

# DOCTOR

# GATOR

COLLEGE OF MEDICINE ALUMNI NEWS

UF  
UNIVERSITY of  
FLORIDA

SUMMER 2015

## A time to celebrate

BY STYLIANA RESVANIS

**T**he UF College of Medicine's 55th commencement ceremony overflowed with joy and enthusiasm, as well as sage advice for the 128 men and women who received their medical degrees May 16.

"Believe in your own potential and continue to do all that you can to maximize it," said Michael L. Good, MD, dean.

About 1,600 family members and friends, along with faculty and staff, attended the ceremony at the Curtis M. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts. One of those graduates was Michael Ullman, MD '15, who grew up hearing stories about UF from his alumni parents, ophthalmologist Saul Ullman, MD '82, and pharmacist Nancy Ullman, who met while at the university.

"[My father] always talked about how UF gave him not only his family but also the opportunity to provide for his family," said Michael Ullman, whose twin brother graduated from the Florida State University College of Medicine the same day.

The elder Ullman said it's a "dream come true" to see his twins graduate from medical school.

"I think it's a wonderful thing in terms of legacy, and I hope that one day I'll be attending my grandson or granddaughter's graduation at UF," Saul Ullman said.

It was a "huge day" for UF's newest physicians, who were ready to begin their residencies.

"We've been waiting for this moment our whole lives," said Stephen Suah, MD '15, who began his residency in dermatology at Howard University. "It means a lot for us all to succeed and get here together as a family."

One month later, about 500 people packed UF's University Auditorium June 20 to watch as the 61 graduates of the College of Medicine School of Physician Assistant Studies celebrated commencement and their transition from pupils to professionals.

"We've enjoyed having you with us here at the University of Florida, but to be honest, we're glad you're graduating because your future patients need you," UF President W. Kent Fuchs, PhD, told the graduating physician assistants. "Society needs your knowledge, abilities, your compassion, your leadership and especially your UF values."



▶ Please visit [Facebook.com/ufdrgator](https://www.facebook.com/ufdrgator) for a gallery of photos from the 2015 commencement ceremony.

PHOTO BY JESSE S. JONES

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# NEWS CLIPS

## COM'S FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN ALUMNUS WINS TRAILBLAZER AWARD

Reuben E. Brigety, MD '70, was one of eight Jacksonville community members to receive the 2015 Trailblazer Award from then-Mayor Alvin Brown during a ceremony Feb. 26.

The award honors African-American leaders in Jacksonville who were pioneers of their profession. As a medical student, Brigety worked alongside Howard Pearson, MD, to conduct research in outlying areas of Gainesville. As the first African-American graduate of the UF College of Medicine, he went on to complete a residency in obstetrics and gynecology in Jacksonville and delivered about 2,000 babies during his years of practice. ■

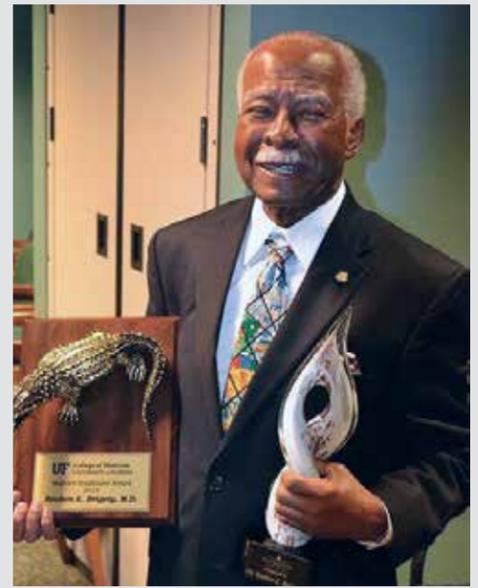


PHOTO COURTESY OF UF MEDICAL ALUMNI AFFAIRS

## College of Medicine celebrates research at annual event

BY MORGAN SHERBURNE

The UF College of Medicine hosted its annual Celebration of Research event Feb. 9, and for the first time combined the faculty and student research poster presentations. Students and faculty presented more than 460 research posters during the event at the Stephen C. O'Connell Center. Medical students, most of whom are part of the Medical Student Research Program, presented approximately 90 posters.

"Our celebration focused on research, but one could

not help but also notice the integration of all our missions, and the multiple intersections of research, education and patient care," said Michael L. Good, MD, dean of the College of Medicine.

