



A SALKEHATCHIE *Start*

A large part of what makes this campus “Singularly Salkehatchie” is the unique quality of the Salkehatchie family, particularly our students. The two former students profiled here represent the best this campus has to offer, and they credit this campus with helping them to achieve their goals.

Jill Chappell-Fail: A Second Chance Can Lead to Success

Earning her first college degree didn't come easily to Jill Chappell-Fail, but perseverance and a leg up from USC Salkehatchie helped make it happen. Now, with a master's degree and a university career, she's gone further than she had ever imagined.

“I guess you could say it took me awhile to finish, and it wasn't the smoothest journey, but I got there,” says Fail, laughing. “I started off beautifully at Salkehatchie, but I came to Columbia and crashed miserably the first time.”

Chappell-Fail is referring to her initial transfer to the University of South Carolina's Columbia campus in the early 1980s, where she was placed on academic suspension after her first year.

“At Salk, everything was hands-on,” she said, talking about her disappointment when she first entered the journalism program. “Here, the classes were so large the professors didn't know you and whether you were coming to class or not. It's not that they didn't care, it just wasn't possible for them to have the same level of involvement.”

She says she realizes now that she wasn't taking college seriously enough, but at the time she was more interested in the

social aspect of college life than her classes. While suspended, she spent some time in paralegal school, then began working for newspapers in the Allendale and Hampton area as a writer and photographer. She grew up in Allendale, working on her family's peach farm, and was glad to be close to home, but she said she was starting to realize how hard “real life” could be.

“You don't really recognize the value of a degree until you are out there in the working world,” she says.

After urging from her father, Chappell-Fail returned to USC Salkehatchie in 1983 to try her hand at college again. This time, she was more focused on her goals and earned a bachelor's degree without difficulty. She designed her own specialty area with the BAIS, one filled with journalism and photography classes, leaning toward what is now media arts. She was involved with student government during both her times at USC Salkehatchie and served as SGA president when she returned to the campus.

After completing her BAIS at USC Salkehatchie in 1986, Chappell-Fail went on to work as a graphic artist and reporter at other publications and for a public relations firm before moving to USC in 1991. She earned her master's in library and information science from USC in 1999 and now works at USC Columbia as an information resources consultant at the College of Mass Communications and Information Studies. She also serves as an adjunct instructor for the School of Library and Information Science and the University 101 program.

She might have come a long way from her days of academic suspension, but Chappell-Fail has never forgotten USC Salkehatchie, where she got her start. She says it was a wonderful place to meet people from nearby counties that she might have never met otherwise, friends she still has to this day. She recalls an SGA event when she was supposed to bring a pig for a barbecue. She says when she went to get the pig, they asked her whether she wanted it “dressed,” and not knowing that meant



Jill Chappell-Fail, a former Salkehatchie student, has found success working for the University on the Columbia campus.

they would clean the pig and prep it for cooking, she said no, that they would do it.

“So we ended up with this dead pig that hadn’t been dressed, with everything, all the innards, still in it, and we panicked,” she says, laughing.

Another student whose father farmed called one of the farm workers to come help them, and he cleaned the pig in time for them to get it cooking.

“That taught me right there not to assume you know what you’re talking about, and not be afraid to ask questions,” she says. “I should have just asked and saved us all a lot of trouble. But people still remember that. We had good times there at Salk.”

These days, Chappell-Fail stays busy traveling and raising her four-year-old step-grandson with help from her husband, Raymond. He plays in a band, and they used to spend a lot of time on the road, time she says she now devotes to the little one. She participated in an alumni panel at USC Salkehatchie in the spring and enjoyed returning to the campus to share her experiences with current students. That opportunity to share is one reason she loves teaching the University 101 course, which helps new students acclimate to college life and makes sure they know what resources are available if they need help.

“I don’t care what degree you earn, the fact that you do it at all says a lot about you,” she says. “A degree opens doors, and you need it to move ahead in life. And there are so many areas of support these days, it’s amazing. To me, there’s no excuse for anybody failing out of college anymore with all of that help. But that’s what we do—make sure they know the help is there. If I can keep one student from going through what I did, of just giving up on school without trying to be proactive and seeing if you can get help, then I will have done something great.”

Daniel Bessinger: Salkehatchie Alum Stays Close to Home

For many local residents, graduating from high school is a chance to “escape”—it means leaving home, moving to a big city, and experiencing all the things they felt they missed while living in a rural community. But not for Daniel Bessinger.

Leaving home was something he did because he had to, because it meant he could fulfill his ultimate goal: returning home to Ehrhardt, finding a good job, and settling back into his hometown.

USC Salkehatchie was a major part of making that happen. After he graduated from Andrew Jackson Academy in 1999, he began attending USC Salkehatchie as a springboard to the Columbia campus.

“I grew up in Ehrhardt,” he says. “My dad owns two small businesses, my mom is a school teacher, and I have absolutely, positively no desire to ever live anywhere but here. I wasn’t prepared to go straight to Columbia, coming from such a small town and high school, and Salkehatchie made sense.”

Being able to commute to campus and save money on tuition and living expenses for the first two years was the reason Salkehatchie was always Bessinger’s first choice.

“The classes were smaller, and you really got to know your professors,” he says. “The experience and education I gained at Salk definitely prepared me for Columbia and for life. Looking back on it, it was the perfect decision for me.”

Since his time on the campus, Bessinger’s life has been an almost perfect example of how education can propel a person forward. He earned his associate’s in science in May 2001 from Salkehatchie, then his BA in business administration/finance from USC Columbia in 2003 and his master’s in human resources from the University’s Moore School of Business in 2004.

During his time in Columbia, he served as an intern in S.C. Sen. Glenn McConnell’s office and completed a

three-month human resources internship at a company in Michigan.

His interest in business and finance was kindled during classes at Salkehatchie and grew when he took more classes in Columbia. The graduate degree became a necessity when he began to consider the lifestyle he wanted and the fact that he wanted to live in Ehrhardt. Now, it’s all paying off.

Bessinger was offered and accepted a job right out of college working as a compensation analyst for a national company with offices in Columbia, but he dreamed of living and working near home. That dream came true when he was hired in August 2007 as the human resources manager of Clariant Corporation’s Martin site, four years before his 30th birthday.

“It can be a challenge to recruit talented professionals to work in rural locations such



Daniel Bessinger always knew he wanted to settle down in his hometown, and he worked hard to make that happen.

as Martin,” says plant manager Eric Riden. “Daniel’s knowledge and experience in the local community have made him an even more valuable addition to our management team.”

Daniel and his wife, Jodie, own a home in Ehrhardt. He commutes to work at Clariant, and she commutes to her job as a physical therapist at Colleton Medical Center. When he recently spoke to college students at USC Salkehatchie and high-school students at Andrew Jackson, he offered this advice:

“Set goals and work toward those goals, but be realistic about those goals and know what to expect out of the major and career you choose,” he said, “I wanted to live in Ehrhardt and work in the area, and I knew that limited my opportunities. I had to take steps to widen those opportunities as much as I could, so I did what I needed to do to make that happen.”