

Furman Magazine

Volume 61
Issue 1 *Spring 2018*

Article 19

4-1-2018

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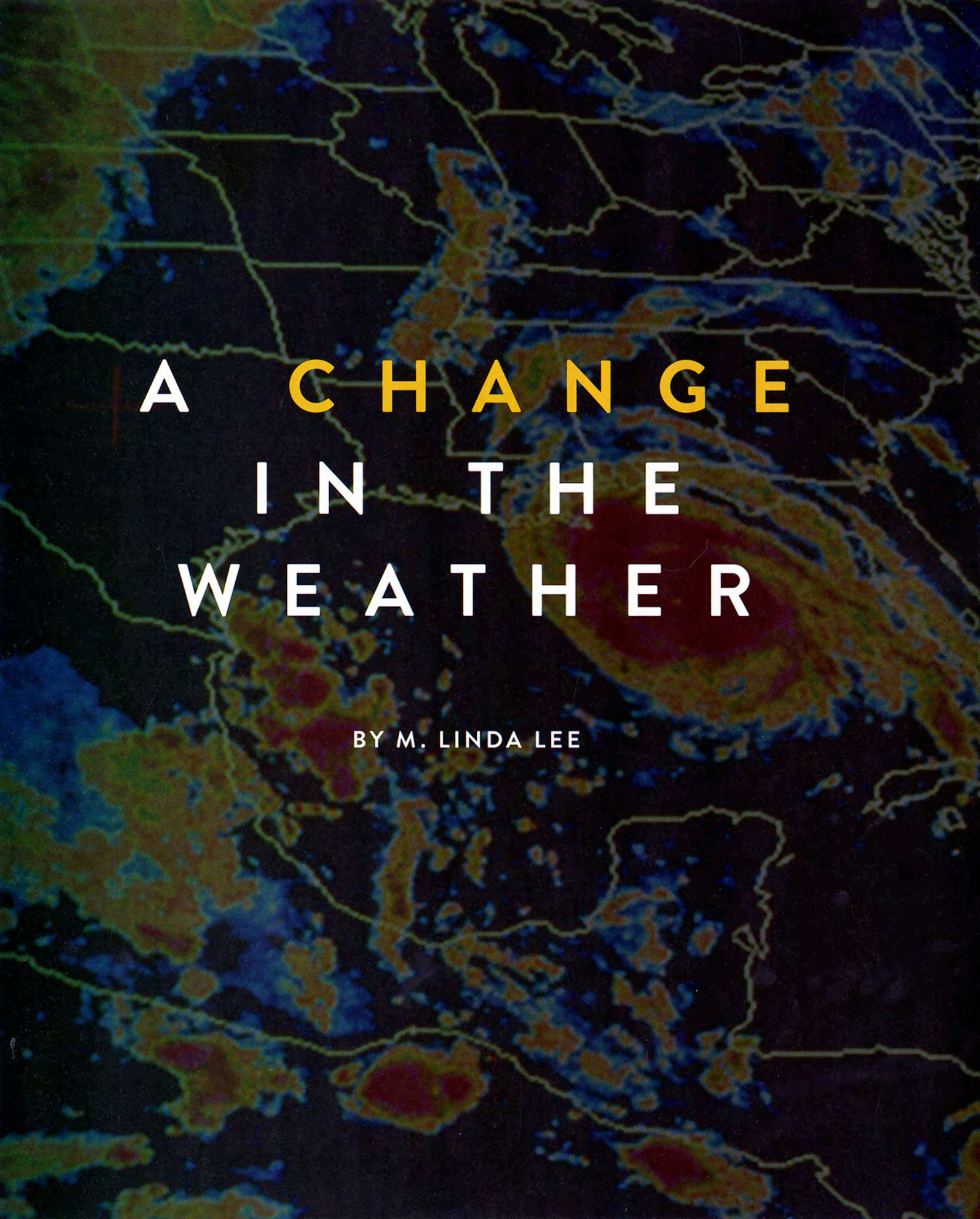
M. Linda Lee

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Recommended Citation

Lee, M. Linda (2018) "A Change in the Weather," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 61 : Iss. 1 , Article 19.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol61/iss1/19>

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A CHANGE
IN THE
WEATHER

BY M. LINDA LEE



FURMAN'S THREE INSTITUTES TAKE A YEARLONG LOOK AT CLIMATE CHANGE

Polar glaciers are melting, sea levels are rising, and extreme weather events are more frequent. These are but a few of the dire signs of climate change.

To highlight this critical issue, the Riley Institute, the Shi Center for Sustainability and the Institute for the Advancement of Community Health (IACH) have banded together to present a yearlong exploration of climate change at Furman. The initiative was spearheaded by Don Gordon, executive director of the Riley Institute, in response to a request from President Elizabeth Davis that Furman's three institutes collaborate on an issue relevant to all of them. Gordon contacted Weston Dripps, his counterpart at the Shi Center, and they agreed to zero in on climate change.

"Climate change has that broad-based, cross-disciplinary impact that allows folks from IACH to hone in on health-related issues, while the Riley Institute looks at it from a public policy angle," says Dripps, executive director of the Shi Center. "At the Shi Center we focus on the science of climate change and how we can

inject that into the curriculum across all disciplines."

Gordon and Dripps presented the idea to Eli Hestermann, executive director of IACH, who was quick to come on board. "Health is heavily tied to climate change," Hestermann acknowledges. "In fact, the American Public Health Association proclaimed 2017 as the Year of Climate Change and Health."

