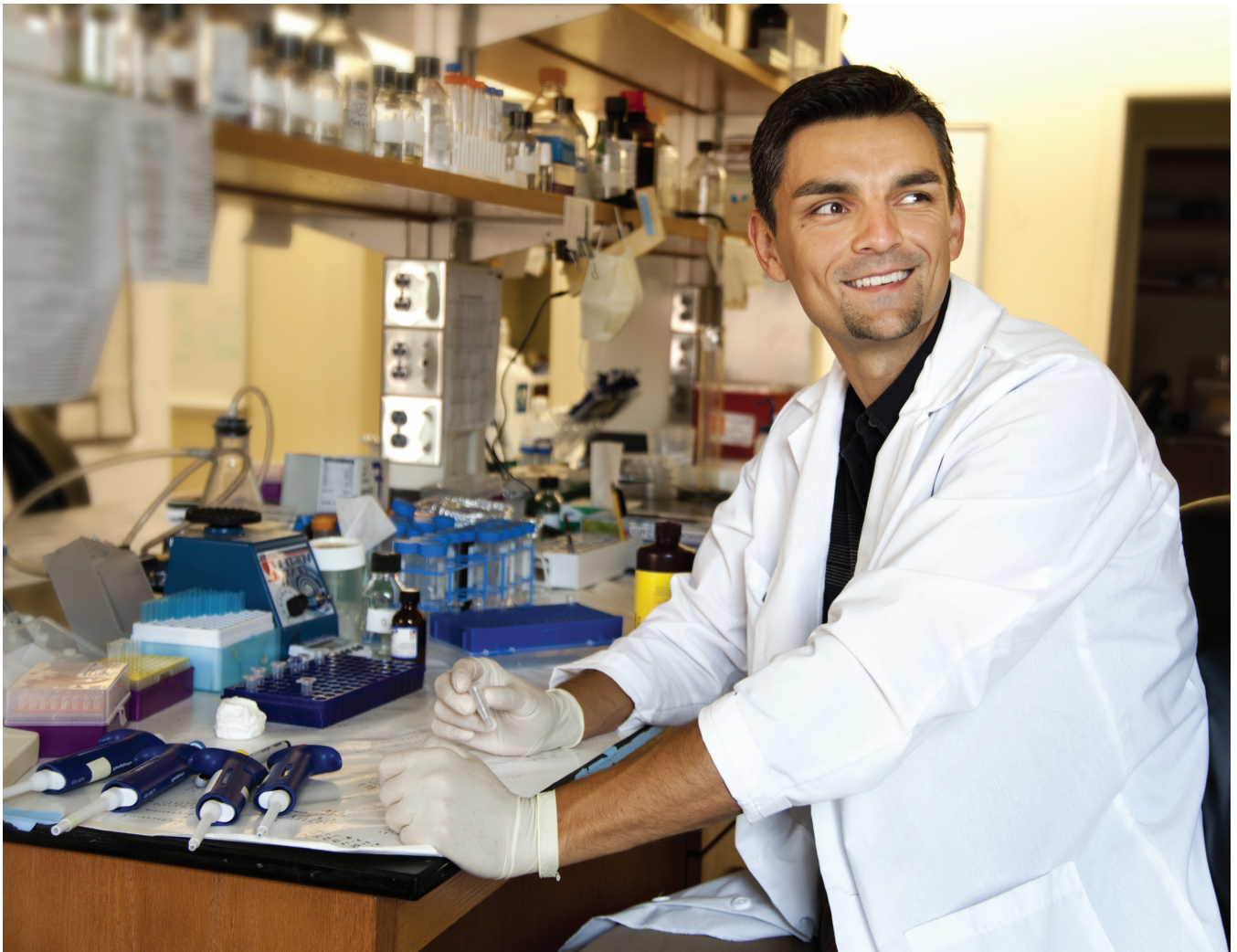


# scientific endeavors



COLIN HACKLEY

Zarko Manojlovic has had a long journey from Bosnia's civil war to a College of Medicine lab, where he now researches liver fibrosis with the aid of an NIH grant.

## Happy in the lab

Growing up near the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo, Zarko Manojlovic was 6 years old when he remembers becoming fascinated hearing a family friend—a physician—talk about cancer one evening at the dinner table.

"I started thinking about it and I had this idea that trees do not get cancer, so I began collecting samples to see if there was something in the juices that prevent trees from getting cancer," Manojlovic said, laughing at the memory.

Doesn't matter that he later learned trees actually can, and do, get cancer. A love for science was born.

"That was a turning point for me," he said.

The passion for research remains strong. It has survived a civil war and family moves from Bosnia to Germany and then to Thomasville, Ga. It even trumped his passion for soccer when Manojlovic gave up an athletic scholarship to accept a full academic scholarship at Thomas University.

Today Manojlovic is pursuing a Ph.D. in biomedical sciences at the College of Medicine, working in the lab of his

mentor, Associate Professor Branko Stefanovic.

The work is hard, often requiring days (and nights) of 15 or more hours in the lab. The rewards, of late, have made the investment worthwhile. Manojlovic won a competitive three-year, \$108,000 NIH grant that will fund his work through completion of the biomedical sciences program. His winning entry: "The translation and regulation of Type I collagen in liver fibrosis as a target for new drug development."

Based on his success in Stefanovic's lab, Manojlovic also was chosen to receive a Florida State University

Graduate Student and Research Creativity Award and received the Randolph L. Rill Outstanding Graduate Student Award from the Department of Biomedical Sciences.

“I’m a very hard worker, and I’m very competitive,” Manojlovic said, giving credit for his success to his parents. They were the ones, after all, who pulled the family through the Bosnian civil war.

“We were lucky that at one point in the war there was a door open for people to leave and my parents took advantage of it,” Manojlovic said. “In a civil war, you never know who the enemy is – the next-door neighbor can pick up a gun and shoot you in the middle of the night.”

The move to Germany was temporary, just long enough for the situation in Bosnia to stabilize. Then came a choice: They could return to Bosnia, where Manojlovic said educational opportunities and the likelihood of a future job for people like him and his brother, Marko, were nonexistent. Or his parents could sacrifice their professional careers and take advantage of a chance to move to one of three countries accepting Bosnian war refugees: America, Australia or Canada.

His mother, Snjezana, a mining engineer in Bosnia, found work as a chef at a plantation in Thomasville. His father, Vlatko, a political science professor, didn’t have the needed command of the English language to teach in the U.S., so he accepted work as a long-haul truck driver.

“I am really very appreciative of my entire family,” said Manojlovic, who hopes to complete his Ph.D. as early as next year. After that, he hopes to find work confronting diseases that could be at the root of global epidemics.

The uncertainty about his next step is not so difficult to manage after everything Manojlovic has survived to reach this point. He is confident the love of science will pull him through.

“I’m very happy in the lab,” he said.