





# A Perfect Fit

**Introducing John  
and Stacy Nicklow:  
Partners,  
Problem-Solvers  
and Important  
Pieces of the  
Florida Tech Puzzle.**

By Karly Horn

John Nicklow, Ph.D., is Florida Tech's sixth president.

*But did you know that  
he also once wrestled a steer?*

Yes, John has more than 25 years of higher education experience as a faculty member and administrator, most recently serving as president at the University of New Orleans (UNO).

*But many years before that,  
he worked as a pizza delivery driver,  
a lumber yard laborer, a bartender  
and a bouncer.*

He is a former NCAA Division I football player (right offensive tackle) who earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in civil engineering at Bucknell University, later earning his Ph.D. in civil engineering from Arizona State University.

*But he's also a romantic  
(just ask his wife, Stacy Nicklow, Ph.D.)  
who loves spy novels and considers  
Jack Ryan a personal hero.*

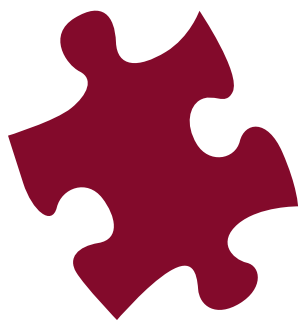
These many facets both past and present, conventional and unexpected, are the puzzle pieces that intricately connect to form John Nicklow, our new president.

*continued on page 20*



**“I have a need to create, I have a need to progress, I have a need to problem solve.”**

For a “puzzler” and problem-solver like President John Nicklow, every piece flipped is an opportunity. Every match made is progress. And when the puzzle is complete, it’s a success. Problem solved, next puzzle, please.



### Lessons Learned

In his 25 years in higher education, President Nicklow has taught a lot of lessons. But more important, he says, are the lessons he has learned.

*continued from page 19*

It’s a fitting metaphor for John, an avid “puzzler.”

“I always have a puzzle going. It’s almost like meditation for me,” John says. “You really can’t think about other things when you’re doing a puzzle.”

To some, assembling a puzzle from 1,000 tiny pieces dumped from a box and splayed across the table facing every direction might sound overwhelming.

But to John, ever the problem-solver, every piece flipped is an opportunity. Every match made is progress. And when the puzzle is complete, it’s a success. Problem solved, next puzzle, please.

“I have a need to create, I have a need to progress, I have a need to problem solve,” John says. “Maybe it’s the engineer in me that always needs a project—to make things, whatever they are, somehow better.”

John’s positive, level-headed persistence translates from puzzles and problems to people, his profession and pretty much everything else, which so far, has served him well.

It led him to Bucknell, a university that placed academics over athletics, encouraging him to pursue the engineering degree he desired while also playing football, an almost unheard-of combination that several other schools told him just wasn’t possible.

After two years, he entered a five-year program that enabled him to simultaneously earn his bachelor’s and master’s degrees. During that time, he completed two summer internships, one of which was on Navajo tribal lands in the New Mexico desert, where he learned as much designing water distribution systems for communities with none as he did interacting with the different people and cultures that surrounded him.

“Working with Native American communities really taught me the value of communication and understanding a culture without making assumptions,” he says.

It’s a lesson that was really driven home, he says, when he was chased off the property with a shotgun. Twice.

“I knew I was there to help, but the older woman—who barely spoke English and just saw me knocking on her door in my public health officer’s uniform—didn’t,” he says. “To me, that meant, OK, I need to start building relationships, communicating in different ways and having some empathy around their situation.”

The five-year program also afforded John the opportunity to work as an undergraduate research assistant, exploring water flow through a new type of culvert. Although it took a few years working as an engineer after graduation to realize it, the stimulation and fulfillment of the research assistant

experience is what inspired him to transition from industry to academia.

“It’s going to sound odd, but I got bored, and I wanted more,” he says. “I really missed teaching, and I really missed research. So, I went back and got my Ph.D. and then, ultimately, my first tenure-track job in education.”

John went on to hold increasingly senior titles, including chief enrollment officer and, later, provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs at Southern Illinois University, followed by provost and, eventually, president at UNO.

He has become widely recognized at the university level, nationally by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) and by industry for his teaching and research accomplishments.

When it comes to his career, John can speak passionately about his research, focused on STEM education advancement and environmental and water resources systems optimization.

He can tell you about the four books he has authored, and he is happy to discuss his experiences becoming and serving as a registered professional engineer, a certified professional hydrologist, an ASCE fellow and an American Academy of Water Resources diplomate.

