St. Baldrick’s Fundraiser aims to fight cancer / pg. 2

UI Health offers patients a lift

East Meets West highlights collaborations

Chemists receive NSF CAREER Awards

February 22, 2017

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For the community of the University of Illinois at Chicago

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CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL RAISES $15K FOR PEDIATRIC CANCER RESEARCH

By Jackie Carey — jmcarey@uic.edu

UIC staff, students, patients and volunteers shaved their heads Feb. 16 to raise funds for the St. Baldrick’s Foundation, a nonprofit organization that supports pediatric cancer research. The annual fundraiser, hosted by the Children’s Hospital University of Illinois, raised more than $15,000 this year.

Mary Lou Schmidt, associate professor in the UIC College of Medicine and pediatric oncologist at UI Health, said that the money raised will fund research projects across the nation, including significant grants returned to UIC.

“Over the last decade, our pediatric oncology group, which also includes Rush and Stroger hospitals, has enrolled more than 600 patients into clinical trials and have benefited from more than $1.5 million in grant funding,” Schmidt said.

“In many ways, childhood cancer can be much more complex than adult cancer,” said Schmidt, who notes that kids tend to have later-stage cancers and that treatment is complicated by the fact that children are still growing and developing.

Officer Terry Williams was among four UIC police officers who volunteered to go bald.

“I saw the event last year and I knew I wanted to do something more this year,” Williams said. “Our police department set up our own group, and even those who didn’t shave their head got involved by donating.”

In addition to the money raised online, UIC Police surprised event organizers with an impromptu cash donation collected during their morning roll call.

Hilda Diaz, a UIC student and cancer survivor, shaved pediatric nurse Jocelyn Mallard’s head. When Diaz was a patient at UI Health, Mallard was her nurse.

“I’ve been growing my locks for 12 years,” said Mallard, a top fundraiser. “I see cancer patients every day and it was time that I did something to give back and to encourage other people.”

Lindsay Cousins, child life specialist at UI Health and event organizer, said that many of the volunteers are regular participants — like James Kelly, another top fundraiser from the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research — who volunteer to shave their heads every year in honor of a loved one.
Dashboards display real-time energy use on campus

By Francisca Corona — fcoron3@uic.edu

Anyone connected to campus internet can monitor how much energy they’re consuming or conserving with the UIC Energy Dashboard.

The dashboard, an improvement of a project launched in 2015, displays campus-wide or building-specific data recorded by smart meters, which electronically report energy use in real time. The tool lets users track UIC’s carbon dioxide emissions along with electrical, cooling, heating and natural gas demands.

“It’s not just a single page — it’s like an interactive application,” Dath said.

After logging on, visitors are greeted with a landing page that provides energy-use totals for UIC’s east and west sides. From there, users can select up to 13 buildings to monitor energy use.

Campus leaders hope the dashboard will inspire students, faculty and staff to help UIC achieve its climate commitments.

“One of the ways that we can encourage awareness around energy use and environmental impacts is for people to visualize what they’re actually using,” says Cynthia Klein-Banai, associate chancellor for sustainability.

In the pilot phase, rides will be offered to patients discharged from the medical surgical and critical care units who live in Chicago.

“The University of Illinois Hospital & Health Sciences System has partnered with a local startup company to offer patients a ride home after they have been discharged. The pilot program is projected to provide about 300 rides this month and next through Kaizen Health, a company that coordinates non-emergency medical transportation. The rides will be paid for by the hospital.

“UI Health is continually looking for ways to improve the health and wellness of our patients, including by examining the impact of the social determinants of health,” said Jerry Krishnan, associate vice chancellor for population health at UI Health. “Last year, we identified transportation to and from of our health systems to be a significant barrier for the patients we serve. We designed the Pilot PROGRAM for Non-emergency TransportORtation, or PRONTO, to provide an option for patients who are going home after being treated in the hospital.”

