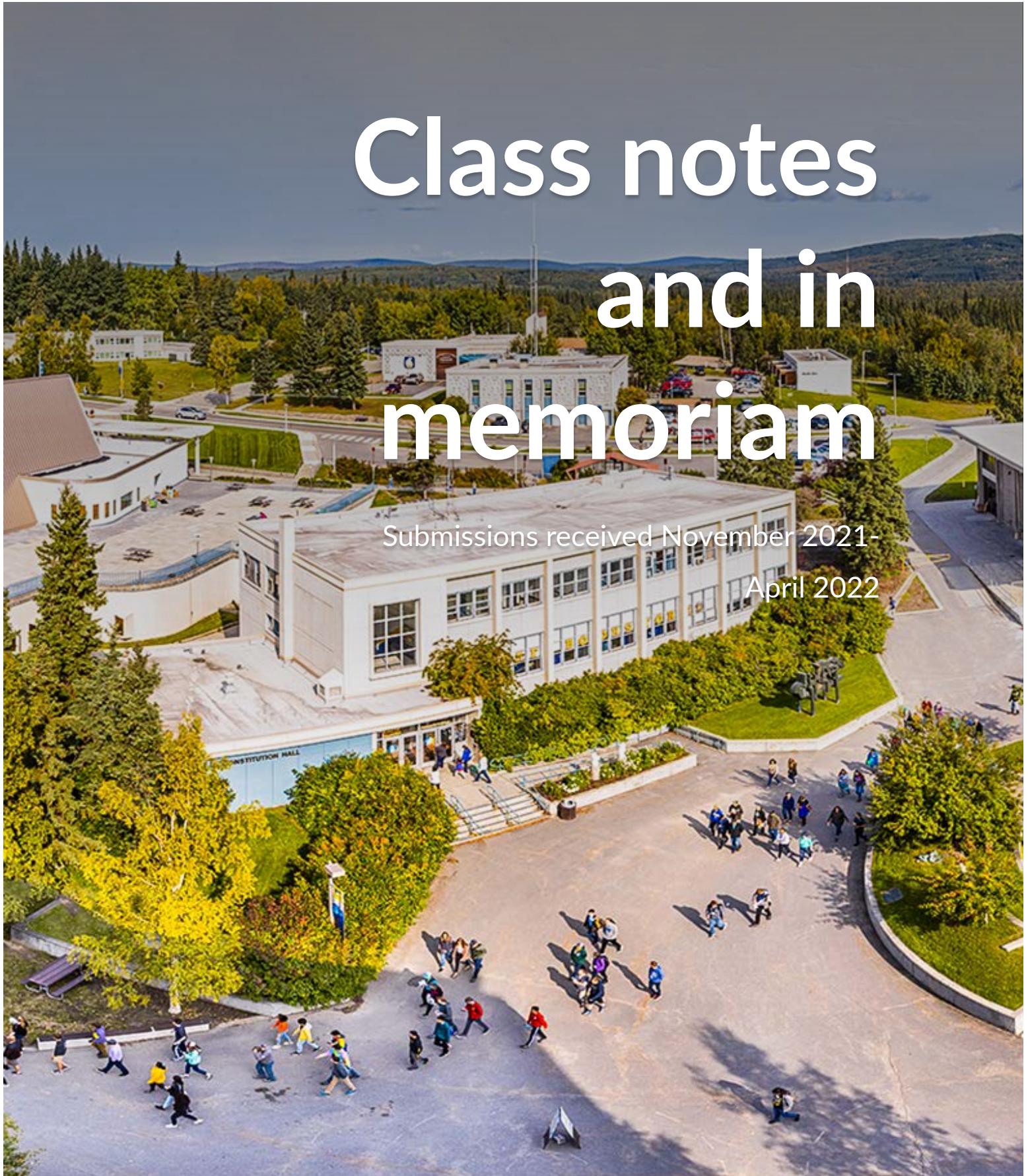


AURORA

# Class notes and in memoriam

Submissions received November 2021-  
April 2022



*Above: Students walk to the Wood Center during New Student Orientation on a sunny day in August. UAF photo by JR Ancheta. Photos courtesy of alumni unless otherwise noted. Information is courtesy of alumni and public sources.*

**Margaret Nelson '80** is celebrating the fifth year of owning her own real estate brokerage in Anchorage. Denali Real Estate, with 10 licensees, provides residential, commercial and property management services.





