

## New Director Brings Innovative Focus to Arizona Arthritis Center



*Salvatore Albani, MD, PhD,  
Stephens chair and director of  
the Arizona Arthritis Center*

The Arizona Arthritis Center welcomes its new director, Salvatore Albani, MD, PhD, an internationally renowned pediatric rheumatologist and

**“I want to help put this center on the world map, even more than it is now,” says Dr. Albani.**

immunologist, who joined the Center in January, bringing not only a new research focus, but also new energy, vision and hope for people suffering from rheumatoid arthritis.

Dr. Albani also serves as the Charles A.L. and Suzanne M. Stephens Chair of Rheumatology, and professor of medicine and pediatrics at the UA

College of Medicine. “I am humbled when I think of Dr. Stephens’ work. He always focused on improving lives of individuals. He never forgot that the person is at the center of what we do,” says Dr. Albani.

“I want to help put this center on the world map, even more than it is now. When I was 20, I needed to make a choice between continuing with a serious career in rowing with a nationally ranked team or entering medical school. Now, this is my Olympics,” says Dr. Albani.

Before joining the Arizona Arthritis Center, Dr. Albani served as director of the Translational Medicine Unit at the Clinical Investigation Institute at the University of California, San Diego, where he also was professor of medicine and pediatrics. There, he was the director of a research team that developed a synthetic peptide – a chain of amino acids – in tablet form

that, in early clinical trials, disrupted the immune response in people with RA without causing side effects. The Arizona Arthritis Center was one of the sites for one of the trials.

Dr. Albani’s research has been funded by grants from the National Institutes of Health and the Arthritis Foundation. His research findings have been



**Through a \$6 million estate gift, Charles and Suzanne Stephens funded the Charles A.L. and Suzanne M. Stephens Chair of Rheumatology, which supports Dr. Albani’s research at the Arizona Arthritis Center. Dr. Stephens was a private-practice rheumatologist whose research led to breakthroughs in arthritis treatment. “Steve (as he was called by friends) always said he wasn’t interested in bricks and mortar. He wanted to invest in brain power. Dr. Albani is the kind of person Steve wanted to support,” recalls John Franklin, an attorney and Stephens family friend.**

published in numerous leading peer-reviewed publications and he is the recipient of multiple awards and honors, including the Kourir Award in Pediatric Rheumatology, Paris, France; and the Fijkman Award for Translational Research, Utrecht, the Netherlands.

Originally from Italy, Dr. Albani trained in medicine, pediatrics and pediatric rheumatology and immunology at the University of Pavia in Italy. He then moved to Scripps Research Foundation

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ARIZONA  
ARTHRITIS  
CENTER

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One of nine Centers of Excellence at The University of Arizona College of Medicine, the Arizona Arthritis Center is dedicated to biomedical research into the causes and treatments of more than 100 forms of arthritis. Understanding the ways that arthritis, bone and connective diseases start and progress is the key to helping individuals with arthritis lead healthier lives.

**Arizona Arthritis Center**  
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Development Director  
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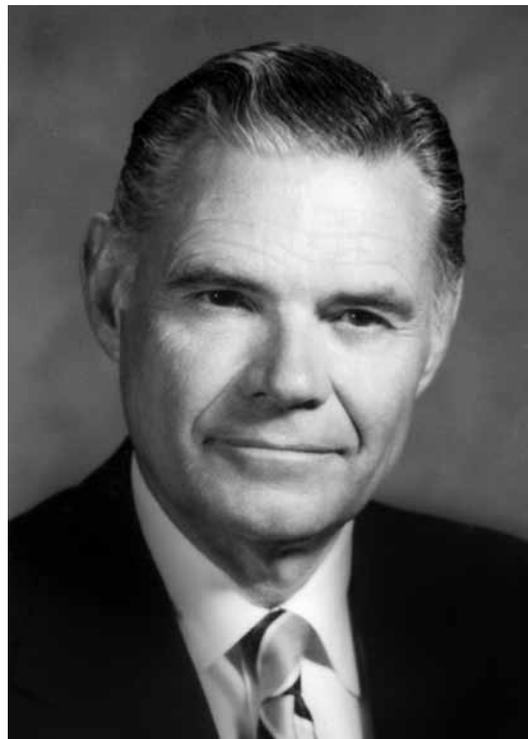
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in La Jolla, Calif., where he completed a research fellowship in pediatric rheumatology and immunology.