Because the exact time of discharge is often unknown, it can be hard for patients to arrange transportation in advance, said Avijit Ghosh, CEO of UI Health. “So often they are left waiting in their rooms for their ride after they are given the OK to go home,” he said.

“The University of Illinois Hospital & Health Sciences System has launched a pilot program to provide free rides home for patients in February and March.

“Last year, UI Health launched a program to come out of UI Health’s community needs-assessment survey, completed last year. The survey focused on identifying the unique social determinants of health that affect people in the communities UI Health serves.”

“We believe it is our responsibility to do whatever we can, even in lean times, to help improve the health of our patients,” said Dr. Robert Barish, vice chancellor for health affairs at the University of Illinois at Chicago. “The community needs-assessment helps us identify non-medical barriers to health, so we can develop targeted initiatives and programs to reduce those barriers and help the communities we serve.”

In addition to transportation, the survey also identified housing as a barrier to care, Barish said.

“Transportation is a big barrier for many of our patients,” Ghosh said. “By providing rides, we keep our patients healthier and can care for more people.”

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Panel to examine media’s role in race, politics

By Brian Flood — bflood@uic.edu

UIC’s African American studies department will present “The Press, Race, and Contemporary Politics,” a panel discussion addressing the role of news media in debates about race and politics Feb. 28.

From urban uprisings and the formation of black activist movements to the tumultuous 2016 presidential campaign, a panel of journalists and media scholars will look at examples of racial discourse in the news, particularly regarding African Americans as agents and actors.

The discussion takes place from 4:30 to 6 p.m. in the Residents’ Dining Hall, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum.

Among the questions to be addressed: What are some of the high and low points in news coverage about African Americans? How does the press frame or represent African American protest? How was race positioned as a factor in the presidential campaign? How did African American-owned media respond to and shape political debates?

Featured panelists include Kathy Chaney, Jane Rhodes, Andrew Rojecki and Charles Whitaker.

Promotion, Tenure Seminars

The Office of Faculty Affairs will offer free promotion and tenure training this spring.

The seminars, which are open to faculty from across campus, cover valuable topics that assist in successful promotion or tenure.

The next session takes place Feb. 28 and focuses on topics of interest to junior tenure-track faculty.

For more information, visit bit.ly/2ISFd1w

Celebrating Faculty Research

Celebrate and learn more about UIC faculty’s research on race, ethnicity and public policy at the second annual Faculty Achievement & Book Celebration.

The event, presented by the Institute for Research on Race & Public Policy, begins at 4 p.m. March 1.

RSVP to attend the celebration, which is held on the 28th floor of University Hall, by emailing irrpp@uic.edu

Research Webinars

The Survey Research Laboratory is offering three webinars on survey research methodology in March.

Topics include political polling, ethics and survey sample weighing. All webinars begin at noon.

For more information, visit srl.uic.edu

Student Legal Services

UIC’s Student Legal Services is a full-service law office dedicated to providing legal solutions for currently enrolled students.

The office provides advice and representation on a wide variety of legal matters, including landlord-tenant matters, family law, traffic issues, orders of protection and more.

To make an appointment, call 312-996-9214.

Project Management

UIC Extended Campus will host continuing and professional education courses in project management this spring.

Participants will learn from UIC experts, improve their project management skills and prepare for Project Management Institute exams in five course sessions that take place from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturdays, April 1 through May 6.

For more information and to register, visit go.uic.edu/projectmanagement

UIC Impact Day

Students can showcase their scholarly pursuits by presenting their experiences April 3.

UIC Impact Day is dedicated to giving students the floor to exhibit posters or conduct creative presentations about their internships, leadership and career development.

The event, cosponsored with the Student Research Forum, will take place at the UIC Forum.

For more information, visit uicimpact.uic.edu

Send campus news information to Christy Levy at christyb@uic.edu
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AND SEE THE DIFFERENCE
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Can cellphone use predict manic episodes in bipolar disorder?

