

Professor recognized for field work in Belize

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Contributing Writer

Arlen Chase, interim chair of the department of anthropology, was honored with the Pegasus Professor Award last month.

The award is the highest honor for UCF faculty.

"I'm very pleased that I got this award," Chase said. "It's one of the few ways that a professor can get recognized with a title at UCF, and that means a lot to me."

While Chase is a professor and interim chair, his main focus is the Caracol Archeological Project, a Mayan site in Belize, Central America, where he has worked at every year since 1985. The site has 36,000 structures and is the location of the tallest man-made pyramid in Belize.

At least 25 people go to Caracol each spring, including undergraduate and graduate students. Chase believes it's important to include undergraduate students because their opinions aren't as well formed as graduate students, and therefore, "they get a lot more out of it."

Students are chosen based on their interest in the project and are required to spend a semester working in a laboratory to teach them that archeology isn't just about digging in the dirt.

While the trip is very demanding, spending several hours each day and night either in the field or in the laboratory, Chase makes sure there is some time to relax and shows movies on a sheet in the kitchen every Wednesday and Saturday night.

Students are also allowed to explore the surrounding area and countries, but only after being in Caracol for the first six weeks.

While he has made many discoveries since his first trip to Caracol, Chase said the one that means the most is his discovery of Caracol Altar 21. The piece, which he discovered in 1986, is in hieroglyphics and recounts the defeat of Tikal, Guatemala, Chase said.

Chase funds his work mainly with grants from the National Science Foundation, but he is also known for receiving the first archeological grant for the study of warfare from the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation.

Jose Fernandez, dean of the College of Arts and Humanities at UCF and a former Pegasus Professor, said he believes that Chase fully deserves the Pegasus Professor Award.

"As a teacher, I believe that Arlen is a great mentor," he said. "In terms of being a researcher, he is a renowned



COURTESY CARACOL ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT

scholar in the area of Maya archeology."

Chase's wife, Diane, a former Pegasus Professor, is also part of the Caracol Archeological Project and works side-by-side with him at UCF.

Chase said he contributes his successes to his wife and to the fact that they are able to work together every day. He believes the best relationship he could possibly have is the one he has with his wife.

"We tend to be critical of each other ... make sure we're doing stuff up to snuff," he said.

Chase also said that he doesn't think he would be as successful if it wasn't for his wife.

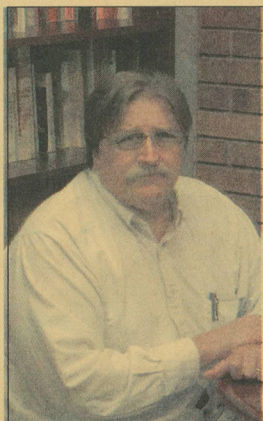
"If I'm not doing something she thinks is right, she'll tell me and tell me what I should be doing, and I'll do that," he said.

Chase and his wife are also responsible for developing a Mayan archeological studies program at UCF, which includes an interdisciplinary program looking at the Mayan culture holistically.

Chase's wife isn't the only family member who travels to Belize with him. Chase and his wife have been bringing their three children with them to the site since the children were two months old. Each year, Chase un-enrolls and re-enrolls his children in school so that they can make the trip, tutoring them while at Caracol. He sees the trips as a very positive thing and wishes more students had the same opportunity to travel.

Chase said that he has always wanted to pursue a career in archeology, particularly Mayan archeology, which he said he "fell in love with" while on a three-week archeological trip to Guatemala in high school.

"To me, it's like a gigantic game. You're given certain pieces, and then you make interpretations, and then you justify why you've made those interpretations based on what you know from all of the other pieces of anthropology," which is the discipline arche-



ANDY JACOBSON / CENTRAL FLORIDA FUTURE

Top: Arlen Chase during an excavation into a building during 2007's field season in Belize. Above: Chase received the Pegasus Professor Award this year.

ology is in, Chase said.

Chase also said that archeology is a complete commitment and that it is "all or nothing," a philosophy Ida Cook, an associate professor of sociology at UCF, believes Chase shows in his class and with his students.

"I think he is an exemplar of what a scholar academic can be," she said. "It's amazing the kinds of things he's written, the information that he knows."

Cook said that while he is "very stringent and exacting among his students," he also has a great sense of humor and loves to joke with his students and colleagues.

Teaching and research aren't the only things Chase is involved in. A former president of the UCF Faculty Senate, Chase currently serves on the Florida Board of Governors, a position he said is "strange" for a faculty member but serves an important purpose.

"What I'd like to do is move us toward a Ph.D. program, and that is one of the reasons I got involved in the Board of Governors," Chase said.

In the future, Chase would also like to start a three-week trip to Caracol in the summer for students who cannot go away during the semester.