The Celebration of Research week continued with talks by Stephanie Karst, PhD, an associate professor in the department of molecular genetics and microbiology, who discussed how the norovirus interacts with the body, and Clayton Mathews, PhD, the Sebastian Family

professor for diabetes research in the department of pathology, immunology and laboratory medicine, who spoke about ways to better understand Type 1 diabetes. The week ended with a keynote address from Ennio A. Chiocca, MD, PhD, about oncolytic viruses as a therapy for brain tumors. Chiocca is chair of the department of neurosurgery and co-director of the Institute for Neurosciences at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.



PHOTOS BY JESSE S. JONES

This year's poster presentation event reflects the momentum UF is gaining in funding from the National Institutes of Health. The UF College of Medicine increased its NIH funding for the fifth consecutive year in 2014, at a time when garnering such research funding has been challenging for institutions across the United States.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MONICA SANTISTEBAN

## International students honored

Students of the UF College of Medicine were honored Nov. 17 at the 20th Annual International Students Award ceremony. Sponsored by the UF International Center, the event recognizes students with exemplary academic achievement, accomplishments and contributions.

Monica Santisteban, BS '11, of Switzerland, and a PhD candidate of the Interdisciplinary Program in Biomedical Sciences, was presented the Alec Courtelis Award by her mentor, distinguished professor Mohan Raizada, PhD. The honor is given annually to three international graduate students who demonstrate commitment to exceptional educational achievement, campus service and involvement in the community.

"It is an honor to have been selected for such a prestigious award from so many international students who do incredible service," Santisteban said.

Four additional College of Medicine international students were presented the Outstanding International Award: Karin Appelberg, Yuanjing Liu, Yuan Lu and Apoorva Mohan.

## PROFESSOR PRESENTS TALK ON 'THE PRICE OF POVERTY: IMPACTS ON WOMEN AND CHILDREN'

Nancy Hardt, MD, HS '81, HS '90, a professor of pathology and obstetrics and gynecology at UF, held a presentation on poverty and its correlation to health, crime and domestic violence Feb. 3. About 115 students, staff, faculty and community members attended the talk, which was hosted by the Bob Graham Center for Public Service.

Hardt serves as associate director of UF's interdisciplinary Family Data Center and leads the College of Medicine's Mobile Outreach Clinic and Health Disparities and Service Learning Programs. ■



PHOTO BY ABBY AUSTIN

# Estate gift secures family's legacy at PA school

BY STYLIANA RESVANIS

When Brian Palmer reflects on his time at the UF College of Medicine studying to become a physician assistant, he not only recalls a rigorous curriculum that paved the way for a fulfilling career but also a chance meeting with a classmate that impacted his future.

"The PA program had a big effect on my life," said Palmer, PA '79, who met his late wife, Lee Berkowitz Palmer, PA '79, in the hospital hallway on the way to the bookstore when they were both students. Decades later, their daughter, Jillian Palmer Johnson, MPAS '09, continued the family legacy by becoming a Gator physician assistant.

To show his appreciation for the experiences and education he received at UF, Palmer recently made an estate gift to support the Physician Assistant Alumni Fund at the UF School of Physician Assistant Studies.

"It's been a very good career for me — it's a job I've enjoyed for 35 years," Palmer said. "I felt it was the right thing to do to pay back."

He still considers UF's PA program to be the best of its kind and hopes his contribution will help keep it on top. He said he feels it's important for graduates to support their alma maters any way they can, whether that means financial contributions or alumni involvement.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BRIAN PALMER

Brian Palmer and his daughter, Jillian Palmer Johnson, served as class representatives for the UF College of Medicine's 2014 Alumni Weekend.

In fact, aside from his UF financial commitment, Palmer sits on UF's PA alumni advisory committee and partnered with fellow graduate Nancy Moody, PA '90, to establish a clinical rotation in the emergency department of Lakeland Regional Medical Center, where he has worked for 16 years.

To show pride in his class and encourage fellow Gator physician assistants to travel back to their old stomping grounds and reminisce, Palmer also served as a 1979 class representative for last year's Alumni Weekend. His daughter served as a representative for the class of 2009 as well.

"I've always told my children: 'If you have to do something for eight hours a day, you want to have something you enjoy and love and that makes you feel good,'" he said. "And I think that's what my career has done."

