



**A Conversation  
with Associate Dean  
Kathleen Wiater**



In January 2004, Kathleen Wiater was named associate dean and senior director for advancement and constituent relations in the School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences.

In this capacity, she is responsible for leading the Office of Advancement in efforts aimed at integrating outreach to alumni, friends and donors to the school. These efforts include development, alumni and other constituent relations, special events, marketing, communications and publications.

Wiater is a native of North Tonawanda, New York, and a graduate of the State University of New York at Fredonia. Prior to coming to UB, she served as director of development for the School of Nursing at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Previous to that she served as director of corporate/foundation relations at the University of Rochester Medical Center and as assistant to the president of Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York.

Recently, Wiater spoke with *Buffalo Physician* as part of an ongoing series of conversations with leaders of the UB School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. The goal of these conversations is to provide readers with a context for understanding the many new initiatives taking place on campus.

Those of you who have read past conversations with deans and senior associate deans are aware that our school faces a myriad of challenges, many of which are related to the rising cost of medical education, coupled with a significant

decrease in the amount of support the school receives from the state. As a result, private philanthropy has become increasingly important. Gifts from

alumni and friends are essential if the school is to attract the “best and brightest” students with competitive scholarship packages, to continue to provide outstanding medical training to current students, and to direct seed funds toward innovative research projects taking place in its laboratories.

As the role of Advancement in the School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences is expanding, so too are the programs and opportunities for alumni to support the school.

In the first of a two-part interview, Wiater discusses annual giving and the critical role it plays in advancing the school’s goals; in Part II, which will be published in a future issue of *Buffalo Physician*, she will discuss endowments and major gifts.

—S. A. UNGER, EDITOR

# ANNUAL DONORS AS Stakeholders

**Q: What is Annual Giving?**

**A:** “Annual giving” is what we call those philanthropic gifts to the School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences that donors make on a yearly basis, often at the same time each year. They are typically given in response to the letters or phone calls (and sometimes visits) we make to our alumni and friends of the school and come from our donors’ discretionary income, as opposed to savings or accumulated assets.

**Q: Why is annual giving important?**

**A:** Annual giving is the foundation of every fundraising venture, the gift base on which all other gifts take root. Annual gifts are essential to the health of a school because they allow the school to seize opportunities as they emerge during the academic year; for example, opportunities that did not exist during the budget process. Annual donors are true stakeholders in the school. In essence they “vote” every year for the medical and scientific education and training of students to continue and to flourish. Annual gifts are essential to the school year after year, and they are important as well because from them spring the major gifts that support scholarships, professorships, and special initiatives critical to the growth of the school.

Another reason annual giving is important is that it serves as a standard measure of satisfaction with a school or university. For this reason, savvy students look at annual giving participation when making choices about which universities to attend. If alumni are happy with their experience at their alma mater, they will give to the annual fund. Corporations and foundations also weigh the giving-participation rate of alumni before awarding grants to an institution. Often we are asked by these grant-making institutions what percentage of our alumni base gives to the annual fund. Finally, annual-giving participation is a criterion used in the rankings of colleges and universities.

**Q: Specifically, what does my annual gift support?**

**A:** Some portion of gifts received by the school is designated by the donor for a particular department or endowed fund. These are called “restricted funds.” One very popular restricted fund is the Medical Alumni Endowed Scholarship Fund, and there are donors who prefer to support this fund each year to help bolster student financial aid packages. Most donors, however, choose to make an “unrestricted” gift to the Dean’s Excellence Fund, and these funds have been used in the past to support students—

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their poster presentations on research day at the school, their travel to present at conferences, special orientation and commencement activities—and to recruit faculty and purchase equipment. Sometimes there are special annual projects that we put forward to donors. Over the course of the past two years, for example, we have asked donors to consider supporting the upgrade of the Clinical Competency Center with their annual gifts, and gifts were directed to this fund when donors requested the designation. As a result of donor giving, we concluded a successful campaign and held a ribbon-cutting event at the newly renovated center.

**Q: What are the characteristics of annual donors?**

**A:** It is deeply satisfying and inspiring to talk with consistent annual donors. They typically tell us that they believe in “giving back” to the school that made it possible for them to experience the kind of career and lifestyle they and their families enjoy. Many annual donors received scholarships when they attended medical school. Others tell us stories about memorable faculty and the strong connections they made to their classmates. These donors’ experiences as students and their stay in Buffalo are couched in warm memories and expressed through consistent annual gifts. Very often annual donors tell us that they will continue to give annually but to “keep in touch” with them because at some point they would like “to do more.”