SPOTLIGHT ON SUSTAINABILITY

As one of 13 U.S. hub institutions for sustainability selected by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, the Shi Center constantly addresses factors that contribute to climate change on a local and regional level.

"Most people in the community don't know that for the last seven years, the Shi Center has performed

an annual assessment of Furman's campus greenhouse gas inventory as part of the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment," says Dripps. "Campus energy use and waste both factor into that."

Furman's Community Conservation Corps (CCC) helps reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions on a local level by providing free home weatherization to low-income families in the greater Greenville area. "The CCC helps us to be proactive in the regional sense," Dripps explains. "As part of this, we consider how we can engage Duke Energy in broader discussions about reducing the local effects of fossil fuels, and what will be future sources of energy in this rapidly growing area." Furman's 6-acre solar farm further illustrates how the university is actively pursuing renewable energy.

As a nonpartisan organization that strives to bring everybody in to take a common-sense, data-based look at the world, the Riley Institute takes a public-policy approach



Charles F. Bolden Jr., former astronaut and head of NASA, delivered the keynote address Nov. 8 at the two-day conference that kicked off Furman's yearlong exploration of climate change.



CLIMATE CHANGE IS REAL: NOW WHAT?

A panel of experts discussed the impact of climate change on human life during Furman's two-day national conference on climate change.

to the issue through its Center for Critical Issues. "We are trying to cut through the ideological and move public thinking to the real world of what is happening in terms of climate change," Gordon says.

In the arena of public health, there are many ways that climate change impacts human health. People too often see certain things, such as the increased incidence of flu and the opioid crisis, as strictly health-care problems. "More and more in the health-care industry, we see these as community problems that take concerted efforts from all vectors to address," Hestermann says. "The impacts we see of climate change – mosquito-borne disease, the effects of drought on agriculture, sea-level rise creating an increase in refugee populations, elderly people dying of heatstroke during unusually hot summers – are perfect examples of that."

All three directors agree that

there's no time to waste in shining light on this issue. "The data on climate change is overwhelmingly clear now," asserts Dripps. "We're not going to debate whether climate change is happening. It is happening, so let's focus the discussion on what to do next."

TACKLING THE PROBLEM

Their initiative, "Climate Change is Real: Now What?," kicked off in early November with a national conference at Furman's Younts Conference Center. "We wanted to bring in the best experts in various fields so people understand that climate change is having a huge impact nationally and locally," Gordon explains. Jill Fuson, director of the Riley Institute's Center for Critical Issues, was in charge of putting together the high-profile two-day event.

On the first night of the conference, Major General Charles Bolden Jr., former astronaut and administrator of NASA, took a global look at climate change, while Dana Beach, founder of the South Carolina Coastal Conservation League, presented a regional focus. Other panelists included Allison Crimmins, an environmental scientist in the EPA's Office of Air and Radiation, Climate Change Division, and Tony Bartelme, special projects reporter for *The Post and Courier*.

The second night examined the effects of climate change on national security with Sherri Goodman, former deputy undersecretary of defense and senior adviser at The Center for Climate and Security. Weighing in on what coastal cities can do were South Miami Mayor Phil Stoddard and Mayor of Beaufort, South Carolina, Billy Keyserling. Former U.S. Congress-



PUTTING SUSTAINABILITY INTO PRACTICE

The Shi Center for Sustainability is a hub for curricular development, student exploration, research, and partnerships in the community and around the world.

man Bob Inglis delivered the closing address. “We also created unique opportunities beyond the conference for these experts in the field to talk with students in small groups,” Fuson points out.

“The consensus was that although the conference would be a capstone component, we wouldn’t want it to be a one-and-done event where people talk about it and then it’s over,” says Dripps. “In the process of planning the conference,” Gordon adds, “we realized we could run with it and make it a yearlong exploration, connecting to students in a wide variety of ways.” So programs throughout the academic year will include a four-part film series, a cross-disciplinary faculty climate change panel next January and an alumni panel in March.

In March, the Riley Institute hosted Jeffrey Ball as its Woodrow Wilson Visiting Fellow. Ball, a former envi-

ronment editor for The Wall Street Journal, is currently studying how boosting solar energy can reduce carbon emissions globally. “The idea,” according to Dripps, “is to pepper the year with events so climate change is an ongoing dialogue.”

HOPE FOR CHANGE

The point they are trying to drive home is that climate change is having a huge impact both on a national and local level. “Knowing students with families in Houston who were affected by the recent hurricane has made it much more personal,” Dripps says. “Climate change should matter to you because it is impacting you.”

“When you look at circumstances in coastal cities like Beaufort and Charleston, you see an impact not only on coastal businesses and populations, but on military bases as

well,” adds Gordon. “Large portions of American bases around the world are in coastal areas or on islands. Those won’t be usable in 25 years, and that diminishes the U.S. presence in those parts of the world.”

So where do we start? “The biggest thing is getting people talking about climate change, even outside the classroom, with their friends and family,” says Fuson. “Once our habits begin to change, we can begin to effect change in our own circles.”

“We constantly preach that to really grasp a problem you have to be able to see it from all sides, and this collaboration illustrates that concept,” Hestermann says.

“We want this yearlong initiative to seed a much broader conversation,” adds Dripps. “We want to infuse climate change into the curriculum so it has a longer-lasting impact. And we’re running out of time, because climate change is getting worse.” ●