In his spare time, Dr. Albani enjoys traveling with his wife, Erika, rowing and photography.

## Stephens \$6M Gift for UA Rheumatology Research Continues to Advance the Field



Charles A.L. Stephens Jr., MD

Honest, forward thinking and of incredible good will, the late Charles A.L. Stephens Jr., MD, was always on a mission to solve medical mysteries.

“He was so far ahead of his time,” says Keith A. Joiner, MD, MPH, vice provost for medical affairs and dean of the College of Medicine. “He was doing medical research in Tucson before there was a College of Medicine.”

With such an advanced agenda, it comes as no surprise that Dr. Stephens and his late wife, Suzanne, left more than \$6 million of their estate to fund continued rheumatology research at the College through The Charles A.L. and Suzanne M. Stephens Chair of Rheumatology and Fund in Rheumatology, which now supports the research of Salvatore Albani, MD, PhD, director of the Arizona Arthritis Center.

“They cared about people,” says John Franklin, attorney and friend of the couple. “The most important thing in my time with them was to sit down in the evening and talk about making these gifts.”

It was perhaps not only his charitable nature that drew people to the late doctor, but his colorful stories, as well. The doctor, called Steve by friends, told of celebrity patients within the United States – including Clark Gable and John D. Rockefeller – and even some in Mexico.

“When one of the presidents of Mexico in the 1950s was dying, a knock came to Steve’s door at midnight,” says Robert Johnson, MD, a family friend and partner in private practice with Dr. Stephens. “Two Mexicans were there saying the president would like him to come.”

### “He was viewed as a magical, mystic guy,” Dr. Johnson says.

Dr. Stephens flew to Mexico, but to no avail. The president had suffered from heart failure. The doctor gave him no more than three days to live.

Over the next few months, several prominent people from Mexico visited Dr. Stephens for care. When asked why they were making the trip, Dr. Johnson recalls one patient’s response, “Your reputation has gone all through Mexico that you were the doctor who predicted the exact hour of the president’s death.”

When Dr. Stephens said that the president would live three days, it translated to “he will die on the 72<sup>nd</sup> hour,” which is exactly what happened. “He was viewed as a magical, mystic guy,” Dr. Johnson says.

Though he may not have been magic, Dr. Stephens certainly was wise. His gift to the College of Medicine will enable his passion for medical research to subsist well into the future. “There is still so much to know,” Dr. Johnson says.

## Immune Modulation “Re-educates” the Immune System to Stop Inflammation

A relatively new field in arthritis research, immune modulation, has come to the Arizona Arthritis Center, with the addition of Salvatore Albani, MD, PhD, the Stephens chair and new director of the Center.

Immune modulation acts like a vaccine to re-educate the body to tolerate the amino acid chains that cause the faulty immune responses that lead to painful inflammation in rheumatoid arthritis (RA) patients. RA is an autoimmune disorder that causes the body to attack its own tissue. Dr. Albani’s research focuses on what triggers this autoimmune response.

“Inflammation is like a fire that destroys the joint,” explains Dr. Albani. “We are addressing the mechanisms that

**“Inflammation is like a fire that destroys the joint,” explains Dr. Albani. “We are addressing the mechanisms that generate inflammation.”**

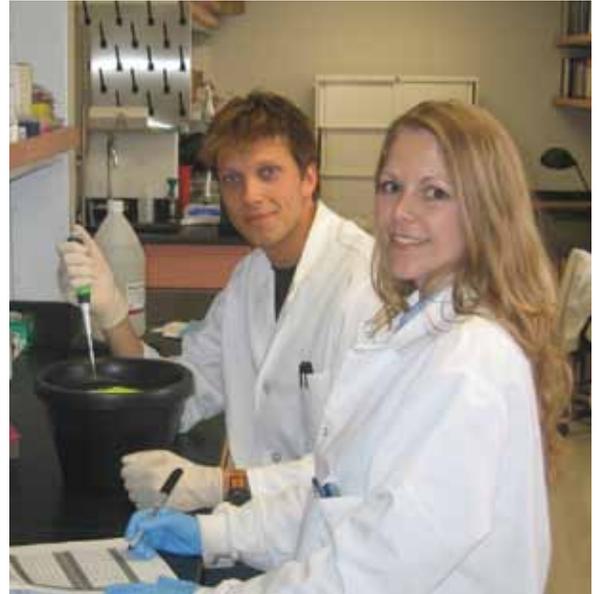
generate inflammation.” Normally such a reaction is caused by the body’s recognition of a foreign invader, such as an infection, but in the case of RA, the body turns its immune response on its own tissue.