# PA alumni team up to serve Haiti

BY CHRISTINE BOATWRIGHT

When Brigitta Nuccio, MPAS '02, PA-C, founded Missions for a Healthy World Inc. in January 2014, she contacted the UF School of Physician Assistant Studies to recruit volunteers to join her on her inaugural trip to Haiti.

An email went out to alumni, and two UF PAs responded: Kristen Jackson-Cirillo, PA '93, and George Roll, PA '96. The email continued to circulate until six additional medical professionals and volunteers completed the team of 10, and they headed to serve the people of Haiti in October.

The group teamed with Convoy of Hope, an organization in place since the late 1990s that helps feed the world, and Mission of Hope in Haiti, which offers medical care and medicine for Haitians.

"The conditions were worse than I expected," Nuccio said. "As we were riding around, it was like you'd gone back 100 years in time."

The medical team saw issues ranging from dehydration and malnutrition to acute infections and chronic illnesses.

"In many of the children I took care of, I saw a bright spark in their eye and hope in their hearts,"



PHOTO COURTESY OF BRIGITTA NUCCIO

UF School of Physician Assistant Studies alumni Brigitta Nuccio, George Roll and Kristen Jackson-Cirillo served the people of Haiti on a weeklong medical mission trip.

Roll said. "It helped me appreciate the chance they're now getting through the meals program and medical program in Haiti."

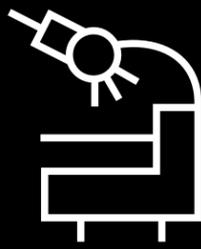
Roll served as a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Air Force before becoming a PA, which he has been doing for 15 years at Seagrove Beach Medical Clinic in Freeport, Florida.

Jackson-Cirillo, an urgent-care PA in Wellington, Florida, and mother of two, was uncertain if she could make time in her schedule to attend the trip. In the end, though, she knew she was supposed to join the team.

"It's hard to imagine so much devastation, poverty and lack of resources right down to lack of clean water and so much wealth all at the same time," she said.

Nuccio is planning future medical mission trips. For more information, contact her at [mrsnuccio@msn.com](mailto:mrsnuccio@msn.com) or 850-693-0789.

"I would recommend (trips like this) to doctors, young residents, dentists, anyone with a medical background who wants to do some good and appreciate how good we have it," Roll said.



# FOR THE LOVE OF SCIENCE

Professor emeritus receives the UF College of Medicine's Honorary Alumnus Award



PHOTO FROM UF HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER ARCHIVES

Throughout his career, Small (pictured with a pediatric patient) has worked as a scientist, physician, educator and public health activist.

PHOTOS FROM UF HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER ARCHIVES



Small served as chairman of the UF College of Medicine department of microbiology from 1966 to 1976.

Small met with UF College of Medicine Dean Michael L. Good, MD, during the college's 2014 Alumni Weekend festivities.

PHOTOS BY JESSE S. JONES



Small, his daughter, Carla, and his wife, Natalie, visited the UF College of Medicine honorary alumnus wall in the Founders Gallery of the Academic Research Building. The wall across the hall showcases the college's Wall of Fame, where a photo of Small's son, Peter Small, MD '85, also hangs.

BY STYLIANA RESVANIS

When Parker Small Jr., MD, accepted a conference invitation, little did he know it would set him on the path toward becoming a Gator.

It was the 1960s, and Small, a researcher at the National Institutes of Health who was collaborating with a UF immunologist on a project at the time, happened to make the five-hour road trip from Gainesville to the conference with the founding chair of the UF College of Medicine's department of microbiology, Emanuel Suter, MD.

"All the way down, we argued about medical education and discussed why and how it needed to be improved," Small said of his encounter with Suter. "A few months later, they made Dr. Suter dean, and he called and asked if I'd be interested in being considered for his old job."

Fast-forward nearly 50 years, and Small, a professor emeritus of pediatrics and pathology, immunology and laboratory medicine, is the latest person to receive the UF College of Medicine's Honorary Alumnus Award for his contributions to science and education.

A scientist, educator and public health activist, Small began his career conducting research at the NIH before entering the academic arena. Once at UF, he continued lower vertebrate immunology and influenza research while working with faculty to develop a new medical education curriculum.

After stepping down as chair of microbiology at UF in 1976, Small practiced medicine in the pediatric immunology clinic, where he noticed how little medical students recalled from immunology lectures in the clinical setting.