But if you really want to learn about his professional passion, ask him about Dave.

A first-generation college student John met through the rolling mentorship program he’d established, Dave was so grateful for John’s guidance and coaching to and through medical school that he once drove four hours with his dad, his chainsaw, two generators and a backhoe to help John clean up the wreckage the May 2009 Southern Midwest Derecho had left behind just days before SIU’s commencement ceremonies. Today, Dave is a successful, accomplished surgeon and still one of the most generous people John knows.

Ask him about Janie.

Janie needed a job to help put herself through college. So, the Nicklows hired her to babysit their son, Ethan, teach him to swim and watch their house and dog, Bayley, when they were out of town. She’s now the owner and operator of AWR Engineering Inc., a prominent water resources engineering firm in Anchorage, Alaska.

Ask him about Christine, or Nigel, or Kennedy or Kyle ...

These, John says, are the highlights of his career.

“I have the best job in the world. Yes, there are a lot of responsibilities and challenges, but in education, we get to serve students

*continued on page 22*

“Be determined. It’s too easy to give up. But if a task is worth doing, then it’s worth the time and effort to do it right.”





## Dr. Nicklow, Too

Born in Fayetteville, New York, a suburb of Syracuse, Stacy Nicklow grew up an avid reader, a self-proclaimed math geek and a dedicated volleyball player, passions that led her to Bucknell University, where she played NCAA Division I volleyball and completed a five-year, dual-degree program in mechanical engineering and English—not exactly a classic combination, she admits.

“I know mechanical engineering and English do not sound remarkably similar at all—I mean, in any way. But they really are,” Stacy says. “There is a creative process in engineering that is not just formulas galore. We have certain principles that structure engineering, but we also have all these tools that we apply to find a solution and really make a project ours. English is similar: different tools, different projects, different problems, but really, developing our own unique take. And the similarity of those two things became really clear to me when I was being creative in both ways.”

After graduating from Bucknell, where she and John met as sophomores and have been inseparable since, Stacy worked for several years as an energy conservation engineer, her favorite part of which, she eventually realized, was writing engineering reports. This motivated her to pursue her graduate studies in English at Southern Illinois University (SIU), where John began his higher education career.

She worked as a graduate teaching assistant while earning her master’s and Ph.D. in American literature at SIU, an experience that sparked another passion: teaching.

“There’s something really special about seeing that transformative moment in a student’s life, where they’re reading something from someone they’ve never heard of before,” Stacy says.

“While yes, students are going to complain about how long the papers are and ‘Why do I care how to spell something?’ It’s really about the exposure and the transformative power of education.”

Stacy spent nearly 20 years in the classroom, beginning as a teaching assistant then as an adjunct professor and assistant director of the Writing Center at SIU, and ultimately as a tenured faculty member in English at Shawnee Community College in Illinois.

“I think there’s no more vibrant place to be than a college campus,” she says. “The energy and excitement of students and faculty is just palpable from the sidewalk to the academic buildings to the sports fields. It’s just truly inspiring to me to be a part of it.”

While she no longer works as faculty, she continues to be a major presence on campus as first spouse, a unique, exciting and fulfilling role she fills with enthusiasm and pride.

“I tell people, ‘I have the best part of John’s job,’” she says. “I get to meet fascinating people. I have interesting conversations. I get to meet people I would never have met without being in this role—and I don’t have to solve the hard problems. So, I’m lucky.”



▲ In President Nicklow's first weeks on campus, he presided over his first commencement ceremony and embarked on a listening tour to familiarize himself with Florida Tech, its campus and its community. His primary objective in the coming months, he says, will be to raise the university's visibility and impact.



*continued from page 20*

and make an impact in a really positive way," he says. "We get to make such a difference in people's lives, whether it's through innovative research or graduating students and putting them on the path toward meaningful careers."

This sentiment fuels his ambition and his open-door, student-centric approach to leadership.

---

"Has anybody talked to the students?"

It's the first question John asks—and trains his teams to ask—when broaching a new topic, project or opportunity.

"It doesn't really matter the issue—big or small. I think our students deserve our attention. I think they deserve our support," John says. "They are our primary constituency, and we need to think about our students first in everything we do."

It might be the first question John asks, but as he familiarizes himself with Florida Tech, its campus and its community and settles into his new role as president, it certainly will not be the last.

