Imagine directly improving people’s lives by giving them access to information, while boosting the national and world economy. This is how Oscar Rodriguez describes his job as president and CEO of Extreme Networks.

“I don’t just like my job. I love what I do,” says Rodriguez, who often works 16 to 20 hours a day.

With 900 employees, Extreme Networks provides equipment, such as switches and routers, to enable cloud computing based on Ethernet technology. Cloud computing, Rodriguez says, is reinventing the way business is done around the world.

“Centralized servers allow businesses to run more efficiently and save money. People don’t have to worry, ‘Did I back up my server?’ or ‘How old is the disk; do I need to upgrade?’ Those things go away with cloud service.”

Technology has a strong influence in improving world economies and people’s lives, he says. “When we meet people in a country that doesn’t have a cloud service, suddenly the lights go on, the wheels start turning in their heads. I love helping people reinvent their lives for the better.”

Rodriguez knows a few things about “rebooting himself,” as he calls it. He grew up in Tampa, Florida, after escaping Cuba at age 4 with his family. “To arrive with nothing and not speak the language, and now do what I do and participate in the world economy—that’s a testament to the American dream and the greatness of the United States.”

He serves on the UCF Foundation Board and the CECS Dean’s Advisory Board. He also financially supports numerous UCF programs, and is a strong believer in UCF’s quality education. “As a young engineer, I could hold my own alongside engineers from big-name universities. That’s how I knew my UCF education was world class.”

*CECS departmental acronyms in this issue: Civil, Environmental and Construction Engineering (CECE); Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (EECS), Division of Computer Science (CS) and Division of Electrical and Computer Engineering (ECE); Industrial Engineering and Management Systems (IEMS); Mechanical, Materials and Aerospace Engineering (MMAE).
Nicole Stott (M.S., IE, ’92)
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION CECS PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Nicole Stott still gets goose bumps when she describes the moment she first saw Earth from outer space. Stott, one of UCF’s most famous alumni, is the first UCF graduate to launch into orbit aboard a NASA space shuttle and live on the International Space Station (ISS).

In fall 2009, she logged 91 days in space, launching on the Space Shuttle Discovery, living on the ISS and returning on the Atlantis. In early 2011, she flew onboard Discovery’s final mission, a 13-day, 5.3-million-mile flight.

Stott often shares stories about life in space and her journey to get there. She also credits CECS for its key role. “My time at UCF prepared me very well for what I ended up getting to do,” she says.

Stott, whose father was a pilot, grew up surrounded by small aircraft in Clearwater. She helped her father build experimental planes in their garage, and they spent lots of time at the local airport. At age 17, she flew her first solo in a Cessna 152.

Now, with a husband and son, Stott maintains the professional–home balance by involving her family in her work. She often took her son to astronaut training sessions, which helped prepare him for his mother’s time away in space.

To think of herself as a national role model, especially to children, is overwhelming, Stott says. But Stott believes sharing her story with young people is critical. “It’s important that kids have an exchange with the people who have done it, so that they can be inspired to do what they love.”

But, she cautions, having a dream is one thing. Acting on it is another. “If you have any desire to become an astronaut, at the very least, fill out the application.”

Like Father, Like Daughter
Leila Nodarse (B.S., CE, ’82)
CECE 2012 DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD

Born in Gainesville, Florida, the daughter of a UF-educated engineer, Leila Jammal Nodarse pursued her engineering education as a UCF Knight, with persuasion from her father, Jim Jammal.

“Orlando was full of opportunities, and UCF engineering had a solid reputation. I think he just wanted me to stay close to home after he moved our family to Orlando in the mid-1960s,” she says.

After college, Nodarse joined her father’s firm, Jammal & Associates, which was sold in 1987. Following in her father’s entrepreneurial footsteps, Nodarse started her own company in 1991, Nodarse & Associates, which specializes in geotechnical, environmental and construction materials testing. The firm has grown to 250 employees—a staff roster that includes her father. “Since I was a girl visiting construction sites with my father, I have been fortunate to work alongside him and benefit from his expertise,” she says.

In 2010, Nodarse & Associates was acquired by Terracon, the largest geotechnical engineering firm in the United States. Nodarse & Associates has been ranked among the top 15 woman-owned businesses in Florida by Florida Trend magazine, and it was named one of the Orlando Sentinel’s Top 100 Companies for Working Families.

Nodarse’s appreciation for the role her father has played in her life will benefit UCF students and faculty. She is establishing a lecture series in his name for the CECS Department of Civil, Environmental and Construction Engineering.
Industrial Engineer, Renaissance Man

Adedeji Badiru (Ph.D., IE, ’84)
IEMS 2012 DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD

In his homeland of Nigeria, Adedeji “Deji” Badiru envisioned the United States to be one giant hustle-and-bustle metropolis, the image portrayed in movies. So when he arrived in Nashville, Tennessee on a Nigerian government scholarship, then boarded a bus and headed to the rural town of Cookeville, he quickly learned that Tennessee is nothing like New York City. He attended Tennessee Tech University in Cookeville, where he earned a B.S. and M.S. in industrial engineering, and an M.S. in mathematics. “My city in Nigeria was much bigger and more advanced than Cookeville, but I was determined to stay,” he says. “I got a fantastic education there.”

He attended UCF on a scholarship and became its first Ph.D. graduate in industrial engineering. “That’s something I take pride in, being a pioneer,” Badiru says.

