



JAMES PLATT WHITE SOCIETY

The annual James Platt White Society recognition dinner honors donors who give \$1,000 or more to the School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences during the academic year (see listing on the following pages).

Dean Michael E. Cain, MD, shared his vision for the school and how private philanthropy is essential for it to achieve its full potential for excellence in research, education and clinical care.

The dinner was held August, 13, 2009, at the Saturn Club on Delaware Avenue in Buffalo.



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- 1) Alfred Stein, MD '58, and Howard Wilinsky, MD '61
- 2) From left, C. Richard Zobel, PhD, Joyce Zobel, Susan Moudy, Philip Moudy, MD '72
- 3) Mr. Michael Collins and Kathleen O'Leary, MD '88
- 4) From left, Charles Niles, MD '83, Ellen Niles, Aziza Karimi, MD, and Faruk Koreishi, MD
- 5) Cheryl Rosso and James Rosso
- 6) Victor Filadoro II, MD '99, and Stacy Akers, MD



JAMES PLATT WHITE SOCIETY

THE JAMES PLATT WHITE SOCIETY is the medical school's recognition society that consists of donors who make gifts of \$1,000 or more annually to the School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences.

Annual giving is the foundation of fundraising. These gifts are essential to the health of the school because they allow the school to seize opportunities as they emerge during the academic year.

Annual donors are true stakeholders of the school. In essence they "vote" every year for the medical and scientific education and training of students to continue and to flourish.

Special thanks to the following alumni and friends of the school for their generous support. The following donors made gifts to the School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences between July 1, 2008, and June 30, 2009.

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Help Along the Way

By NICOLE PERADOTTO

Somit scholars have overcome obstacles, thrived

SANEL SADIBASIC WAS FIVE YEARS OLD when the war raging in Bosnia-Herzegovina landed, literally, on his doorstep. Although some details of those turbulent years have escaped his mind, others he can't forget.

He can still hear the high-pitched whine of mortar shells careening toward Earth. He can still picture the boot of an enemy soldier who had been sitting just feet from his family's hideout.

Then there were the toothaches. They caused him such excruciating pain that even talking about them today makes him wince.

"I was unable to eat, and I was always worrying about my teeth," he says. "I never had a toothbrush, and I never had my teeth taken care of until I came to the United States when I was 10. By that point, I had cavities in all my teeth and had lost four or five molars."

A DECADE AND A HALF LATER, the lingering memory of his toothaches fuels Sadibasic's American dream: He wants to become a dentist. His goal was given a major boost this year, when the senior biochemistry major received the Mary Rosenblum Somit Scholarship, a \$3,000 annual award to a deserving undergraduate in the UB School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences.

"Receiving the scholarship tells me that all the work I've put in has paid off, and it motivates me to strive for better and greater things," says Sadibasic. "I'm just very appreciative."

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Somit scholarship, established by former UB executive vice president Albert Somit, PhD, in honor of his mother, a Russian immigrant who was widowed when he was four and who worked throughout her life to ensure that her only child would be able to attend a good college.

To celebrate, Somit, who served as the university's acting president in 1977, traveled from his home in Carlsbad, California, to Buffalo last August to reunite with the Somit scholars. Of the 11, four have MDs, including three who graduated from UB's medical school.

"It was gratifying to see that they had all delivered on their promises," Somit said of the accomplished group. "They've gone on to do

very well, and it's been wonderful for me to see firsthand how successful they've become."

As for Sadibasic, the recipient of the 2009–2010 award, Somit found his personal history awe-inspiring. "What he went through reminds me of the immigrants who arrived on America's shores between roughly 1880 and World War I. Many of them had lived in areas where they had endured racial prejudice, and they had very unpleasant memories of that. But they turned out to be some of the best citizens we ever had.

"Sanel's story is a distillation of that experience: someone who survives, comes here and turns everything around."

Somit notes that selecting one student each year from the competitive pool of applicants is no easy task. "Dean Rokitka has played a major role in shaping the scholarship," he says, referring to Mary Ann Rokitka, PhD, associate dean for undergraduate education and clinical associate professor in the department of physics and biophysics. "She heads the committee that chooses the awardees—often a difficult task—and has taken a personal interest in their careers."

In making that decision, the committee gives preference to undergraduates, such as Sadibasic, who are first-generation college students and immigrants (or the children of immigrants).