By Sharon Parmet — sparmet@uic.edu

A cellphone app that measures typing speed and spell-check overrides may be able to predict manic and depressive moods in people diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

A team led by two UIC researchers has been chosen as one of two finalists in a contest to use Apple’s ResearchKit, an open-source platform for creating apps, to develop a means to study mood disorders. As finalists, they will receive $100,000 to develop their app using Apple’s beta-testing platform, Test Flight. The eventual winner of the Mood Challenge, to be announced in May, will receive a final award of $200,000 to launch their app publicly.

Alex Leow, associate professor of psychiatry and bioengineering in the College of Medicine, and Peter Nelson, professor of computer science and dean of the College of Engineering, led a team that developed an app called BiAffect that unobtrusively monitors mobile device usage — including keyboard dynamics such as typing speed.

Earlier this year, Leow and her colleagues completed a pilot study of 30 participants that showed typing speed, frequency of texting, and use of social media correlated to depressive and manic episodes in people with bipolar disorder.

“During a manic episode, people with bipolar disorder exhibit some common behaviors, such as talking really, really fast,” Leow said. “It is thus natural that they also type on their phones very fast and tend to not check what they are typing.”

Spell-check usage may be a strong indicator of a manic episode, she said.

“Spell-checking requires the writer to pause and determine whether or not to ignore the suggested correction, or keep typing. People in the midst of a manic episode have reduced impulse control, and they tend to blow through the spell-check alerts.”

Episodes of depression can also be identified by tracking cellphone usage, Leow said. During depressive episodes, typing a long message may become laborious, and messages tend to be shorter.

Bipolar disorder, which causes extreme mood swings between the emotional highs of manic episodes and low periods of depression, affects approximately 5.7 million adult Americans, or about 2.6 percent of those over 18, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. Diagnosis relies on careful history-taking and examination.

“Cellphones are virtually ubiquitous,” Nelson said. “People are increasingly interacting through typed messages as opposed to old-fashioned phone calls and face-to-face conversations. BiAffect lets us examine these ubiquitous virtual-mental-health footprints or signatures of people suffering from mood disorders.”

Leow thinks that apps like BiAffect may prove useful in other fields of medicine. For example, researchers may be able to determine the efficacy of drugs in improving cognition using similarly unobtrusive technology.

“It’s easy to see how we can also use these kinds of apps to track symptoms associated with neurological diseases like Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s disease,” she said.

Mladen Rasic, Faraz Hussain, Dr. Neil Smalheiser, Andrea Fiscitello, Dr. Olusola Ajilore, Dr. Scott Langenecker, Philip Yu, Dr. John Zulueta and Bokai Cao of UIC, and Melvin McInnis and Kelly Ryan of the University of Michigan are also members of the BiAffect team.
First use of graphene to detect cancer cells

By Bill Burton — burton@uic.edu

What can’t graphene do? You can scratch “detect cancer” off of that list. By interfacing brain cells onto graphene, UIC researchers have shown they can differentiate a single hyperactive cancerous cell from a normal cell, pointing the way to developing a simple, noninvasive tool for early cancer diagnosis.

“This graphene system is able to detect the level of activity of an interfaced cell,” said Vikas Berry, associate professor and head of chemical engineering, who led the research along with Ankit Mehta, assistant professor of clinical neurosurgery in the UIC College of Medicine.

“Graphene is the thinnest known material and is very sensitive to whatever happens on its surface,” Berry said. The nanomaterial is composed of a single layer of carbon atoms linked in a hexagonal chicken-wire pattern, and all the atoms share a cloud of electrons moving freely about the surface.

“The cell’s interface with graphene rearranges the charge distribution in graphene, which modifies the energy of atomic vibration as detected by Raman spectroscopy,” Berry said, referring to a powerful workhorse technique that is routinely used to study graphene.

The atomic vibration energy in graphene’s crystal lattice differs depending on whether it’s in contact with a cancer cell or a normal cell, Berry said, because the cancer cell’s hyperactivity leads to a higher negative charge on its surface and the release of more protons.

