Three Staff Members Compete in Atlantic Audubon NJ ‘Big Year’

John Rokita, principal lab technician, was heading to the Campus Center for lunch when an eBird text alert came through on his phone, reporting a snowy owl sighting in Sandy Hook. He immediately called Lester Block, a professional service specialist in the School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, to share the news.

Rokita and Block competed as teammates during the Atlantic Audubon Society’s 2013 New Jersey Big Year. “The idea is to see as many species as you can in one year [within New Jersey for the Atlantic Audubon contest]. The Big Year competition has been around a while,” Block explained.

So when the very first snowy owl in the state was announced on Nov. 21, their first move was to get permission to take vacation time that afternoon to travel the 80 miles to the 6-mile barrier spit of sand. “We didn’t know it would be a snowy owl year. Sometimes they show up for a day and then are gone. We wanted to pick it up for our Big Year,” said Block.

Racing against the setting sun, Rokita skipped the trip back to his office to pick up his jacket, leaving in just short sleeves. When they arrived at the beach in Sandy Hook “there was a crowd of people bundled up in scarves and mittens,” said Rokita. “We could barely see their eyes.”

“People asked me, ‘Don’t you watch the weather?’ ” he laughed.

The distant snowy white owl with its striking yellow eyes was the focus of dozens of binoculars and scopes, so it wasn’t hard to spot. However, a gas-powered UltraFlight gliding up and down the shoreline flushed the owl farther and farther down the beach. It was too long a hike in 20-degree howling wind, so they drove one town south to Sea Bright in search of a closer viewpoint. “We finally found a beach with public access and saw the bird from a seawall,” said Block, who was able to get a few pictures.

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“By that weekend, there were four (snowy owls) in New Jersey,” said Block.

The snowy owl was just one of many highlights for Rokita and Block who began their Big Year, a first-time experience for both, in January 2013. Together they identified 310 bird species in 365 days throughout the entire state.

Janice Weisgerber, a technical assistant in the Office of Development and Alumni Affairs, also participated in the Big Year competition, making up 117 species. A crested caracara, normally a Texas resident, showed up in Galloway this time last year and was a life bird (first-time species) for her as well as Rokita and Block.

After checking off the caracara, Weisgerber decided to use the remaining daylight to go after the American woodcock, searching for the stocky, long-beaked bird known for its bouncing gait along roadsides. After a luckless car ride through Galloway, she pulled into her driveway. To her surprise, a woodcock greeted her in her own backyard.

Block explained that the competition “was a team effort. John and I made our own rule to keep it honest. We wouldn’t count it unless we both agreed on the ID.”

First they identified backyard feeder birds and then moved to the next closest spot, Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge, a local birding mecca. From there, they traversed the state’s 21 counties to bird national wildlife refuges, wildlife management areas, state parks and forests, around lighthouses, along roadways and in more unusual spots such as cemeteries, a campground and Trenton marsh.

“If the bird was supposed to be there, we were there. Some weekends we put 400-600 miles on the car,” said Block.

“I’ve never seen so much in one year,” said Rokita.

Competing in a Big Year was a milestone of their birding lives. “I loved every minute, saw places I’ve never seen, found 73 life birds and met new friends. It was one of the most worthwhile experiences of my life,” said Block.

Robinson and Gwathney Volunteer for Super Bowl XLVIII

Cheryl Robinson, sports marketing coordinator, and Jim Gwathney, coordinator for Intramurals and Recreation, volunteered for Super Bowl XLVIII, held Feb. 2 at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, NJ.

Through her network, Robinson was asked to submit a résumé to the Super Bowl Host Committee. After three rounds of interviews, Robinson accepted a role as an owner liaison, making sure that at least one NFL team owner had a pleasurable Super Bowl experience.

“From behind-the-scenes productions to billionaire parties and the energizing crowd, Super Bowl 48 was an awesome event,” Robinson said.

Gwathney volunteered on the Friday prior to the Super Bowl. He worked as a greeter at the Hoboken Path Station and then with Transit Customer Service at Secaucus Junction.

Gwathney met fans not just from Denver and Seattle, but from all over the world.

“I enjoyed the chance to meet and greet so many people,” said Gwathney. “It was the first Super Bowl held in New Jersey and I wanted to do my part.”

“When my grandchildren ask me where I was during Super Bowl 48, I’ll be able to tell them that I helped make it happen. I was a part of history,” said Robinson.
PAC’s Anjanette Christy and Husband Frank Welcome Baby Boy

Anjanette Christy, director of Ticketing Services in the Performing Arts Center, and her husband Frank, welcomed a baby boy on Feb. 2 at 4:49 a.m. Joseph Howard Christy weighed in at 6 pounds, 11 ounces. Congratulations to mom, dad and baby!