*Jeff Roach, center, plays guitar in this image from a video recorded for the song "Mr. Celsius" by the Nashville-based musician Teddy at Night.*

**Jeff Roach '87** is the executive director of John C. Tune Airport in Nashville, Tennessee. He has overseen the development of a \$10 million air traffic control tower, which opened Sept. 1, 2021; a \$38 million airport redevelopment project constructing 100 new aircraft hangars; and a \$10 million commercial hangar development area project.

Jeff is responsible for all activity at the general aviation airport, which, with more than 100,000 annual operations, is Tennessee's busiest. Jeff mentors other airport executives to prepare them for credentialing through the American Association of Airport Executives.

In his free time, besides taking advantage of the amazing music, sports and entertainment opportunities in Nashville with his wife Sheri, Jeff has begun performing locally in movies and music videos. Most recently, he was featured on guitar in the music video "Mr. Celsius." Jeff encourages everyone to try something new, as you never know where it will take you.



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9\\_9KVaj6PC0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_9KVaj6PC0)





*Forrest Kuiper. UAF photo by JR Ancheta.*

**Forrest Kuiper '99, '00, '12** has been named fire chief of the University Fire Department, which serves UAF's Troth Yeddha' campus in Fairbanks and the surrounding area. Forrest, who was named acting fire chief in July 2021, officially began the permanent role in January 2022.

A product of UAF's fire science program as well as other UAF programs, Forrest has been working in the fire service since 1997, when he started working at UAF as a student firefighter.

He became an auxiliary firefighter in 2000, then worked as a safety officer at UAF Codes and Safety until 2003.

In spring 2003, Forrest began his full-time career position as a captain with the University Fire Department. He was promoted to battalion chief of C Platoon in 2017 while maintaining his State of Alaska EMT III certification as well.

Forrest earned an associate degree in fire science, an associate degree in hazardous materials, a baccalaureate degree in emergency management and a master's degree in public administration, all from the University of Alaska. He is also a graduate of the National Fire Academy executive fire officer program.

When he is not on duty, Forrest enjoys spending his free time sharing his passion for being outdoors in Alaska hunting and fishing with his wife, Buffy, and son, Glacier.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to serve our students and staff at the University Fire Department along with the UAF and Fairbanks community in this new role," Forrest said in a

UAF news release. “Our department is made up of incredible staff and students, and I look forward to working alongside them to move our department forward. Having been raised by UFD for the last 24 years, I am honored to give back to an organization that has given me and my family so much.”



*Jomo Stewart*

**Jomo Stewart '01** is the new president and CEO of the Fairbanks Economic Development Corp.

Jomo graduated from UAF with a political science degree. He has served the Alaska State

Legislature twice as a chief of staff and twice as a committee aide. He also served as communications director for the Alaska Gasline Port Authority and the general manager of the Interior Gas Utility.

While at IGU, he negotiated the third-of-a-billion-dollar deal to finance the Interior Energy Project and unite Fairbanks Natural Gas and IGU under community control.

Jomo replaces Jim Dodson, the development corporation's longtime president and CEO. Jomo previously worked for the corporation as the senior project manager and energy, military and mining specialist.

Jomo is also an amazing father and a talented thespian, with a singing voice as smooth as butter.





*Sarah Schacher*

**Sarah Schacher '03** received the Dr. L.I. Hewes Award at the 2021 annual meeting of the 18-member Western Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. The annual Hewes Award is presented to an individual to recognize outstanding contributions to a member state's highway development program.

Sarah is a professional engineer with the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities' Northern Region in Fairbanks.

“Sarah’s leadership has been instrumental in the success of the Northern Region’s infrastructure program, especially through the unprecedented challenges we have faced during the COVID pandemic,” said Alaska DOTPF Commissioner Ryan Anderson in a news release. “Her exceptional teamwork, work ethic and compassion for her colleagues is remarkable.”