In fact, from the moment he learned he'd been nominated (twice) for the presidency, the big questions—or rather, the prospect of pursuing their answers—are what excited him most.

"I've known Florida Tech for many, many years. I've said it before, and I'll say it again—it's not broken," John says. "The question is, do we stay at this level? Do we continue to do what we've been doing? Or do we do it better? Can we imagine something even bigger that can make our impact even greater? Are enough people aware of that

impact—of Florida Tech, who we are and what we're doing across the globe? Once we answer those questions and establish that vision, we'll put together a plan, utilizing each individual's strengths, to get there together."

One question John has always wondered himself: Why aren't more people flocking to Florida Tech?

His primary objective in the coming months, he says, will be to raise the university's visibility and impact so that they are. To John, that means piecing together the ideal college experience:

Supporting faculty as they engage in unique research experiences and explore innovative teaching methods.

Utilizing the ample data at our fingertips to make informed, strategic decisions.

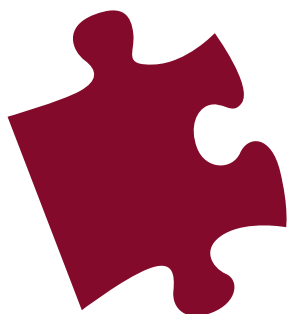
Establishing fruitful partnerships with the local businesses and industries that fortify the Space Coast.

Investing in student success.

And, perhaps most important, ensuring that all members of the campus community feel included and engaged.

Because, John says, the university can strive to provide all the parts that might comprise each individual's perfect university experience. But whether you're a student, faculty, staff—or even president—like a puzzle, every piece has its place.

"Sometimes, even when you're not looking, an opportunity just creeps up behind you and says, 'This is the one of a lifetime,'" John says. "Florida Tech might not be for everybody, but for me, it's a perfect fit."



"Don't ever confuse motion with action." "Each day, we all have an impact on each other's lives, and it's far bigger than any





## Best Together

If John Nicklow is a puzzle, then Stacy Nicklow is about half its comprising pieces—the better half, John says.

“We often say, ‘You’re my best,’ and just leave it at that,” John says. “Stacy’s my best friend, my best confidant; she’s the best everything in my world, and she brings out my best. She’s loving, compassionate, supportive. She makes me a better person.”

Also a “Dr. Nicklow,” Bucknell-educated engineer, former collegiate student-athlete, educator, Northeastern U.S. native, outdoor enthusiast, “puzzler” (crossword, not jigsaw) and Pittsburgh Steelers fan, Stacy admits that she and John are not the “opposites attract” kind of couple.

The subtle differences they do possess, however, complement each other to form a stronger-than-its-parts whole. John’s background is in civil engineering—think strong, still, sturdy—whereas Stacy found her niche in mechanical engineering—read movement, progress. John is a “loveable geek” who brings out Stacy’s social side, she says, while John credits Stacy for the marked improvement in his grades when they met in college—and not just because she graded his papers (a fact John learned when they met at a party and used to his advantage, courting Stacy with sweet notes in the corners of his papers).

They dated for four years before John proposed in a post-ballet (“The Nutcracker,”

Stacy’s favorite) horse-drawn carriage ride through Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia.

They’ve been together ever since.

Together, they’ve raised their son, Ethan, an extremely bright, kind and talented soon-to-be third “Dr. Nicklow” pursuing his Ph.D. in biomedical engineering at the University of Virginia, and “the greatest human being on the planet,” the Nicklows agree.

Together, they’ve earned seven degrees between them.

Together, they’ve transitioned from students to professionals, industry to academia.

Together, they’ve navigated, nurtured and guided two prior universities to new heights.

Together, they walk, hike, kayak, cook (check out their recipes for Nicklow Chili and Dr. Stacy’s Macaroni and Cheese on page 27) and, more important, John says, eat.

And together, they embark on their newest and, perhaps, most exciting endeavor: Florida Tech.

“I love what I do. But even more than that, I love what we do together,” John says.

The Nicklows extend this intrinsic partnership to campus and beyond, embracing their roles as “Mom and Dad of campus,” as well as dedicated community partners and influential university representatives.

“Everything we do is just 100% partnership,” Stacy says. “Everything is just ‘John and Stacy.’”

“

**I love what I do. But even more than that, I love what we do together.”**

—John Nicklow

one of us.” | “Pay attention. Because when you least expect it, somebody will tap you on the shoulder with a new opportunity.”