**Q: What is the typical dollar amount of an annual gift?**

**A:** Annual gifts come in all ranges, from \$50 a year, for example, to \$10,000 or more, depending on the donor. These gifts come from alumni, parents, faculty, staff and friends. What matters most to the school is the giving consistency of a donor and the participation rate of the constituency. In the 2004-2005 academic year, annual donors gave nearly \$400,000 to the medical school, and many of those gifts were from donors who had made gifts to the school in previous years.

**Q: What is the James Platt White Society?**

**A:** The James Platt White Society is our name for the school's donors who make annual gifts of \$1,000 or more to the school. It is a recognition society, which means that it is a way for us to identify and honor these good donors at a dinner each year. Donors may direct their gifts in any way they choose. They may give to the Dean's Excellence Fund, the unrestricted fund for the medical school, or they may give to an endowment that is close to their heart; for example, a scholarship fund such as the Medical Alumni Endowed Scholarship Fund. Regardless of a gift's designation, if the donor's gifts to the medical school total \$1,000 or more during the academic year, they become a member of the James Platt White Society.

**Q: What is the timeframe to make a gift to be considered a member of the James Platt White Society?**

**A:** Cumulative gifts of \$1,000 or more to the school received between July 1 and June 30 of any academic year entitles the donor to membership in the James Platt White Society. This timeframe is new and differs from the calendar year we have used in the past. We decided that it made more sense to model the university's academic and fiscal year (July 1-June 30). By doing so, we can provide the opportunity for alumni celebrating reunions to become members of the James Platt White Society during the year in which they celebrate a reunion. With this change, donors will now be invited to attend the annual recognition dinner in the summer. The 2005 dinner will take place in August of 2006.

**Q: If I have never given before, what should I consider giving?**

**A:** A gift in any amount is wonderful—it is a donor's vote of confidence in the work of the medical school and a vote of support for current students. If a donor can afford a \$1,000 gift to the school, however, it gives us the ability to recognize them for their gift through the James Platt White Society and to pull them into the life of the school through special programs and communications.

**Q: Why do donors give, and what do they receive in return?**

**A:** Many people who are not philanthropically minded are often curious about what donors receive from their giving. Our donors, however, are quite articulate about what they receive from their philanthropy. I'd venture to say that all of them feel close to the school and want to retain a closeness to the academic community that nurtured their intellectual growth and served as a springboard to fulfilling lives and careers. Donors are as much a part of the lifeblood of the school as the students and faculty. Through their giving they stay connected with their classmates, the faculty who taught

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them, and the students who follow in their footsteps. They want to continue to enjoy the intellectual and social connections and traditions offered by the medical school and the greater university community. Not surprisingly, many donors describe themselves as “life-long learners”. Our donors are part of a proud legacy and a longstanding scholarly community, and we value deeply their interest and investment in the school and its students.

**Q: Why do I receive a telephone call from a UB student asking for my gift?**

**A:** The Advancement Office of the School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences coordinates annual gift solicitation with the university. All alumni of the university are asked to make an annual gift either through UB's call center, which is staffed by UB students, or via direct mail. We are currently building the annual giving program for the medical school, however, and in addition to these calls we are trying to reach our donors through face-to-face conversations, with particular attention to our donors who give at the James Platt White Society level. We hear occasionally that our donors would like to be called by medical

students, and though this presents a challenge given the schedules of our students, this past spring we were able to attract a few medical students to calling some of our alumni who were celebrating reunions.

**Q: What else are you doing to increase annual giving to the medical school?**

**A:** It's important to remember that philanthropy is relatively new at UB. Despite the medical school's 160-year history, many alumni and friends have not been enlisted to help the school financially. We are working on building relationships with our alumni that will help the school to realize annual gifts to support students and faculty.

We are also working to build our reunion-giving program, an important part of annual giving. This past year, we met with reunion chairs and with them developed individual strategies to increase class giving. As a result of the support from class chairs, reunion giving in 2005 increased 49 percent from 2004. We would like to see alumni celebrating reunions make greater commitments during their reunion year and pledge their gifts over a five-year time span. For example, an alumnus may



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commit a \$1,000 gift during his reunion year. We would like for that same alumnus to consider pledging \$1,000 each year for the next five years. This \$5,000 gift total would be a wonderful gift of support, taking the alumnus up to his or her next reunion celebration. If all alumni in reunion years took this approach to their giving, support for the medical school would increase significantly.