Sarah began her career at DOTPF in 2003 and has served as preconstruction engineer for the Northern Region since 2016. She oversees a capital program of highway and aviation projects worth approximately \$250 million annually. She is a lifelong resident of Alaska.



*Patricia Watts*

**Patricia Watts '04** is realizing her dream as a novelist following a 20-year career in journalism and 10 years as a human rights investigator for the State of Alaska.

Her fifth published novel, “Paper Targets,” is a tale of female rage and empowerment and lifelong friendship. It’s due for release in May 2022.



*The cover of Patricia Watts' most recent novel reflects the story of a cupcake shop owner who seeks to “confront all the*



*men who have stolen her dignity while she remained silent”  
and “takes along a gun, just in case.”*

“Everyone knew that Roanne never got angry — until the night she killed her ex-husband and herself,” the publisher’s summary of the novel begins.

“Roanne, a nice, suburban lady in her 60s who works at a Hallmark shop and volunteers at the Food Bank, calls her lifelong friend, Connie, confesses to murder, then puts the gun to her own head. Connie, spurred by Roanne’s last words about a lifetime of unspoken anger, sets aside her work as a cozy mystery writer and cupcake shop owner to confront all the men who have stolen her dignity while she remained silent. On a journey to reclaim her inner power, Connie’s mission is to avoid the same tragic path as her friend, but she takes along a gun, just in case.”

Patricia worked for more than a decade at the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, most recently as the features editor and editor of the Sunday magazine, Heartland.

“My time at UAF helped me to make a major transition in my life,” Patricia said. “I sandwiched

classes in between the hours at my full-time job at the newspaper. I remember many a cold, dark night trekking across the old Cushman Street bridge from the News-Miner building to the satellite campus downtown. With the completion of a paralegal studies degree, new doors opened, and I moved on to a career in the legal and human rights field after 20 years as a journalist.”

Patricia worked as an investigator with the Alaska State Commission for Human Rights before moving to San Diego a few years ago.

She has written suspense and mystery novels for the past decade.

“Paper Targets” is available on Amazon, through Atmosphere Press and at [the author's website](#).

**Annette Chism '05** — “I recently left Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute to become the director of environmental health and safety at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire.”



*Julia Hnilicka*

**Julia Hnilicka '06, '20** has been named Alaska state director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development office.

Julia earned her master's degree in rural development from UAF's Department of Alaska Native Studies and Rural Development. While seeking her degree, she traveled throughout Alaska and worked with a vast diversity of populations and resources. She also worked as a teacher's assistant in Alaska Native studies for



Professor Kathleen Meckel. Her decade-long experience in managing a successful freight logistics business on the Yukon River gives her a unique awareness of the challenges that face rural Alaska.

“I’m pleased they’ve chosen someone who has a diverse rural development background and that they are taking a chance with someone who is young,” Julia said. “I’m looking forward to working really hard for Alaskans in this role, as I believe they are our greatest resource.”

Julia was born and raised in rural Alaska. For most of her life, she has lived in her home village of Nenana. The daughter of a tugboat captain and an educator, her background instills a deep, lived understanding of the complexities of the issues facing rural residents. Julia’s recent run for the Alaska State House of Representatives, in the rural Interior district, activated her passion and drive for addressing the many persistent problems facing Alaska.

As state director, Julia serves as the chief executive officer of USDA Rural Development’s Alaska region. The agency provides loans and grants to help expand economic opportunities, create jobs and improve the quality of life. This

assistance supports infrastructure improvements; business development; housing; community facilities such as schools, public safety and health care; and high-speed internet access in rural, tribal and high-poverty areas. More information is available at the [USDA Rural Development's Alaska region website](#).