In July 2009, Sadibasic's status changed from legal immigrant to U.S. citizen during a naturalization ceremony that he describes as a formality.

"Getting my U.S. citizenship was just the government recognizing me as an American when I already felt like an American on the inside," says Sadibasic, who, in addition to going to school, works as a part-time manager at Mighty Taco. "After leaving my home country, I felt like I became Americanized very quickly. I had homesickness for the first month, and then I adapted. I didn't really miss my country after that."

To hear the chapter of his early childhood, it's little wonder.

The younger son of a Muslim father who planned roadway construction and a Serbian mother who was a courtroom stenographer, Sadibasic was born in Travnik, a city near Bosnia's center. As ethnic minorities in a predominantly Croat region, they were targeted during the Bosnian war, a conflict among Bosnian Serbs, Croats and Muslims that is considered the most brutal saga in the breakup of Yugoslavia.

In 1993, a year after the war started, the Sadibasic's peace was shattered.

"My aunt was killed because she was a different ethnicity than her neighbors," Sadibasic says. "It was around six in the

morning and she was gardening. She didn't think anything would happen that early, and she didn't think anything would happen because she was a civilian. But she was sniped in her garden, and she died in her daughter's arms."

SADIBASIC'S AUNT was not the only war casualty in his family. His great-uncle—a veteran of both World Wars—was shot dead while standing on his porch.

In his mind's eye, Sadibasic can still see the pool of blood left behind after his body was removed. "Everyone considered my great-uncle the nicest person," Sadibasic says. "During Ramadan he would slaughter lamb and distribute it to the neighbors. He was highly regarded in our community. For him to die senselessly was just sad."

Throughout the conflict, different groups of masked fighters hunkered down in the Sadibasic house, using it as a hideout. While there, they looted their valuables.

One morning, soldiers kicked through the front door, demanding to know the family's ethnicity. Trying to save themselves, they insisted that they were Roman Catholic Croats. For four days the soldiers confined them to their cellar. Under cover of night, a neighbor ferreted them out and hid them in his own basement. The extended family, 16 people in all, huddled down there for more than two weeks in a state of constant fear of being discovered and executed by paramilitary troops.

"The basement had one little window, and I could see the boot of an enemy soldier so close to the house," Sadibasic recalls. "He was sitting on a bench with his military group. We were all supposed to be quiet, and he didn't notice that we were there. But I was terrified. I had nightmares afterward. Even after the war, I would wake up with night sweats."

A United Nations peacekeeping team rescued the family, but not before fighters demanded that they hand over all military-age men. While his wife and sons were transported by truck to an adjacent city, Sadibasic's father, Salih, was sent to a concentration camp.

Thanks to a prisoner exchange among warring factions, he was reunited with his family four months later. To this day, his younger son has never asked him what he endured during his internment. "As long as he came back safe, that was fine. I don't want to hear the horror stories of concentration camps. I read textbooks about Nazi Germany. I don't want to think of those things."

Trying to stay one step ahead of danger, the Sadibasics traveled on foot from one city to the next. Sometimes, strangers took pity on them, lodging them until their own relatives came seeking safe haven and space became too tight. Then, they were on the move again.

Food was scarce; frequently they subsisted only on a soup of onions, water and salt. "If we got some beans in there it would be like a Christmas present," Sadibasic says.

Ironically, Sadibasic feared enemy attack less than his own body failing him. "I developed bronchitis, so I would wheeze and get terribly congested. And I had the horrible toothaches. I was feeling very sick the whole time. Once it got so bad that my mom took me in her arms and carried me 10 kilometers to the hospital."

Ultimately, the family settled in the industrial city of Zenica, which means "iris" and is so-named because of its location in the center of Bosnia. Surrounded by enemy armies at the war's peak, Zenica was by then regarded as a safe zone. Still, experience had taught Sadibasic to duck for cover whenever he heard mortar fire. "They shelled the heck out of the city, but we still felt relatively safe because there wasn't internal conflict. It was only shelling—we considered that very safe," he says.