Badiru’s career as a professor and academic administrator includes 17 years at the University of Oklahoma. Now he’s the head of the Department of Systems and Engineering Management at the Air Force Institute of Technology, a military graduate school in Ohio. He supervises a faculty of 25 and teaches engineering project management and advanced economic analysis.

His personal life includes a love for soccer. He played in high school in Nigeria, and on recreational teams in the U.S., until 1996. “That’s when my wife put a stop to it,” he jokes. “I had broken bones and twisted ankles, so I began writing about it.”

He manages a website geared to children about the physics of soccer and has written on the topic. The author of 22 books loves writing motivational poems and often writes articles and commentaries about current events, community service, self-help and much more. Badiru also loves dancing, cooking and painting landscapes. He happily explains, “These activities I live by, because they are all artistic expressions.”

The Texas Knight

Brian Crutcher (B.S., EE, ’95)
EECS-ECE 2012 DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD

Growing up in Dade City, Florida, Brian Crutcher dreamed of playing college football. He also loved all things electronic, including his first Atari and Sony Boombox.

Crutcher was able to pursue both passions by attending UCF on a football scholarship. He was a defensive back for the Knights from 1991 to 1994—all winning seasons—but it was his academic pursuit in electrical engineering that launched his future professional success.

Crutcher interviewed with Texas Instruments (TI) on campus and joined the company in 1995. Since then, he has risen in the TI ranks, including running the company’s embedded processing division.

Now he leads TI’s $6 billion analog unit. The unit creates the analog chips that translate real-world signals like light, pressure and sound into the “ones and zeros” of digital processing in virtually any electronic device, from personal fitness monitors, energy-efficient street lights, and smart phones that charge wirelessly to back-up cameras for cars.

He feels deep gratitude for UCF and stays connected by coming to campus to speak to students, who are eager to learn from him. “Words cannot express how much I appreciate the opportunities UCF has given me and the person UCF helped me become,” he says. “I want to give UCF students the opportunities I was afforded.” Crutcher continues, “Every time I step on this campus, I’m in awe of the progress UCF has made in engineering and athletics.”

Crutcher lives north of Dallas with his family and enjoys outdoor recreation, including boating and fishing at nearby Lake Lewisville.

Seeing the World, Closely

Jay Hackett (B.S., CS, ’87 and M.S., CS, ’89)
EECS-CS 2012 DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD

As a 9-year-old in Buffalo, New York, Jay Hackett loved to play on the computer at his father’s electronics business. He wanted a computer of his own, but that was an expensive request.

Hackett says, “I bugged my father over and over, ‘Can you get me a computer?’” The persistence paid off. Hackett’s father gave him a Radio Shack TRS-80, a popular machine at the time. It was loaded with computer games, and his father helped him write new programs, such as a simple version of Monopoly.

Now, Hackett is the senior engineering manager for the Harris Image Processing Core Technology Center. The center uses remote sensing technology (by aircraft or satellite) to create images of Earth and its various geographical features. Clients, primarily military and government contractors, use the images to observe, map or zoom in on areas of key interest, such as a road network, bridge or building.

Hackett’s expertise has been recognized nationally. In 2001, he was selected as a Technology Fellow for the National Reconnaissance Office.

While he considers himself a systems engineer more than a computer scientist, Hackett says the most rewarding aspect of his job is mentoring others, whether it’s helping his staff of 80 reach their career goals or helping a UCF student develop a winning resume. Staying involved with his alma mater has benefits. “We get to know students before hiring them, and it’s helpful to stay current with the professors’ research.”

The father of two embraces his children’s use of technology, noting that while kids today may be losing some face-to-face interaction, “It doesn’t seem to be harming people’s daily activities or work.”
Mark Your Calendar

UCF Black & Gold Gala
Nov. 1, 2012

CECS BBQ & Tailgate for UCF Homecoming
Nov. 3, 2012

CECS events are listed online at www.cecs.ucf.edu

Supporting the Troops and UCF

Joanne Puglisi (B.S., ME, '73)
MMAE 2012 DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD

As a teenager talented in math and science, Joanne Puglisi’s high school counselor recommended she visit a new engineering college under construction in Orlando. So she and her parents—artists who wanted their daughter to become a math teacher—paid a visit to Florida Technological University. While they explored the new campus, Puglisi fondly recalls her encounter with founding president Charles Millican. “There was this man with his foot up on a bench, smoking a pipe. He said he had big plans for the place.”

Four years later, as one of three female 1973 FTU graduates, Puglisi’s mechanical engineering degree garnered her several job offers in a variety of industries. “Simulation and aviation sounded different and exciting. So that’s what I picked,” she says.

Puglisi has spent 39 years immersed in military aircraft systems development as an engineer, program manager and corporate executive. Until recently, Puglisi oversaw the development and sustainment of all support systems for Lockheed Martin’s F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter, a $1.8 billion operation. In August 2012, she changed jobs and now leads Lockheed’s live training division, which develops lifelike simulation training modules for ground troops.

Puglisi has served on the UCF Foundation Board, UCF Alumni Association Board, CECS Alumni Chapter and the UCF Alma Mater Society 2000. She often donates to UCF and has supported some projects that many UCF alumni will recall.

“Knightro’s car and the old castle that the football team came out of were actually engineering senior design projects that I funded,” Puglisi says. “That was before Bright House Networks Stadium was built.”

On weekends, Puglisi enjoys creating flower arrangements for her church’s Sunday services. She has two grown daughters.