Current RA medications, such as biologics, suppress the immune system and cause side effects such as increased infection and cancer risks. “Biologics act like a tank, killing good cells, including those that protect the body from cancer, as well as cells that cause inflammation,” adds Dr. Albani. In contrast, immune modulation “re-educates” the cells of the body so that it no longer sees the inflammation trigger as an invader.

During Dr. Albani’s tenure as director of the Translational Medicine Unit at the Clinical Investigation Institute at University of California at San Diego, he was head of a research team that developed a synthetic peptide called dnaJP1—a chain of amino acids—in tablet form that appears to disrupt the immune response in people with RA without causing side effects.

Dr. Albani’s UCSD research team conducted Phase 2 clinical trials of the synthetic peptide drug derived from a

naturally occurring protein, dnaJ, which generates inflammation in RA patients with impaired T cells that attack the body’s own tissues. The study showed that the dnaJP1 peptide worked as a vaccine to re-educate the T cells to be tolerant of the protein chain instead of



*Lab manager Nicole Schechter and researcher Theo van den Broek are part of the team working in the Albani Lab.*

attacking the tissue. The AAC was one of the sites for the Phase 2 trial.

In addition to eliminating side effects and potentially reducing treatment costs, immune modulation provides hope for the 30 to 40 percent of RA patients who do not respond to current biologic therapies.

Dr. Albani, whose research has been funded by numerous grants from the National Institutes of Health and the Arthritis Foundation, hopes to secure additional funding

to conduct another Phase 2 trial to better understand how this peptide will work to moderate the immune system in people whose symptoms are first brought under control by current treatments, such as biologics.

## AAC Welcomes Tom Buchanan, Development Director



Tom Buchanan, development director

The Arizona Arthritis Center welcomes its new development director, Tom Buchanan, who brings more than

30 years experience in non-profit management and development.

Early in his career, Tom learned first hand what it means to act locally and think globally. After completing a capital campaign in 1981 for Kalamazoo College, a private liberal arts college in Michigan, Tom joined the Peace Corps as a volunteer. During this time his passion for fundraising was seeded.

“I joined the Peace Corps to learn to live in another culture, contribute as a volunteer and gain international experience. To make a career in fundraising, I knew I wanted to support causes that help people locally and have the potential to affect global change,” says Tom.

“The Arizona Arthritis Center attracted me because it helps people right here in Arizona as it carries out research with the potential for tremendous global impact. I’ve seen family and friends

**“The Arizona Arthritis Center attracted me because it helps people right here in Arizona as it carries out research with the potential for tremendous global impact,” says Tom.**

struggle with rheumatoid arthritis and other forms of arthritis. I understand how debilitating these diseases can be and how important it is that better treatments and even cures are found,” adds Tom.

Tom, who moved to Tucson in 2006, has experience with international and Chicago-based non-profit organizations.

## All Gifts Great and Small

**It takes a culture of philanthropy at many levels of giving to build a Center of Excellence like the Arizona Arthritis Center, which is dedicated to research and improving patient care. “Arthritis affects so many people in so many different ways. Whatever their interests or capacity to give, I want people to understand that there’s a way to give and further the mission of this Center,” says Tom Buchanan, AAC development director.**

**Whether you begin as a member of the AAC Friends for \$35 a year; enjoy the Lute Olson Celebrity Auction and Golf Tournament for \$200; or have the resources to commit a major gift or a much larger sum that would support an endowed chair, your support and commitment helps AAC educate people about arthritis and research ways to improve diagnosis and treatment. Together, by contributing to the best of our ability and means, we can fight this debilitating disease.**

## Yuma Friends of AHSC Supports Cartilage Engineering Student’s Research



Chris Ferguson

Yuma Friends of the University of Arizona Health Sciences Center awarded a \$3,000 grant to support the research of Chris Ferguson, a master’s candidate in Physiological Sciences. Chris, who works on his research project in the Orthopaedic Research Lab in the Arizona Arthritis Center, says that athletes and older people with generalized arthritis would benefit from this type of research.