"It changed my whole approach to medical education," said Small, who used this experience to create the Patient-Oriented Problem Solving, or POPS, program, which aimed to increase retention rates by providing students with clinically relevant retrieval cues for learning basic science. The program has been used at more than half the nation's medical schools and was recently introduced in China, Small said.

Small's work in the pediatric immunology clinic also prompted him to collaborate with his wife, Natalie Small, PhD, to create the Team Pack system, a program to promote AIDS and STD education in schools, which was used by about half of Florida's 67 counties. Other states made use of the program as well, and in 1987 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National PTA named it the best AIDS education program in the nation.

"Throughout his career and life he has demonstrated a tremendous passion for science — for asking questions and figuring out how to answer them," said Robert Amdur, MD '85, a former student of Small's and a professor and residency program director in the UF College of Medicine's department of radiation oncology.

An advocate for flu prevention, Small conducted the first nasal-spray flu vaccination study in 1967. In 2006 he co-founded the Alachua County Control Flu Program, and today, Small channels his efforts into spreading this school vaccination program throughout the state and, hopefully, beyond.

"There's no question that our program ... has demonstrated that through a school-located program, a community can really reduce the morbidity and mortality not just in those vaccinated but also those across the community," said Paul Myers, administrator for the Florida Department of Health in Alachua County.

With more than 150 published research papers, 12 patents and more than five decades' worth of work, Small's passion for his field is undeniable.

"He is someone who is very humble," said UF Emerging Pathogens Institute director J. Glenn Morris, MD, who also works with Small on the school vaccination program. "He's not the one who has to be at the podium speaking; he's the one who sits in the back row and makes sure it all happens and that other people get credit."

**"Throughout his career and life he has demonstrated a tremendous passion for science – for asking questions and figuring out how to answer them."**

**– Robert Amdur, MD '85**

# A CAREER ON FIRE

ALUMNUS RETIRES AFTER DEDICATING 30 YEARS TO  
IMPROVING EMERGENCY HEALTH CARE IN JACKSONVILLE

BY STYLIANA RESVANIS

The impact Robert “Bob” Kiely has had on the Jacksonville community is evident in the faces of the emergency responders he has worked alongside, in the grateful words of the patients he saved — even in the name emblazoned on the side of a 70-foot fire rescue boat.

After serving as a trauma physician and medical director of the Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department for more than 30 years, Kiely, MD ’78, hung up his stethoscope in October to the squeal of bagpipes and the rumbling of drums during a retirement celebration at the Jacksonville Landing.

“It was overwhelming because I really, truly love the community,” said Kiely, who stepped down due to a diagnosis of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS. “It just reaffirmed all the love I knew I had through the years.”

After graduating from the UF College of Medicine in 1978, Kiely completed a residency in Pennsylvania before returning to the Sunshine State for another residency in Jacksonville. The West Virginia native found home in Florida’s “River City,” and said he grew to love the “controlled chaos” of the emergency room.

As an ER physician, he frequently interacted with fire rescue workers and paramedics who brought in patients — so when the Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department medical director position became vacant in 1982, it seemed like a natural fit.

“Dr. Kiely was a team player, and he was always willing to teach and give his time,” said Cliff Jeremiah, MD, who oversaw Jacksonville Memorial Hospital’s emergency department during Kiely’s residency days and served 10 years as the Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department’s first medical director (He and Kiely

also opened two acute care centers in the area in the 1980s).

Like a moth drawn to flame, Kiely fell for the “trauma and drama” of the fire and rescue lifestyle, often hopping behind the wheel of the emergency response vehicle at the first blare of the fire station siren to provide on-scene treatment and supervision for medics. Throughout his career, he dedicated about 1,000 hours annually to emergency calls.

Adding to his list of duties, Kiely also joined the fire department’s emerging S.W.A.T. Medic Team (a partnership with the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office) and the urban search and rescue team, traveling to Mississippi in 2005 to aid in search and rescue efforts in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Then, at age 54, he enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserve, spending 11 months running a hospital in Iraq and serving as the battalion surgeon for a mountain warfare unit in Afghanistan.

After what he calls an “exciting and adventurous” career, Kiely is determined to continue doing what he loves, which includes spending time with his two daughters and six grandchildren in Pensacola and skiing near his vacation home in Lake Tahoe.

“I intend to stay as active as this disease will allow me,” said the 63-year-old, who ran in the San Diego Rock ‘n’ Roll Marathon prior to his diagnosis.

