



Don Foster



Photos, from left:

Don prepares for pasta plant fumigation.

Don with his green Gregory car, at the UF Entomology main building in Gainesville.

Don and wife Natalie celebrate their wedding day.

Don works with ultraviolet light-emitting diodes (UV LEDs), comparing the advantages and disadvantages with insect light traps currently available in the industry.

Setting up one of several fans for ProFume introduction.

Outside the Urban Entomology Lab in Gainesville.

DON FOSTER was born in Muscatine, Iowa, and moved to South Carolina in 1985 at the age of 10. His father, who is deceased, was from Muscatine, and his mother was from McColl, South Carolina. Now retired, she resides to this day in South Carolina.

Both Don's parents grew up in poverty, so their options in life were not great. Don's father served in the United States Army during the Vietnam War and was honorably discharged due to his two brothers being killed in action.

Don's Early Career

Don graduated from Spring Valley High School in Columbia, South Carolina, in 1992 and soon entered the workforce. Through a series of events, Don ended up working for the state of South Carolina as a juvenile correctional officer. At the time he had an interest in pursuing a career in law enforcement and this was a step in the general direction. "I worked for about six months assigned to the 16- and 17-year-old delinquents housed in the reception and evaluation center," Don says.

But soon Don realized that working third shift was not for him.

"One day, I was looking through the classified ads in the newspaper and saw a job opening for a termite technician."

The potential salary was twice the amount Don was making at the time. He applied for the job and was scheduled for a ride-along at All-America Termite and Pest Control, which did business as a Sears-authorized termite and pest control company.

"The day of my ride-along was enhanced with bad thunderstorms. We pulled up to the first stop and met with the customer," Don says.

The house did not have gutters. The technician slid through the crawl door and told Don to follow him. "I laid belly down, water rushing off the house onto my back, thinking to myself, 'Absolutely not!'"

Don was soaked when he came out from under the house, and he admits that the next statement he made was probably not the brightest: "So, the termites are *under* the house?"

The two had a good laugh about it, and Don followed his instructor under the rest of the houses that day.

About a week later, Don was called and offered the job. "Fast

forward more than two decades later, and I'm still in the pest control industry," Don says.

Q&A with Don

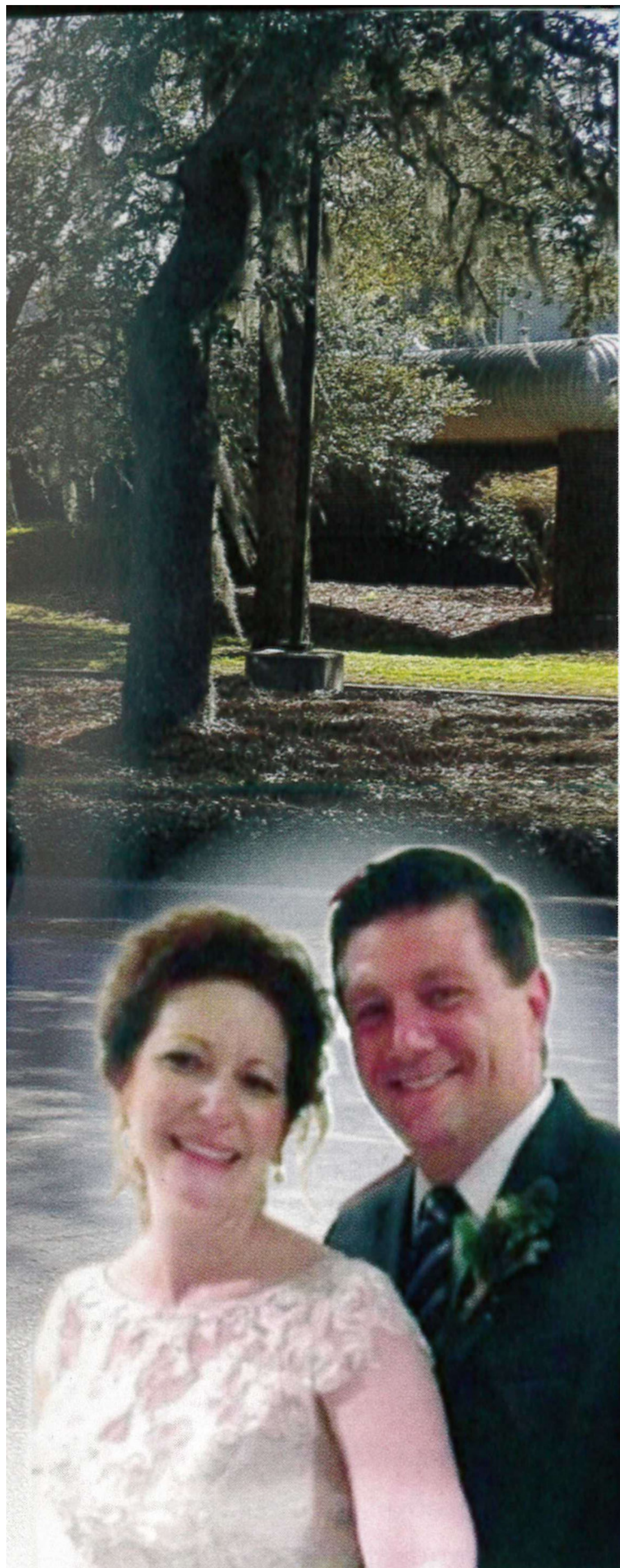
Who is your current employer?