The research project, “*Evaluation of human mesenchymal stem cell sources for use in articular cartilage engineering*,” focuses on finding better techniques to repair damaged cartilage. Chris is comparing how easily three types of stem cells can be grown and converted into cartilage cells (chondrocytes).

Chris’ project is jointly supervised by John Szivek, PhD, director of the Orthopaedic Research Lab, and David Harris, PhD, professor in the Department of Immunobiology. John Ruth, MD, and William Grana, MD, MPH, in the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery collect discarded tissue from patients to support Chris’ research. Dr. Harris provides cord blood cells for comparison.

Chris has applied to medical school with a career goal of becoming an orthopaedic surgeon.

# Help Continue the Legend

## 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Lute Olson Celebrity Auction and Golf Tournament

The Arizona Arthritis Center is proud to celebrate 21 years of support from UA Men's Basketball Coach Lute Olson to benefit arthritis research at the Arizona Arthritis Center. Since 1987, these events have raised more than \$1.8 million for the Center.

### Please Join Us!

- **Celebrity Auction, Friday, April 11, 5:30 p.m.**  
Randolph Golf Complex, 600 S. Alvernon Way, Tucson  
Cost: \$25 per person (not tax deductible).  
Meet Lute Olson and the men's basketball team; bid on Wildcat memorabilia, autographed jerseys and basketballs, vacation and golf packages, and many other great items -- even bid on a player or coach to play golf in your group on Saturday morning. Buffet dinner included.
- **Lute Olson Golf Tournament, Saturday, April 12, 7:30 a.m. (19th Hole Party At Noon)**  
Randolph Golf Complex, 600 S. Alvernon Way, Tucson  
\$200 per individual golfer, \$700 per foursome, \$1,000 per foursome with tee sign, \$500 for tee sign.  
Fee includes golf shirt, boxed lunch, green fees, cart, tickets to auction and 19<sup>th</sup> hole party and goody bags.  
  
Join Coach Lute Olson, his coaches and players on the course for a fun morning of exciting and entertaining golf. Then join the team at the popular 19th Hole Party for lunch, prizes for the winners, and a grand finale raffle drawing.



**For reservations and more information, please call the Arizona Arthritis Center, (520) 626-7901.**

### Thank You Sponsors!

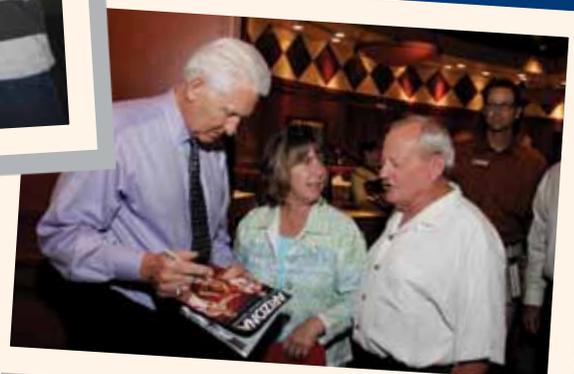
We are very proud to announce our title sponsor for this year's event is again Desert Diamond Casino. We also thank University Medical Center, along with the many others who donate auction items, tee sponsorships and donations to make this a memorable event.

*If you have questions concerning access, wish to request a sign language interpreter or disability-related accommodations, please contact Karen at (520) 626-7901 or [karenc@arthritis.arizona.edu](mailto:karenc@arthritis.arizona.edu).*



### Lute Olson Celebrity Lunch, Auction and Golf Tournament

During Lute Olson's 21-year history of supporting the Arthritis Center, he and his teams helped raise 1.8 million dollars to support programs and research.