“The electric field around the cell pushes away electrons in graphene’s electron cloud,” he said, which changes the vibration energy of the carbon atoms. The change in vibration energy can be pinpointed by Raman mapping with a resolution of 300 nanometers, he said, allowing characterization of the activity of a single cell.

The study, reported in the journal ACS Applied Materials & Interfaces, looked at cultured human brain cells, comparing normal astrocytes to their cancerous counterpart, the highly malignant brain tumor glioblastoma multiforme.

The technique is being studied in a mouse model of cancer, with results that are “very promising,” Berry said. Experiments with patient biopsies would be further down the road.

“Once a patient has brain tumor surgery, we could use this technique to see if the tumor relapses,” Berry said. “For this, we would need a cell sample we could interface with graphene and look to see if cancer cells are still present.”

The same technique may also work to differentiate between other types of cells or the activity of cells.

“We may be able to use it with bacteria to quickly see if the strain is Gram-positive or Gram-negative,” Berry said. “We may be able to use it to detect sickle cells.”

Last year, Berry and other coworkers introduced nanoscale ripples in graphene, causing it to conduct differently in perpendicular directions, useful for electronics. They wrinkled the graphene by draping it over a string of rod-shaped bacteria, then vacuum-shrinking the germs.

“We took the earlier work and sort of flipped it over,” Berry said. “Instead of laying graphene on cells, we laid cells on graphene and studied graphene’s atomic vibrations.”

Co-authors on the study are Bijenimala Keisham and Phong Nguyen of UIC chemical engineering and Arron Cole of UIC neurosurgery.

Funding was provided by UIC.
**EMBODIMENT ABSTRACTED:**

**THE INFLUENCE OF YVONNE RAINER**

Gallery 400 exhibit gathers together recent works by artists who take up Yvonne Rainer’s experimental approach to the body as a material in the 1960s and explore its political implications with fresh eyes.

- Tues.–Fri.: 10 a.m.–6 p.m.
- Sat.: Noon–6 p.m. and by appointment

**UIC Theatre production, directed by Derrick Sanders, features a main cast of women taking over the testosterone-fueled story.**

**Feb. 17–18, 22–25: 7:30 p.m.**
**Feb. 19, 26: 2 p.m.**

**Tickets:**
- $12 for students and seniors
- $5 for high school students
- $17 for general public

[theatreandmusic.uic.edu](http://theatreandmusic.uic.edu)

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**AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER PRESENTS BINGE FEST**

Watch and discuss episodes from the web series “The Movement,” about everyday heroes who fight to reclaim and recover marginalized communities. Lunch provided.

- Noon–1:30 p.m.
- African American Cultural Center Gallery, 207 Addams Hall

[aacc.uic.edu](http://aacc.uic.edu)

**The Entrepreneurial Engineer**

Tech talk presented by Brandon Hamilton, president of Hamilton’s Solutions and 1979 UIC graduate. Talk includes panel discussion. Light refreshments served.

- 5–6:30 p.m.
- 1000 Science and Engineering Offices

**SHOW STOPPERS: BLACK HISTORY MONTH SHOWCASE**

Part of 2017 Black History Month events. Multimedia performance and art exhibition featuring the artistic contributions of the UIC community including song, dance, visual art and poetry.

- 6–9 p.m.
- Illinois Room

**BLACK STUDENT UNION HERITAGE BALL**

Part of 2017 Black History Month events. Free for students with valid i-card.

- 7–10 p.m.
- Illinois Room


**“RAISING BERTIE”**

Screening of documentary directed by College of Architecture, Design and the Arts alumna Margaret Byrne (BFA ’01). Set in Bertie County, a poor, rural African American-led community in North Carolina, the film follows three youths who return to high school after their alternative school closes due to budget cuts. Byrne will answer questions after the screening.