Kiely, who was named honorary medical director upon his retirement, even stops by the fire station regularly to see his firefighter family.

“Once a week I ride with the rescue chief just because I love it,” he said. “It just makes me feel like I’m still alive.”



PHOTO BY JESSE S. JONES



# A REUNION TO REMEMBER

- 1960
- 1965
- 1970
- 1975
- 1980
- 1985
- 1990
- 1995
- 2000
- 2005
- 2010

**UF** | College of Medicine  
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

## ALUMNI WEEKEND

OCTOBER 2-4, 2015

.....  
*Ready to return to The Swamp for Alumni Weekend 2015?*

Mark your calendars for Oct. 2-4 to reminisce and reconnect with fellow alumni and see how campus has evolved with the opening of the George T. Harrell, MD, Medical Education Building.

.....  
A full weekend of activities is planned, including the annual Notable Alumnus Lecture, opportunities to meet current medical students through a student-alumni speed networking event, a reunion dinner party and the annual football tailgate and watch party.

.....  
Highlighting the weekend will be reunions for the classes of 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005 and 2010.

.....  
For information on hotels, registration, football tickets and more, visit [drgator.ufl.edu/aw](http://drgator.ufl.edu/aw).



# Alumni Ambassador Network

From welcoming students to The Gator Nation to giving remarks at commencement, alumni can help shape future health care providers through every step of their educational journey.

## **What do UF College of Medicine alumni do for students?**

- Donate to support scholarships and learning tools
- Open their homes to students during residency interviews
- Host a Jacksonville Supper Club event for students rotating at UF Health Jacksonville
- Host a Gainesville Supper Club event for students (coming soon)
- Serve as mentors or guest speakers
- Serve as preceptors
- Advocate for the UF College of Medicine

**To learn more about how you can get involved, contact Heather Holcomb, director of UF Medical Alumni Affairs, at 352-273-9109 or [hholcomb@ufl.edu](mailto:hholcomb@ufl.edu).**

**Get involved with UF Medical Alumni Affairs by checking out these upcoming events**

**What:**  
UF College of Medicine Alumni Weekend

**When:**  
Oct. 2-4

**Where:**  
Gainesville, FL

**What:**  
UF School of Physician Assistant Studies Alumni and Student Tailgate

**When:**  
Sept. 12, 4-7 p.m.

**Where:**  
Reitz Union Lawn, Gainesville, FL

**What:**  
Housestaff Fall Barbecue

**When:**  
Oct. 24, 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

**Where:**  
George T. Harrell, MD, Medical Education Building, Gainesville, FL

# Giving the gift

TWO GATOR GRADUATES  
TRAVEL THE WORLD,  
RESTORING SIGHT AND  
PROVIDING CARE TO  
HUNDREDS LIVING IN  
IMPOVERISHED AREAS