**Q:** How do I make an annual gift?

**A:** When a student calls, please consider making a gift. Or you may give when you receive a letter in the mail asking you for an annual gift. You may opt to complete the giving envelope includ-

ed in this issue of *Buffalo Physician* or you may call the Office of Advancement at (716) 829-2773 or 1-877-826-3246. Lastly, you may visit UB online at [www.buffalo.edu/giving](http://www.buffalo.edu/giving) and click on "Give Online" icon. Alternately, visit us! The Office of Advancement is located on the ground floor of the Biomedical Education Building, across from the Office of Medical Education.

**Q:** What else should we know about annual giving?

**A:** You should know that every gift makes a difference. You should also know how important your gift is to the school and to the generations of physicians and researchers who will follow in your footsteps. If you don't support them, who will? **BP**

## Medical Alumni Endowed Scholarship Fund

Help us reach the \$1 million mark

**N**o one better understands a medical school's costs and benefits than its alumni. Looking back, many physicians clearly recall their own balancing act between studying and paying bills—and that was before tuition increased to \$18,000 per year and students graduated with average debts of \$100,000.

In 1993, in order to help ease the financial burden faced by our medical students, members of the UB Medical Alumni Association established The Medical Alumni Association Endowed Scholarship Fund. After nearly 13 years, the fund has grown

to \$780,000 and the school is looking to alumni and friends to help it reach the \$1 million mark.

In 2005, the fund provided \$26,000 in scholarship support to UB medical students.

"This support is critical," says Charles M. Severin, MD '97, PhD, interim associate dean for medical education and admissions. "With publicly funded loans and grants declining, scholarships provided through the generosity of alumni and other private donors are increasingly important. Financial aid plays a big part in a student's decision about where to attend medical school, and UB must compete with other

renowned medical institutions that have well-established scholarship endowments.

"In reaching the \$1 million mark," he adds, "we will bolster our financial-aid packages and have resources to recruit the best student candidates available."

Help us reach our \$1 million goal. Please consider a gift to the Medical Alumni Endowed Scholarship Fund. Return the gift envelope included in this issue or visit [www.giving.buffalo.edu](http://www.giving.buffalo.edu) and make your gift online. For more information on how you can support scholarship opportunities at the medical school, call the Office of Advancement at (716) 829-2773. **BP**

# Why Do *You* Give?

We asked two alumni who are annual donors why they give to the School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, and here's what they told us:

"I am a big believer in giving back to the institutions that gave me the superb education I received. I think it's the right thing to do, and it is my pleasure to do so. I needed financial help when I was in school and I want students to know that there are grateful graduates who are there to help them. I hope my giving helps someone else so that they don't have to worry so much about finances while they are in school."

Merrill Miller, MD '71  
James Platt White Donor since 1986

"My education at UB paved the way for the rest of my life, which has been fun and successful. I'm forever grateful for that—and all of us who pass through UB's doors should be. An annual gift to the school is the smallest of small gestures by which to acknowledge my gratitude."

Kenneth Z. Altshuler, MD '52  
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# James Platt White Society

JANUARY 1—JUNE 30, 2005



Founded in 1846, the University at Buffalo School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences has a proud history. James Platt White, MD (1811–1881), one of the nation's first practicing obstetricians and gynecologists, was one of the founders of the school. Later, he became a professor and served as dean of the school until he died in 1881.

James Platt White contributed significantly to society and to the university through his clinical and academic leadership. It is fitting that we associate his name with the distinguished donors who make leadership gifts to the School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences through the James Platt White Society.

Members of the James Platt White Society give gifts of \$1,000 or more annually to the School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. This special group of donors may choose to support a variety of options: student scholarships; seed funding for ground-breaking scientific and clinical research; the Dean's Excellence Fund, which provides the dean flexibility to take advantage of unanticipated opportunities that arise mid-year; or established school funds that have special meaning for donors, such as memorial funds.

Donors who choose to become a James Platt White Society member honor the fine history of their alma mater and the tradition of leadership set by physicians and medical researchers. They themselves become leaders through their giving and their stalwart support of the generations of Buffalo-educated physicians who will follow them. We are pleased and proud to recognize this very special group of donors.

The following donors made gifts to the School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences between January 1, 2005 and June 30, 2005.

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