- 6 p.m. / School of Public Health

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**Send information about campus events to Christy Levy at christyb@uic.edu**
Before joining UIC, Joshua Katz enlisted in the U.S. Army in 2007, where he served until 2010. “I wanted to serve our country and pave the way for a bright tomorrow,” said Katz, a senior in electrical engineering.

He was stationed at Fort Drum in New York, and he was a power generator equipment repair technician. During his service, Katz achieved the rank of Specialist (E-4) and was deployed to Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2008. He was awarded the Army Commendation Medal twice, an Army Achievement Medal, a Good Conduct Medal, Global War on Terrorism Medal, National Defense Service Medal and Iraq Campaign Medal.

Katz decided to continue his education at UIC in 2014. Katz was treasurer of the Student Veterans Association and is an active member of the organization.

“I love Chicago and wanted to come back here during my studies,” he said. Once he finishes school in May, he plans to put his degree and experience in the Army to good use.

“I want to work with programmable logic controls,” he said.

Since joining Alpha Phi Alpha in April 2016, I have experienced a noticeable difference in my experience here at UIC and in my personal life.

Aside from the social boost that comes with Greek Life, joining a fraternity introduced me to a network of like-minded individuals who want to excel in their respective fields as much as I do.

This sense of community is a facet of college life that is extremely integral in not only my success, but the success of all students, especially racial and ethnic minorities.

Seeing others making a difference on campus and in the surrounding communities has given me the inspiration to step up and be the change I wanted to see.

The most important benefit I’ve experienced in Greek Life is the undying support of my brothers, D9 orgs, and all of Fraternity & Sorority Life on campus.

In my eight-month stint as chapter president of Alpha Phi Alpha and co-president of National Pan-Hellenic Council, I am grateful to have had a number of accomplishments and successes.

To kick-off the semester in January, I had the chance to organize and act as a site leader for UIC’s MLK Day of Service at Lincoln Park Community Shelter. We prepared and served pizza to more than 25 homeless residents and made birthday cards for residents.

The event was a huge success with more than 40 student volunteers supporting Dr. King’s mission.

I hope to continue this type of work through my new internship at GG+A — a company that provides non-profit and philanthropy consulting — where I’ll be working closely with the Obama Foundation to build a presidential library on Chicago’s South Side.

Dedication to manly deeds, scholarship and love for all mankind — the aims of Alpha Phi Alpha — led me to win both Outstanding College Brother of the Year and Outstanding Neophyte of the Year at Alpha Phi Alpha’s 2017 Illinois District Conference. While this award is specific to my fraternity, it signifies the opportunities for excellence that come from being a part of a Greek organization.

Although I feel personally responsible for my work, I would like to credit a huge portion of my individual success over the past year to my involvement in Alpha Phi Alpha and NPHC.

All Greek organizations share a similar goal in uplifting humanity through service and brotherhood/sisterhood.

While individual success in Fraternity & Sorority Life is possible, it is even more rewarding to be a part of a group effort to uplift those around you.
Startups taking the plunge into international markets early may not face any bigger challenges than those firms that remain domestic or choose to expand later on, according to a new study.

“Some companies choose to internationalize at a very young age, even without many resources,” said Maija Renko, associate professor of entrepreneurship and the study’s lead author. “How and why do they do this?”

The study, “Liabilities, Advantages, and Buffers of Newness: How Young Age Makes Internationalization Possible,” shows that the resourcefulness, resilience and adaptability of entrepreneurs can create advantages that offset the risks of conducting business abroad early.

Factors thought to be disadvantageous for new companies — like limited knowledge base, high coordination costs of organizing, and difficulties finding customers — can actually turn into advantages in the process of early internationalization, according to the study.

Easier access to digital marketplaces, social media, and new international networks are other key influences encouraging entrepreneurs to expand to foreign target markets.

“Connectivity of people and businesses across national borders keeps on increasing, and with that, international opportunities are becoming ever more present for new companies, as well as old,” Renko said.