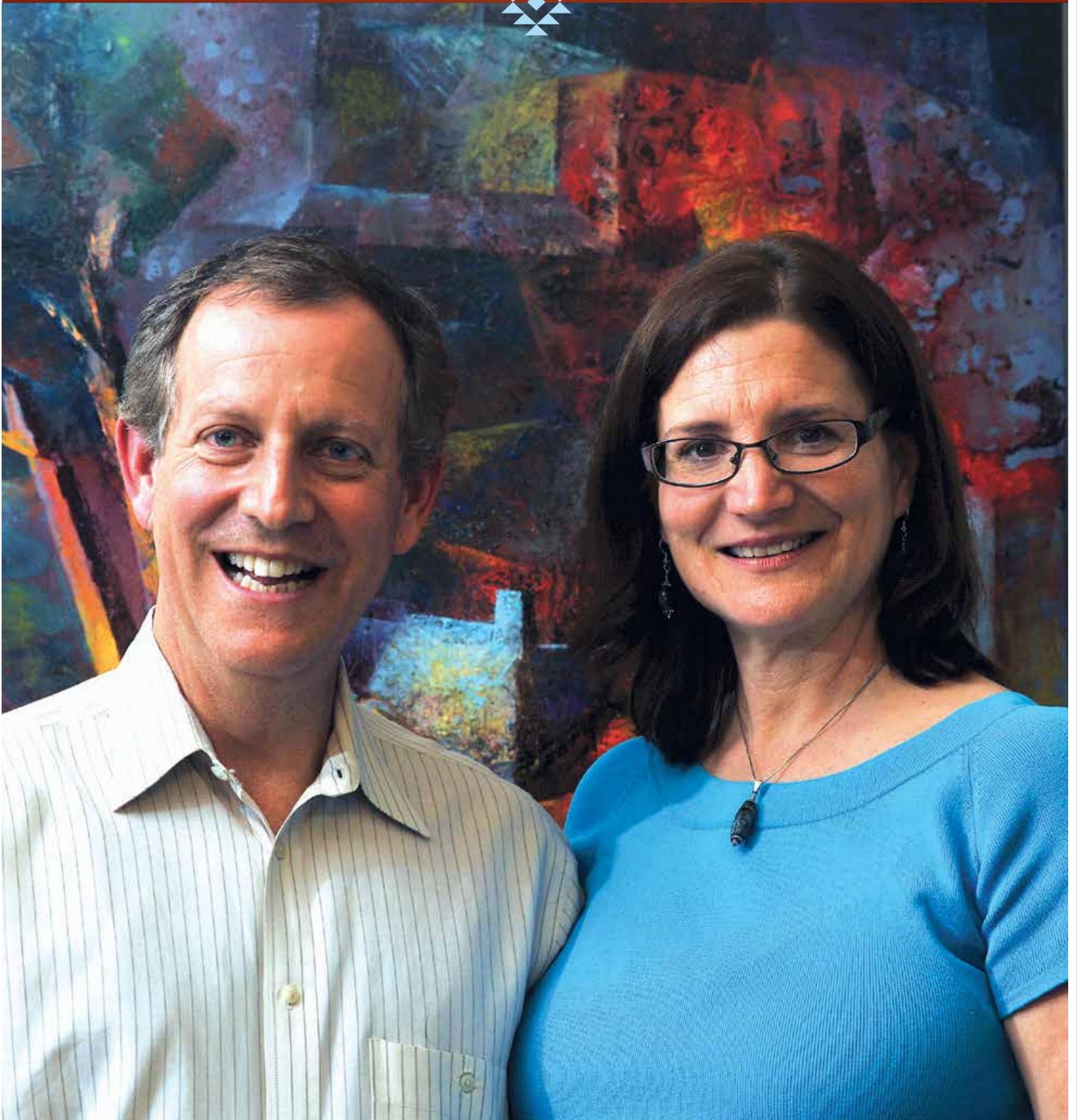


PHOTO BY RICK WILSON



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE LEVENSONS

Patients of Chalatenango, El Salvador, line up outside the medical tents — many after traveling hours on foot — to receive care.

BY MARY GOODWIN

When Jeffrey Levenson, MD '84, began losing his vision six years ago, he saw things in a different light. An ophthalmologist with 25 years of experience, he'd performed more than 20,000 cataract surgeries. It wasn't until he became the patient, however, that he truly appreciated the miracle of the sight-restoring procedure.

"Within weeks I was back at work, and I got to thinking 'What if I was born 50 years ago, before this procedure?'" Levenson said. "Then I had this terrible thought, 'What if I was born now but elsewhere in the world, where roughly 30 million people are completely blind from cataracts?'"

Later that year, Jeff and his wife, Ilene Levenson, MD '82, planned a trip to Peru, providing free medical care to underserved populations through Surgical Eye Expeditions, a nonprofit partnering with surgeons and international clinics to coordinate eye surgeries.

Each morning, the team of physicians would arrive at 7 a.m. to find a line of about 100 patients waiting to be seen — many of whom were completely blind and had walked for hours to reach the clinic. As a result of the surgery most of the patients had their sight completely restored, providing immediate relief to the patient and family members.

"We had a patient with a 7-year-old grandson," Jeff said, "and when we took off the grandfather's eye patch, the boy started dancing around the room because he could go to

school. It affects more than just that person."

In the last five years, the Levensons have voyaged across the world on nine self-funded trips, treating around 100 patients in each location.

"It's so meaningful when you're there," Ilene said. "People wait years to have these surgeries that otherwise wouldn't get done. When we returned to Peru, a man was waiting six hours in the hot sun just to say thank you. It's very humbling."

A sense of adventure is what brought the couple of 35 years together. Friends since the fourth grade, they fell in love in Paris on a backpacking trip across Europe. Soon after, Jeff relocated to Gainesville from New York to be with Ilene, who was studying internal medicine at the University of Florida College of Medicine. The following year, Jeff was accepted to the UF College of Medicine and they were married and later had three children, Annie, 28; Brian, 26; and Eric, 24.