I work for Gregory Pest Solutions, headquartered in Greenville, South Carolina. I have served in different supervisory roles, including service manager, district manager, and, currently, quality assurance manager in technical services for Gregory.

What experiences and training have you had at Gregory?

I started at Gregory as a commercial technician in 1998. I obtained several certifications and licenses over the years, including the prestigious Associate Certified Entomologist (ACE) from the Entomological Society of America, which I have maintained since 2012. And I was a finalist for the 2009 "Commercial Technician of the Year" award in *PCT Magazine*.

My certifications include both structural and commodity fumigation, turf and ornamentals, aquatics, public health, and wood-destroying organisms covering seven states. As a quality assurance manager, I have audited and provided training for third-party



auditing programs that fall under Good Manufacturing Practices and Global Food Safety Initiative as it pertains to Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points programs in the food-processing industry.

What has been your main focus in the pest management industry?

I attended the New York City Department of Public Health and Mental Hygiene Rodent Academy taught by Dr. Bobby Corrigan. At Gregory, I am considered the resident rodent expert due to my passion for solving major rodent infestations, in addition to handling major bat extractions. I have a passion for urban pest management and I have been seeking to further my expertise in this industry.

What brought you to the UF Urban Entomology lab?

It's been a long journey that has landed me in the Urban Pest Management Lab under the direction of Dr. Phil Koehler. I first

met Dr. Koehler at our company-sponsored annual training several years ago. I remember thinking that I would love to study insects under this professor.

In 2014, my lovely fiancée (now wife), Natalie, did some research to find an online program for entomology. She found the microbiology and cell science program at the University of Florida, which allowed a minor in entomology.

I was reluctant to review the paperwork for admission in the program, but after two weeks Natalie demanded that I look at the program and insisted that I call the coordinator. After several phone conversations and submission of an application, I was accepted for the fall semester. Thank you for your love and support, Natalie!

Has it been difficult to commute to UF from South Carolina?

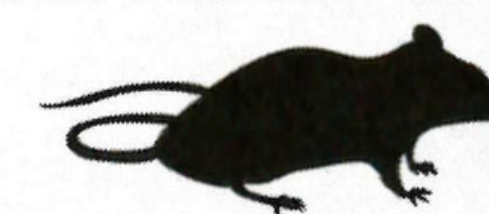
While pursuing my undergraduate degree in Florida, I worked full time

for Gregory in South Carolina and spent weeks on the road traveling across the Southeast. I moved to Gainesville, Florida, in the fall of 2015 and got my bachelor's degree in urban pest management in April 2017. I drove 102,000 miles during a two-year period while obtaining my degree with honors.

There were several obstacles along the way. But I was very determined to graduate and took on the financial responsibility that also included out-of-state tuition.

