

# Alumni Association honors Soaring Eagles

This year, the **Florida Gulf Coast University Alumni Association** introduced a **new award honoring accomplished graduates**, inducting four alumni into the **Soaring Eagles**. Recipients were individuals who have dedicated time and resources to their communities and excelled in their professions after earning degrees in the last decade. The Soaring Eagles Society complements the Alumni of Distinction Society, which has been honoring graduates since 2004.



## JONEL GOMEZ, '02 and '08

Giving birth to two children did not slow down Jonel Gomez as she pursued her master's degree in nursing at FGCU.

"It was a great fit," she recalls. "I could stay home with them and be up until 2 in the morning writing papers, and they wouldn't know."

These days, instead of balancing term papers and diapers, she juggles work as a nurse practitioner with her roles as wife and mother. Even though daughter Kinley and son Alden are only 6 and 5, respectively, Gomez hopes to squeeze in work on a doctorate in the next few years. Eventually, nurse practitioners will need the advanced degree, she believes.

How does she manage it all?

"I'm very driven to excel in anything I do," she says. "Any time there's an opportunity to learn more, I'm there."

Gomez also finds time to incorporate teaching into her career. In spring 2008, she served as an adjunct clinical instructor in FGCU's College of Nursing. And at Shell Point Retirement Community in south Fort Myers, where she worked for almost two years, she developed learning modules for the nursing staff.

She also finds time to teach her children the importance of giving back by encouraging them to create and deliver cards, artwork and homemade trinkets to Shell Point residents.

Gomez credits her success to the support of Keith, her husband of 10 years, who nominated her for the Soaring Eagle Society.

"Jonel leads by example and in doing so is creating a path of life that others can follow and admire," her husband says. ♦

**Degrees:** B.S. and M.S., nursing  
**Age:** 33  
**Home:** Fort Myers  
**Occupation:** Nurse practitioner for Stephen J. Laquis, a Fort Myers oculo-plastic surgeon



## SCOTT GUELCHER, '05

Since earning his bachelor's degree five years ago, Scott Guelcher has woven his way into the Southwest Florida arts community – or, more accurately, painted his way.

Now a full-time artist, he describes his work as an abstract mix of realism and pop art. Everyday urban imagery and contemporary themes are entwined and rendered in a variety of media.

An ambitious installation about the U.S. government testing of the hydrogen bomb in the Marshall Islands, "Bikinis and Bombs," began as his senior project and evolved into a solo show last year at the daas Gallery in Fort Myers. He has served as the education director at the Alliance for the Arts, an umbrella organization for Lee County performing and visual arts groups. In 2008 and 2009, he received arts grants from the City of Fort Myers, and he won the Alliance's 2008 Angels of the Arts award for best new artist.

Guelcher credits FGCU and its faculty with instilling values he lives by today.

"The Arts Complex is just like a family," he says. "It gave me a sense of community."

Associate Professor of Art Patricia J. Fay, who nominated Guelcher as a Soaring Eagle, says he tackles new challenges with enthusiasm.

"Making a life in the arts is not an easy thing to do – it takes truly unusual levels of perseverance that are rarely balanced by tangible rewards," she says. "Scott has crafted a path for himself in the art world that is based on continuous growth and personal application, whether teaching, managing arts programs or continuing to develop his own studio work." ♦

**Degree:** B.A., art  
**Age:** 33  
**Home:** Lehigh Acres  
**Occupation:** Artist

## SPENCER ROACH, '05

When Spencer Roach graduated from high school in Louisiana, college tuition wasn't in the cards. So at 19, he joined the U.S. Coast Guard. Four years later, reassigned from Seattle to Fort Myers Beach, he was able to enroll at FGCU through a Coast Guard educational program.

"It provided me with a great foundation," he says.

Roach's decorated service and academic success since earned him a spot in law school thanks to the exclusive Judge Advocate General program. Only six officers around the country were chosen last year. The Coast Guard pays their regular salaries while they go to school.

"I really feel like I won the lottery," he says. "Law school was a long-term goal, but I didn't know how I'd accomplish that in active duty."

And active it has been. Roach has distinguished himself in military and community service ever since. His heroism in rescuing lives during a severe winter storm in Alaska won him a medal. The Navy and Marine Corps honored him for helping enforce United Nations sanctions against Iraq in the Persian Gulf. The Florida State Legislature noted his efforts to register voters and organize communities.

"His strong moral code propels him to serve those around him ... regardless of where his career takes him," says Ruth Rodrigues, FGCU's Campus Reservations and Records Management director, who nominated Roach for the Soaring Eagles Society.

His proudest accomplishment? Helping rebuild Louisiana Coast Guard units devastated by Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005.

"The first year down there was hell, like a war zone, worse than some Third World countries I've visited," Roach says. "To help those units and those people get back to a normal life – that tour turned out to be an incredibly rewarding experience." ♦

**Degree:** B.A., political science  
**Age:** 32  
**Home:** Cape Coral/ Coral Gables  
**Occupation:** Student at University of Miami School of Law, lieutenant in U.S. Coast Guard



## MAGALI SOLIMANO, '03

After graduating from FGCU, Magali Solimano spent two years with the Peace Corps, working in a rural, mountainous region of Ecuador. She taught business skills to women and helped establish financing for lunch programs at two elementary schools.

"I wanted to use my finance skills in a small community very far from the banking world," she says. "I was helping farmers with their livelihood on a daily basis. I always knew I wanted to contribute my skills and abilities in some way. I didn't want to get too sidetracked."

That focus has kept her on track to success. She had completed a United Nations International Poverty Centre internship in Brazil, a master's degree in international affairs and public health from Columbia University and a finance internship in Colombia. These accomplishments led to her current post at The Economist as an expert on financial markets, investment climates and policies in 15 Latin American nations.

Solimano's success impressed mentors such as Howard Finch, the Lutgert College of Business Alico Chair in Financial Management and Planning.

"She formulated a plan to jump-start her career after completing her degree and she has executed it perfectly," says Finch, who nominated Solimano for the Soaring Eagle award. "Throughout her experiences, she has always been appreciative of the influence and guidance she received from the faculty and administration at FGCU."

Solimano believes the University's academic programs and her campus leadership experiences formed a strong foundation for her career.

"It definitely prepared me for the work I'm doing now," she says. ♦

**Degree:** B.S., finance  
**Age:** 29  
**Home:** New York City  
**Occupation:** Regional editor – Americas, The Economist Group, New York, N.Y.



— Stories by John Francis / Photos by Garth Francis