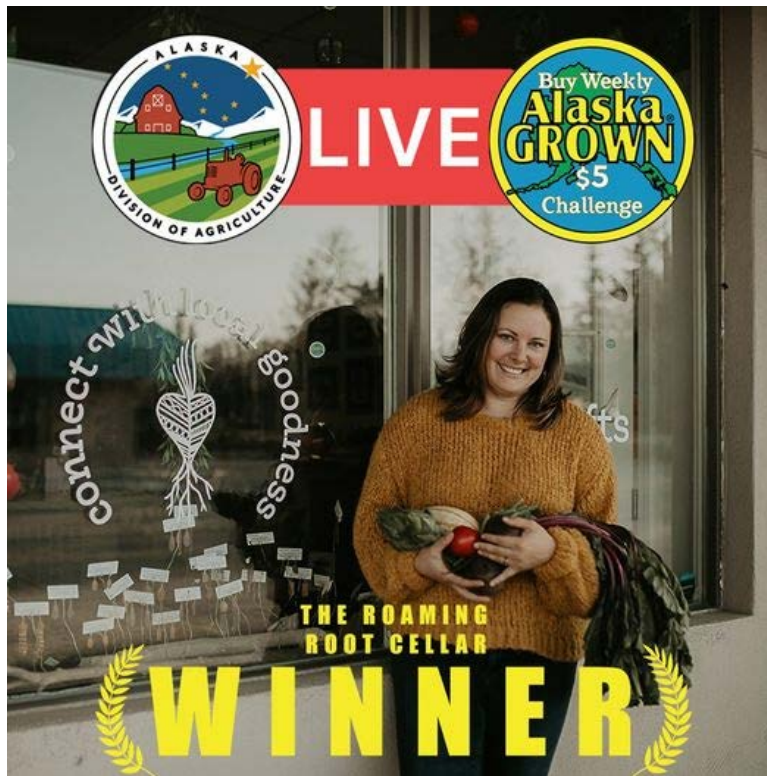
**Will Baker '11** — “I have accepted the position of political director for the (Steve) [Carra for Congress](#) campaign. With the title of political director there comes responsibility, and a large portion of campaign failure would fall upon me.

“In addition to overseeing and organizing volunteer activities, I’m also a cross between a secretary and errand boy. In coordination with his state office staff, I maintain the candidate’s daily schedule, book appointments and interviews, and, lastly, research and obtain various items needed for the campaign.

“Right now the campaign is currently transitioning from the early stages, where it was mostly planning and fundraising, to the more active stages of the political season. I’ll soon be coordinating both daily volunteer activities and several candidate appearances across a moderately sized geographical area. Michigan’s

primary is Aug. 2, and each month will just get busier until then. Should my candidate win, we then retool to face the Democrat opponent in the November midterms.

“The new fourth congressional district of Michigan consists of two entire counties and portions of four others.”



*Erica Moeller*

**Erica Moeller '18**, owner of The [Roaming Root Cellar](#) in Fairbanks, won the Alaska Division of Agriculture's 2021 Golden Carrot Award.

The award recognizes Erica's creative use of Alaska Grown displays, support of Alaska small



businesses and success during the fifth annual Alaska Grown \$5 Challenge campaign.

Her Fairbanks store is the first Alaska small business and the first store located in the state's northern region to win the award.

The Alaska Grown \$5 Challenge encourages Alaskans to spend \$5 each week on Alaska-grown products, including vegetables, dairy, meat, grains and value-added products. The competition is held from June to November during the peak of the Alaska growing season.

"We are excited to see a small business in the Interior of Alaska, such as The Roaming Root Cellar, win the \$5 Challenge," said David Schade, the Division of Agriculture's director, in a news release. "This company exemplifies the Alaska spirit, supporting our producers and serving consumers in the heart of Alaska."

Erica opened her business on Feb. 29, 2020, and operated out of a 23-foot, 1976 Bluebird bus. Her mission was to connect local customers with local products. When the COVID-19 pandemic came along, she was forced to close down the

bus. She continued to produce and deliver products from her home until May 2020, when she reopened as a storefront business.

That store doubled in size on the one-year anniversary of its opening.

Everything Roaming Root sells is made or grown in Alaska. At the store, customers can find information about each producer.

“When you combine high-quality produce with innovative and resilient business practices, you get a standout Interior business like Erica Moeller’s Roaming Root Cellar,” said Gov. Mike Dunleavy in the news release. “I am proud to see this Golden Heart City businesswoman get the recognition she deserves for helping expand Alaska’s agriculture business and build our state’s food security.”





## In memoriam

[View a list of alumni and friends whose passage has been shared with us since the previous issue of Aurora.](#)









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