Nursing Program Celebrates Graduates’ High Licensure Pass Rate

Dr. Linda Aaronson, coordinator of the Nursing Program, recently announced excellent results in Stockton’s nursing graduate licensure pass rate for 2013. The pass rate for first-time test-takers who took the exam in 2013 was 96.55 percent, with a total of 29 students taking the exam.

“It is indeed a pleasure to work with such talented faculty and students. All of this translates to the wonderful passing rates we have enjoyed since the beginning. Just last year our passing rate was 100 percent,” said Dr. Aaronson.

For entry into the nursing program, students undergo a rigorous application process. The program receives hundreds of applicants for 36 seats per year. The program’s curriculum focuses on advancing skills necessary to practice as a professional nurse.

“On behalf of everyone in the School of Health Sciences, congratulations on preparing these students so well!” said Interim Dean Bess Kathrins of the School of Health Sciences.

Dr. Joseph Speaks in Serbia, Re-Elected to U.N. Board in Italy

Dr. Janice Joseph, Distinguished Professor of Criminal Justice, recently served as a plenary speaker at a victimology conference in Serbia and was re-elected to the executive board of a United Nations scientific and professional advisory council in Italy.

Dr. Joseph spoke at The International Conference on Victims and Contemporary Responses to Crime: Between Protection and Misuse. The conference was sponsored by the Victimology Society of Serbia and was held in Belgrade, Serbia in November 2013.

Dr. Joseph’s speech was titled “Sexual Harassment in Educational Institutions: A Comparative Perspective.” She also gave a presentation on femicide to victimologists and graduate students (doctoral and masters) from the University of Belgrade.

In addition, Dr. Joseph met with a group of undergraduate students from the University of Belgrade to discuss the problems involved in conducting research on sexual harassment.

Dr. Joseph would like to express her gratitude to Mrs. Marija Majstorovic, mother of Spanish Professor Dr. Gorica Majstorovic, for her hospitality during Dr. Joseph’s stay in Belgrade.

In December 2013, Dr. Joseph attended the Fifteenth Plenary Meeting of the International Scientific and Professional Advisory Council (ISPAC) of the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Program, which was held in conjunction with The International Conference on Protecting Cultural Heritage as a Common Good of Humanity: A Challenge For Criminal Justice in Italy.

During that meeting, she was re-elected, for the third time, to ISPAC’s executive board.

ISPAC is a component of the U.N. Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Program. One of the principal goals of ISPAC is to enhance the contributions of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) by convening annual conferences devoted to topical subjects in criminal justice as agreed upon by the ISPAC Board in consultation with the U.N. Secretariat. ISPAC also serves as the body for the coordination of NGO activities and ancillary meetings at the United Nations Crime Congresses.
Dean Pedro Santana Receives Doctorate in Business Administration

Dean of Students Pedro Santana received his doctorate in Business Administration from Wilmington University in Delaware on Jan. 26.

Dean Santana had successfully defended his dissertation, “Middle States Chief Student Affairs Officer Roles and Succession Planning Considerations,” on Dec. 16.

His dissertation study examined chief student affairs officers (CSAOs) within the four-year colleges and universities accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. The objectives were to: determine the profile of the CSAO; provide a better understanding as to the role of the CSAO; identify the most common career paths taken to reach the CSAO position; determine CSAO career aspirations beyond their current roles; and ascertain what colleges and universities are doing to attract, develop and retain talented individuals to assume the CSAO role.

The study surveyed 300 institutions and achieved a 46 percent response rate.

Among the findings was that succession planning is essential, both because of the critical nature of the position and because 62 percent of respondents plan to retire or leave their jobs within the next nine years.

Dean Santana attended a hooding ceremony on Jan. 24, followed by graduation on the 26th. He was also inducted into Sigma Beta Delta, the international honor society in business, management and administration, at Wilmington University on Jan. 17.

‘Messiah Reloaded’ Brings Community Together in Atlantic City

The show did go on! Although the originally scheduled performance was canceled due to snow, Beverly Vaughn, professor of Music, led the Stockton Chorale and Oratorio Society in the Jan. 26 performance of Handel’s “The Messiah Reloaded: An Oratorio.”

Vaughn led the Stockton choir as well as singers and musicians from all over the region. Stockton’s “The Messiah,” performed this year at the Xanadu Theatre in Trump Taj Mahal, brings together members of the public and professional performers to form a family that gets together every other year. Vaughn conducted performances of “Silent Night” and “Go Tell It on the Mountain,” in addition to Handel’s masterpiece.

“The concert [was] a chance to sing Christmas carols after the holidays,” Vaughn said. “Holiday cheer doesn’t have to stop in December.”

The event was well attended by Stockton faculty and staff members, as well as the community. A portion of the proceeds benefits scholarships for Stockton students.

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News about distinguished students can now be found at Distinctive Stockton Students. To contribute a news item for the blog, please contact the editor at distinctive@stockton.edu