The Levensons occasionally return to Gainesville — they attended Alumni Weekend two years ago to celebrate Ilene's 30th reunion, but were unable to attend Jeff's reunion this year due to a medical trip to Oaxaca, Mexico.

"Most people have a separation between work, home and hobbies. For us, it all blurs together," Jeff said. "Doing 100 cases each trip is amazing and life-changing for people and their families, but there are 30 million more out there who are blind. There's still so much more for us to do."



PHOTO BY RICK WILSON

Jeff and Ilene Levenson have traveled around the world on nine self-funded trips to provide eye care to patients in need.

**"A MAN WAS WAITING SIX HOURS IN THE HOT SUN JUST TO SAY THANK YOU. IT'S VERY HUMBLING."**

— ILENE LEVENSON, MD '82



# A new era for UF medical education

BY STYLIANA RESVANIS

After several years of dreaming, planning and building, the University of Florida celebrated a milestone event this summer.

The George T. Harrell, MD, Medical Education Building opened its doors July 29, becoming home to students training to become the next generation of health care professionals. Designed to promote interaction and

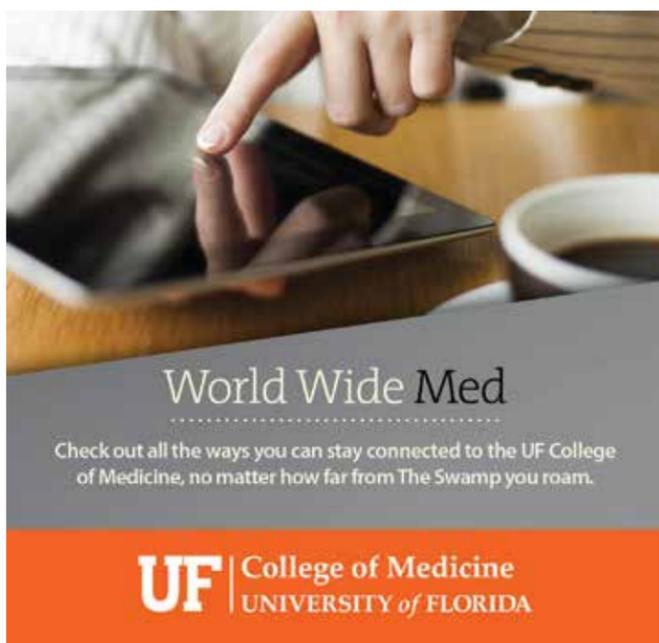
collaboration, the 95,000-square-foot space is the nation's premier medical education facility, equipped with the features and the spaces to support a modern curriculum.

The Harrell Medical Education Building, named after the UF College of Medicine's visionary founding dean, continues to be propelled by private philanthropy in its goal to provide a learning environment that embodies

the traditions of the past while responding to the needs of the ever-evolving health care landscape.

Look for complete coverage of the building's dedication in a special issue of the Florida Physician coming soon.

**To learn how you or your class can create a lasting legacy in the new medical education building, please visit [HowWeLearn.med.ufl.edu](http://HowWeLearn.med.ufl.edu) or contact Virginia Claus, director of reunion giving, at 352-273-8596 or [vclaus@ufl.edu](mailto:vclaus@ufl.edu).**



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Dr. Gator is produced by UF Health Communications for alumni, faculty and friends of the UF College of Medicine.

Dean  
**Michael L. Good, MD**  
[mgood@ufl.edu](mailto:mgood@ufl.edu)

President, Medical Alumni Association  
**Gina M. Sevigny, MD '94**

Editor  
**Karen M. Dooley, MAMC**  
352-273-5865  
[dooleyk@ufl.edu](mailto:dooleyk@ufl.edu)

Contributing Writers  
**Christine Boatwright**  
**Mary Goodwin**  
**Styliana Resvanis**  
**Morgan Sherburne**

Art Direction/Design  
**Mary Cecelia**

Photography  
**Jesse S. Jones**  
**Mindy C. Miller**

Please send address changes and other correspondence to:

**Karen M. Dooley**  
UF College of Medicine  
Director, Advancement Communications  
1600 SW Archer Road, Suite C3-025  
P.O. Box 100253  
Gainesville, FL 32610  
[dooleyk@ufl.edu](mailto:dooleyk@ufl.edu)