Much of the discussion about the global marketplace is driven by traditional manufacturing industries and established corporations, Renko said. But the nature of the economy is changing as a result of innovation in the marketplace. And innovation is often introduced by new ventures.

“So, we should be asking, ‘What can we do to help new companies innovate and internationalize?’” Renko said. “How can American startups take their innovations to the global marketplace?”

“The main thesis of the study is that being new and nimble does not need to hinder — and it can actually aid — in internationalization,” she said. “The mechanisms are, if anything, stronger today than five years ago.”

Renko and a team of researchers examined earlier studies on the internationalization of new firms. They then developed a conceptual model of how and why some new firms internationally from the start.

The researchers reviewed quantitative studies published between 2005-2013 in entrepreneurship and management journals listed on the Financial Times’ 45 list.

The UIC study draws attention to the less-covered, yet important topics of international new venture research, Renko said.

Co-authors include Rodney Shrader, professor of managerial studies at UIC; Sumit Kundu, professor of management and international business at Florida International University; Alan Carsrud, visiting research professor at Abo Akademi University; and Annaleena Parhankaangas, assistant professor of managerial studies at UIC.

The study, published in the journal Group & Organization Management, is online.

Maija Renko (Photo: Joshua Clark)
Justin Lorieau and Justin Mohr
UIC chemists receive NSF CAREER Awards

By Brian Flood — bflood@uic.edu

Two chemistry researchers have been named recipients of major early career awards totaling more than $1.6 million from the National Science Foundation.

The five-year grants support early career-development activities of “those teacher-scholars who most effectively integrate research and education within the context of the mission of their organization.”

Justin Lorieau, assistant professor of chemistry, will receive $220,000 annually via an NSF CAREER grant through the foundation’s Division of Molecular and Cellular Biosciences.

Lorieau will use his award to lead a project that investigates how the influenza virus infects cells at a molecular level and answer questions related to viral infections.

“On cellular entry, the hemagglutinin protein on the virus surface latches into the endosomal membrane of the host cell and promotes fusion with the viral membrane,” he explained. “We study the mechanism of the hemagglutinin fusion peptide domain to understand how this highly conserved sequence is needed for the fusion process.”

Understanding how the fusion peptide functions could lead to new universal treatments for all flu serotypes, and it informs our understanding of related diseases, including HIV, Ebola, MERS and SARS viruses, Lorieau said.

The educational components of the project include incorporating graduate students, undergraduates and research experiments in the classroom with molecular techniques in modern biophysics.

Mohr’s UIC-based research group specializes in synthetic organic chemistry with research focusing on reaction discovery, catalysis, and the synthesis of biologically active molecules.

The NSF award will support Mohr’s project to develop new catalysts useful for synthesizing complex molecules. He said the reactions will improve the overall efficiency of chemical synthesis and have potential applications in medicinal chemistry, agrochemicals, and materials science.

“Our goal is to learn how to control reactive molecules containing unpaired electrons,” Mohr said. "We use inexpensive catalysts to efficiently form these intermediates and then put them to use in the construction of new chemical bonds in a controlled fashion. This strategy allows us to synthesize molecules in fewer chemical operations and to generate a specific spatial arrangement of the atoms that is difficult to obtain using currently available methods.”

Mohr’s project also includes the development of new educational tools and activities to explain complex science topics to students from kindergarten through college.

One effort involves introducing the concept of catalysts to middle school students by using the copper and zinc found in a penny. He plans to pilot the program with middle school students at the Joseph Sears School in Kenilworth.

“Understanding the principles of catalysis helps prepare students for learning more complex concepts of chemical reactivity,” he said.

Justin Lorieau and Justin Mohr.
(Photo: Jenny Fontaine)
**Women’s gymnastics beats Rutgers**

*By Jenn Zoellick — jennz@uic.edu*

The women’s gymnastics team took down Big Ten opponent Rutgers, 194.275-194.200, Sunday at the UIC Pavilion. The Flames tied their season-high total on bars and set a new team-high on floor with their highest team total since the 2015 MIC Championships.