## AAC Adds History and Statewide Scope to Advisory Board

The Arizona Arthritis Center Advisory Board added three new members: two provide a foundational, historical perspective while the third expands the Center's ability to reach beyond Tucson.



**Eric Gall, MD**, former director of AAC from 1985-1994 and professor at the Chicago Medical School of Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine & Science, is planning to become more active on the AAC Advisory Board now that he is scheduled to retire in 2009 from his academic position. "We are delighted that Eric Gall has joined us on a formal basis. Over the years he has served informally as an adviser," says Michael Hard, AAC Advisory Board chair and retired Tucson banker.



**Jeffrey Lisse, MD**, the Ethel McChesney Bilby Endowed Chair for Osteoporosis, who served as interim director of AAC until Salvatore Albani, MD, was named director, also joins the advisory board. "Jeff stepped in to act as interim and kept the Center and clinics operating at a critical time. His continued involvement on the board and his working relationship with Dr. Albani are crucial to our future success," says Mr. Hard.



**John R.P. Tesser, MD**, a rheumatologist with Arizona Arthritis and Rheumatology Associates in Paradise Valley, and clinical lecturer for the UA, will help the Arizona Arthritis Center extend its reach to the Phoenix area. "Dr. Tesser is a world-renowned rheumatologist whose commitment, creativity and experience will significantly contribute to the growth of the Center," says Dr. Albani.

"This is a great, momentous time for the Arthritis Center, particularly with Dr. Albani's energy and vision," says Mr. Hard.

## Learn to Live Healthy with Arthritis

Half-day program, Saturday, May 3

Join us for the Arizona Arthritis Center's annual "*Living Healthy with Arthritis*" half-day program. The Friends of the Arizona Arthritis Center are pleased to provide financial support for this event, which is coordinated by Michelle Cornett, RN, senior research nurse for the Center.

You'll receive inspiration, information and a light brunch to help you and your family members live fuller, healthier lives. The event is set for **Saturday, May 3, from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.**, in DuVal Auditorium at University Medical Center, 1501 N. Campbell Ave. in Tucson. The cost is \$10. (Note: the cost is not tax deductible.)

For program details, please visit our Web site: [www.arthritis.arizona.edu](http://www.arthritis.arizona.edu) or call (520) 626-5040.

If you have questions concerning access, wish to request a sign language interpreter or disability-related accommodations, please contact Michelle at (520) 626-5040 or [michellec@arthritis.arizona.edu](mailto:michellec@arthritis.arizona.edu).



## Arizona Arthritis Center Friends Board Elects Joan Lisse as Chair

Don't assume that Joan Lisse, the newly elected chair of the Arizona Arthritis Center Friends Board, joined because she happens to be married to Jeffrey Lisse, MD, the Ethel McChesney Bilby Endowed Chair for Osteoporosis at the Arizona Arthritis Center.

When Joan moved to Tucson in 2000, she was very much influenced by Eva Holtby, who established the AAC Friends. She invited Joan to join the board, and since then Joan chaired a number of great events. "I have worked with some dynamic people who have brought diverse ideas from some fascinating backgrounds," says Joan.

Joan takes over this leadership role which was held by Ralph Silberschlag, who served as AAC Friends Board chair since 2005. Thankfully, Ralph, who has served on both the AAC Friends and Advisory boards continues to support the Center.

Personal experience with arthritis also influenced Joan's involvement. "Arthritis has definitely been a real issue in my family. My grandmother had rheumatoid arthritis, my parents both developed osteoarthritis, and my two sisters and I have osteoarthritis. It is my hope that the exciting research that is currently under way at



*Joan Lisse, chair,  
AAC Friends Board*

**"The people on the AACF Board are very motivated to find ways of furthering outreach to the community," says Joan.**

the AAC, as well as plans that are being developed for future projects, will result in effective treatments that will help improve dexterity, mobility and life for the millions of people who have arthritis and arthritis-related diseases," says Joan.

Joan, who has background in neonatal neurophysiology, worked at Children's Hospital in Boston before relocating to University of California-San Diego, where she supervised the Neurophysiology Laboratory, specializing in neonatal studies, and worked in the NICU at University Hospital there. She met her future husband in San Diego, where he was doing his rheumatology fellowship.