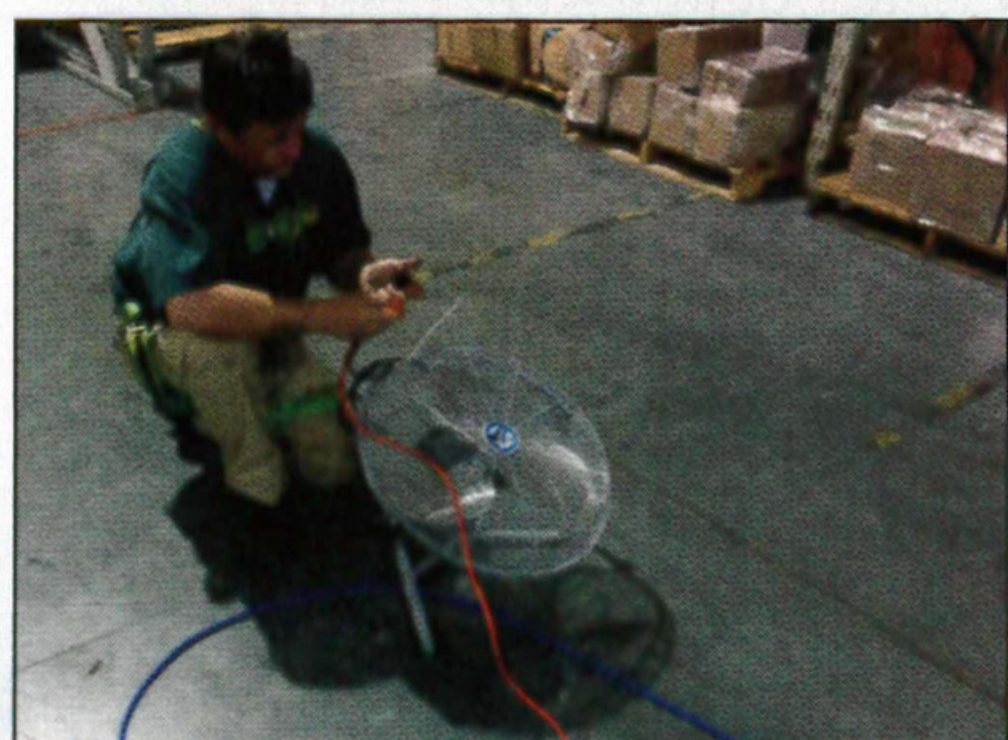
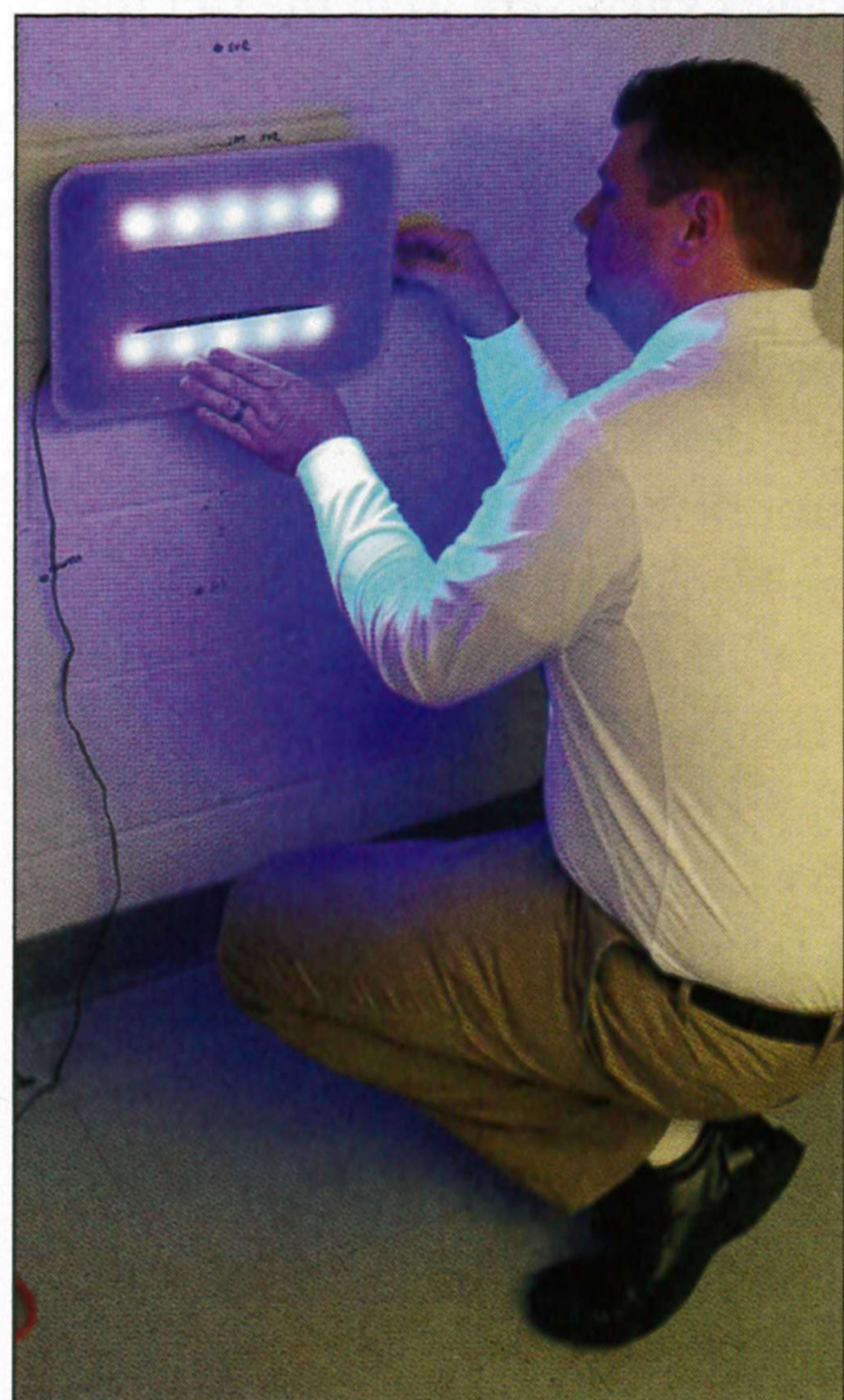
Now you are in graduate school at UF. How did that come about?