Sunday’s dual meet was the homecoming competition for women’s gymnastics, as the Flames honored alumni before the game.

Mikailla Northern matched her career-high all-around score with a 39.075 to take first place. Jenna Squillo competed all-around for the first time this season, earning a 38.750 to take third.

“It was very exciting to beat a Big Ten team,” co-head coach Peter Jansson said.

“It really shows us what the girls are capable of, and we even did that counting a fall on beam. So I feel really good about what we put together.”

The Flames earned their second-highest team total of the season on vault — 48.650 in the first rotation. Northern tied for first place, earning a 9.800. Nikki Woodruff earned her highest vault score of the season, 9.750, to tie for fourth. Squillo tied for sixth for the Flames with a 9.725, while Toni Alicke had a career-high 9.700 on the event.

**Daniella Maciel earned a career-high 9.725 alongside Northern to tie for fourth and pace the Flames on beam, followed by Squillo in seventh with a 9.675.**

Trailing 145.450-145.300 into the final rotation, UIC put together a season-best 48.975 on floor to edge past the Scarlet Knights.

Abby Hasanov took home the even title with a personal-best 9.850, followed by Alicke, Northern and Maciel in a tie for third with a 9.800.

“The girls really stepped it up on floor today when we needed it,” Jansson said.

“They were very clean and were able to get us the highest score of the season as a team. I think that goes to show what we can really do. This was a team effort, there’s no doubt about that, and that is what will keep our momentum going forward.”

The Flames host Western Michigan at 2 p.m. Sunday at the UIC Pavilion. The women’s team will play alongside the men’s gymnastics team, which faces Nebraska in the co-ed meet.

### Flames enjoy Sunday sweep in Big Easy

*By Dan Yopchick — yopchick@uic.edu*

UIC jumped into the win column in a big way Sunday with victories over Grambling State and Prairie View A&M during the final day of the 2017 MLB Urban Youth Invitational in New Orleans.

The Flames defeated Grambling State in the first game, 9-3, before closing the weekend with a 6-1 triumph over Prairie View A&M.

During the first two games of the invitational, the Flames fell Friday, 4-5, against Prairie View A&M and Saturday, 5-8, versus New Orleans.

Ricardo Ramirez homered in both games Sunday, while Thomas Norton drove in four runs and clubbed three doubles. On the mound, the Flames scattered only seven hits and gave up three earned runs to two SWAC schools.

In the day’s first game against Grambling State, freshman Jacob Key took the ball on the bump for the first time and delivered a quality start — six innings pitched with only two runs allowed — one of which was unearned. Key’s offense supported him well as four players drove in at least two runs, highlighted by Norton’s three RBI.

Sophomore Reid Birlingmair earned the start in game two and he delivered another quality outing. The Normal, Illinois native allowed but one run over his 6.2 innings pitched, fanning a career-high 10 batters in the process.

David Cronin was the only player to hit safely in all four games over the weekend. He batted .500 on the weekend (8-for-16) with two extra-base hits, two RBI and two stolen bases. The redshirt junior has an eight-game hitting streak dating back to the end of the 2016 season.

Rob Calabrese joined Cronin as the only Flames to reach base safely in every game at the MLB Urban Youth Invitational.

The UIC pitching staff posted a 3.41 ERA at the MLB Urban Youth Invitational, while holding the opposition to a batting average of .194. The Flames had 42 strike outs, while issuing only 12 walks for a ratio of 3.5.

UIC will travel to Nashville this weekend to take on No. 7 Vanderbilt in a three-game set.

**FLAMES @ HOME**

**Wednesday, February 22**

**Saturday, February 25**

Swimming and diving Horizon League Championships

All day / Flames Natatorium

**Sunday, February 26**

Men’s gymnastics vs. Nebraska

2 p.m. / UIC Pavilion

Women’s gymnastics vs. W. Michigan

2 p.m. / UIC Pavilion

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