"The people on the AACF Board are very motivated to find ways of furthering outreach to the community," says Joan. You can help the new chair and board with its goals of making more people aware of the work of the Arizona Arthritis Center by joining Friends.

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## Arizona Arthritis Center Clinics

You can choose between two locations for outstanding patient care from our rheumatology specialists, who also teach and conduct research to discover new treatments and improve diagnosis:

- **University Physicians Healthcare (UPH) Clinics at 535 N. Wilmot**
- **UPH Hospital and Clinics, 2800 E. Ajo Way**

No referrals are necessary except when required by insurance. Most insurance plans are accepted. To make an appointment, please call (520) 694-0611.

## Join AAC Friends

As a member of AAC Friends, you are part of an important Center of Excellence at The University of Arizona that, since 1970, has been advancing state-of-the-art research to improve arthritis care. It is very likely that you, a friend or family member suffers from arthritis, which is a growing epidemic among our aging population as well as a condition that afflicts thousands of children.

Through your AAC Friends membership, you will support the Center's mission to create a world free of arthritis and autoimmune diseases, a mission put into action through basic and clinical research, excellent patient care and education. Annual Friends membership dues are only \$35 for an individual or \$60 for a family. In exchange, you'll be invited to exceptional programs and receive discounts on special events.

Please visit us on-line at [www.arthritis.arizona.edu](http://www.arthritis.arizona.edu) or call (520) 626-7901. Invite your family, friends and neighbors to join us as we work together to create an arthritis-free world.

# A Message from the Director

My first few months as director of the Arizona Arthritis Center have been an exhilarating time! I've had the pleasure of meeting with many friends, staff, faculty and board members associated with the Arizona Arthritis Center, and it's inspiring to share a vision for this organization with so many committed individuals.

You have laid the foundation for our long-term objective: to make AAC recognized worldwide for absolute excellence in translational research of rheumatic and other autoimmune diseases. With your continued support, we will reach this objective.

In our strategic plan, we have identified these priorities:

- Develop a pediatric rheumatology translational research program to build an understanding of the molecular mechanisms that trigger juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA), the most common cause of permanent disability in children. We've already sown seeds to work with top international scientists. This will help AAC become the worldwide center for developing safer and more effective therapies, specifically for children. To accomplish this, we must raise \$1 million this year. The total projected cost during the next four years is more than \$4 million.
- Build on AAC's excellence in immune therapy and cartilage reconstruction research to create a world-class program that uses non-embryonic stem cells as a biologic regeneration source to reconstruct joint surfaces damaged by the pathological processes of rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis. This will require \$250,000 to \$400,000 per year for five years.
- Extend AAC's community reach by developing iServe, a web-based system of sharing information with our various communities. Outreach is one of AAC's fundamental missions. iServe will enable us to provide better service and educational materials to our patients, students, physicians and the diverse communities throughout the state, including Spanish-speaking populations. It also will facilitate cross-pollination of ideas with other departments and centers, including public health and integrative medicine. This effort will require \$200,000 per year.

I've been energized by the number of people who have offered their support to make these dreams a reality for the Arizona Arthritis Center.

As we prepare to move forward, I would like to thank the many people who were excellent stewards of AAC during the interim period, particularly Dr. Jeffrey Lisse, who served as interim director and continues to provide invaluable insights, and the entire Advisory Board and Friends Board. Despite the lengthy interim period, both boards helped the Center move forward. It will be a pleasure to work with all of you to make the Arizona Arthritis Center a world-renowned Center of Excellence that helps not only people in our state, but those across the globe who suffer from arthritis.



Salvatore Albani, MD, PhD

## Advisory Board Members

<i>Chairman</i> Michael Hard	Leslie Galloway Lura Lovell John Wesley Miller	Carole Rue Ralph Silberschlag N. Philip Strause, III, MD	<i>Ex-officio</i> Joan Lisse, <i>Chair,</i> <i>Arizona Arthritis Center</i> <i>Friends Board</i>
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## Professional Staff Represented on the Advisory Board

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<i>Development Director</i> Thomas Buchanan	

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