

Alumni Focus

A newsletter for public health alumni of the University of Tennessee

Alumni socials in Nashville & Atlanta draw nearly 60 people!



The department launched inaugural alumni socials in Nashville and Atlanta—cities with growing numbers of alumni. On September 13, nearly 20 alumni, faculty and students mingled at the Cool Springs Brewery in Franklin, an event that will occur every September during the annual TPHA conference.



On November 5, nearly 40 alumni, faculty, students and friends of the department gathered at the Gordon Biersch Brewery in Atlanta, piggybacking on APHA's annual conference. A fun time was had by all! What a lively, talented and diverse group!

Our faculty are making news



What is access?
How do market places work?
What is the future of healthcare?
Tune into **Health Connections** every other Tuesday to [hear Dr. Carole Myers' radio show](#) with



[Dr. Rob Lieberthal](#) discusses pending healthcare legislation in Congress in a 4-part local news segment



Be a part of Big Orange Give to raise \$1 million dollars for UT in just one day! **Plan to give online Wednesday November 8th.**
BigOrangeGive.utk.edu

Connecting you

This newsletter, issued every fall and spring, keeps public health alumni informed about news and opportunities.

As graduates of the program, your continued involvement strengthens the foundation and traditions for graduates to follow.

Send success stories, requests for interns, jobs postings, or other news to Julie Grubaugh
 Phone: 865-974-9277 Email: jgrubaugh@utk.edu

Alums Help Students

Kudos to **Erin Guy, Cheryl Hill, Cari Jennings, Stephanie Strutner, Jessica Waddell, Anniece Weaver, Stephanie Welch, Courtney Williams and Bud Yard** for sharing career guidance & opportunities at this fall's *Getting the Job You Want* event, drawing 50 people!

Are you LinkedIn?

Click [here](#) to join our group

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Passion-driven alumni careers

Passion is the difference between having a job or having a career. Recently I connected with alumni [Michael Acker](#) and [Natasha Speed](#)--whose careers are paved by personal and professional passion.

By Julie Grubaugh

Transforming communities to live longer, healthier lives



Michael Acker, '07

I met Michael Acker at our 1st annual Nashville PH alumni social and was struck by his passion.

He, like many of us, has had an unexpected career path. Having started in finance, he left the company for a year, and then returned when an opportunity

arose to work with a program he believed in—the [BlueZones Project®](#).

The BlueZones Project® teaches communities how to live longer and better. The program leverages secrets discovered in Blue Zones around the world—rare longevity hotspots—helping transform communities across the U.S. into areas

where the healthy choice is easy and people live longer with a higher quality of life. The nine secrets he described are in essence, public health principles and strategies, supported by research and marketed brilliantly!

How is it possible that in only 4 years after returning to his company, Michael was promoted to lead a 30 million dollar growth business in 42 communities across 9 states?

According to Michael, it was luck--being in the right place at the right time.

I would argue that it was Michael's pursuit of passion that placed him in the right place at the right time.

Rewarding, ever-evolving career in HIV pays tribute to mother



Natasha Speed, '11

Natasha (Murphy) Speed, and I recently re-connected, and I'm inspired to share her story.

Natasha entered the HIV field to pay tribute to her mother, who passed due to complications of AIDS when Natasha was eight.

As an undergrad, Dr. Steven Waller introduced her to Dr. June Gorski, who built an instant bond, explaining how a degree in public health could lead to work in the area of HIV. She, along with Drs. Paul Erwin and Charles Hamilton, guided Natasha along her path.

She began at the local level as a Disease Investigation Specialist and then case manager at the City of St. Louis Dept. of Health. Then she worked at the national level as a program coordinator at the National Minority AIDS Council, training staff and leaders across the country, and providing capacity building assistance to

organizations seeking to build sustainable infrastructure and HIV programs.

"I'm so blessed that my degree afforded me the opportunity to fulfill my passion. When thinking of my next career move, I wanted to see how I could apply my skill set in other settings."

Recently, Natasha was hired as a senior quality and innovation project administrator for Johns Hopkins Medicine's Armstrong Institute for Patient Safety and Quality (AI)—an area outside of HIV, yet utilizing her ever-growing skills to support multidisciplinary QI teams across Johns Hopkins Medicine (6 hospitals) to reduce variation in care by eliminating preventable harm and optimizing patient outcomes and experiences.

Natasha's advice to alumni, "Follow your passion and always look for ways to develop your skill set outside of your current area of focus to ensure you don't pigeon hole yourself."