During the fall of 2016, I approached several professors to help me define the next step in my education, and finally had an opportunity to sit down with Dr. Koehler to discuss my future. The meeting was short and ended with him offering to supervise my graduate studies.



Continued

GOES **Back to School**



Don Foster, continued

As a 43-year-old completing my bachelor's degree, I reminded myself to proceed with caution. I told myself, "You might have no idea what you are signing up for! Paying for graduate school presents some obstacles, along with getting accepted to the No. 1 entomology department in the world."

That sounds expensive — did you have any financial assistance?

Gregory Pest Solutions was hosting the annual training meeting, in which Dr. Koehler was invited to speak. Dr. Koehler and I arranged a meeting with Ben Walker and Phil Gregory to discuss my accomplishments in school and to see if they would consider supporting me for graduate school.

I had my answer in less than 24 hours. Early the next morning, Phil and Sara Gregory

met with Dr. Koehler and expressed their willingness to support me in furthering my education. Gregory Pest Solutions would fully support me in pursuing a master's with thesis.

Phil Gregory approached me shortly after. "On behalf of Sara and I, we want to thank you for your years of dedication to our company," he said. "We have expressed to Dr. Koehler our commitment to support you in graduate school. Merry Christmas."

What an amazing show of support from your employer! Are there any other examples of outstanding leadership?

I'm very grateful for the opportunity that Gregory Pest Solutions has provided me in addition to my employment over the years. Thank you for the continued support, Phil

and Sara Gregory. I have been with the company for 20 years, experiencing both the growing pains and culture changes of a great company.

My direct supervisor, Brad Baker, has supported my growth and development in my current position working as a team. Thank you for the guidance, Brad.

Phil and Sara continue to treat the employees as their own children and express their gratitude for the continued support of the company.

Gregory Pest Solutions has experienced solid growth under the unprecedented leadership of Ben Walker. In recognition of this, they have invested in Ben by providing him ownership to take the company to the next level. Thank you for your leadership and support, Ben.

The Gregorys support the Make-A-Wish Foundation, which inspires hope and changes children's lives. They have supported animal rescue programs by auctioning off decommissioned vehicles. They continue to invest in their employees by their commitment to make Gregory Pest Solutions the premier provider in the Southeast. I would like to challenge other owners to invest in their employees the same as Gregory Pest Solutions.

What direction is your master's research heading at the UF Urban Entomology Lab?

My research focuses on filth flies and their attraction to light. I have spent over 300 hours studying fly behavior and their attraction to light in my first semester of graduate school. I am working with ultraviolet light-emitting diodes (UV LEDs), comparing the advantages and disadvantages with insect light traps currently available in the industry.

During one of my experiments, I noted what forensic entomologists knew very well: the fact that fly excrement would fluoresce under UV light. This has provided information on tracking flies in and out of environments.

I have noted changes in fly behavior through running back-to-back experiments lasting several hours into the night describing intermittent periods of activity that affect fly capture. The handling of the flies as they emerge from pupae has garnered insight into the reasons why fly control programs fail.

I plan to present my research to the industry to enhance fly control efforts due to vector pathogenicity. After fulfilling my contractual arrangement with Gregory, I plan to use my talents addressing urban pests in a metropolitan city.

Any final thoughts?

I have a message for one of my mentors:

By the way, Dr. Corrigan, I tried to convince Dr. Koehler to let me perform my research on roof rats, but that would require too much red tape. I know you understand how much I love dealing with major rodent infestations, especially roof rats, but flies will have to take center stage for now.

How 'bout them rowdy reptiles?

My new favorite animal has changed: Go Gators! **PP**



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