In 1995 the war ended and the Sadibasics began to rebuild. The two brothers started school in Zenica. Sadibasic's father had sustained a gunshot wound to his arm early in the war, so it fell to his mother to provide for the family while he recuperated. To that end, she took trips to Hungary and Turkey

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46

The following is a list of the Somit scholars and where they are today:

1999–2000 SOMIT SCHOLAR

Diana Wilkins, MD '04: clinical assistant professor and assistant director of residency education in the UB Department of Family Medicine

2000–2001 SOMIT SCHOLAR

Katherine Rizzone, MD: resident in medicine-pediatrics at Vanderbilt University Medical School

2001–2002 SOMIT SCHOLAR

Ilana Kuznets: medical student at Technion Israel Institute of Technology, Technion American Medical Students Program

2002–2003 SOMIT SCHOLAR

Inna Rozov, MD '07: resident in internal medicine in the UB Department of Medicine

2003–2004 SOMIT SCHOLAR

Narasimhachar Prativadi, MD '08: resident in diagnostic radiology at the University of Rochester School of Medicine

2004–2005 SOMIT SCHOLAR

Abdulqwai Rashed: enrolled in medical school

2005–2006 SOMIT SCHOLAR

James B. Lim: third-year medical student at Albert Einstein College of Medicine

2006–2007 SOMIT SCHOLAR

Agnieska Laskowski: PhD candidate in cell biology and human anatomy in the School of Medicine at the University of California-Davis

2007–2008 SOMIT SCHOLAR

Comlan Missihoun: first-year dental student at SUNY Stony Brook School of Dental Medicine

2008–2009 SOMIT SCHOLAR

Kofi Aseno-Mensah: applying to U.S. medical schools

2009–2010 SOMIT SCHOLAR

Sanel Sadibasic: senior biochemistry major at UB School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences (see article, opposite)

ABOVE LEFT: The 2009–2010 Somit Scholar, Sanel Sadibasic, with his mother, Snjezana. "I really look up to her," Sanel says. "Our parents raised us not to dwell on the past—just learn from it."



Save the Date

REUNION WEEKEND 2010 | April 23–24, 2010

To be held at the Butler Mansion on Delaware Avenue and the Adam's Mark Hotel in downtown Buffalo

CLASS CHAIRS

SEATED (FROM LEFT): Joseph Cardamone, MD '65; John Peterson, MD '55; James Kanski, MD '60; Roger Dayer, MD '60; and Herbert Joyce, MD '45
BACK ROW (FROM LEFT): Jack Freer, MD '75; Sylvia Regalla, MD '75; Ellis Eugenia Gomez, MD '90; Jack Coyne, MD '85; Elizabeth Maher, MD '85; Donald Copley, MD '70; and Margaret Eberl, MD '00, MPH '05
NOT PICTURED: Andrea Buccilli, MD '05; Martin Mahoney, MD '95 PhD; Margaret Paroski, MD '80, MMM; Martin Terplan, MD '55; Sidney Anthone, MD '50; and Robert Patterson, MD '50

PHOTO BY JOE CASIC

HELP ALONG THE WAY, CONT'D FROM P. 45

to buy cigarettes, candy and clothing, which she resold at Zenica's open-air market.

The couple squirreled away their profits; with post-war Bosnia in economic tatters, and with ethnic tension still running high, they knew that the only hope of a promising future lay far from their native country. In 1998 they immigrated to the United States, living first in Vancouver,

Washington, before relocating to Buffalo in 2004, where Sadibasic graduated from City Honors high school.

With his undergraduate education approaching its end, Sadibasic is now preparing to apply to dental school. He hopes to be accepted at UB's School of Dental Medicine and eventually practice in the city he calls home.

Before starting graduate school, however, he plans to return to Bosnia. He'd like to work with a dentist there, educating his former countrymen about oral hygiene and taking care of their teeth. As he puts

it: "I want to help people in need."

At the same time, Sadibasic looks forward to reconnecting with the childhood friends he has tracked down on Facebook.

"Even though we didn't have anything, we still had good times," Sadibasic says of his class. "If my friend didn't have money, I bought a piece of bread and split it with him. It was brotherly love. That's how our generation was raised. In that classroom I developed close friendships with Roman Catholic kids, Eastern Orthodox kids and Muslim children as well. I see that as a beautiful thing, you know?" **BP**

SOMIT SCHOLARS, FROM LEFT: Kofi Aseno-Mensah; Ilana Kuznets; Inna Rozov, MD '07; Sanel Sadibasic; and Diana Wilkins, MD '04; with Albert Somit, PhD, center.



“Sanel’s story is a distillation of that experience: someone who survives, comes here and turns everything around.”

—ALBERT SOMIT, PHD

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My Fellow Alumni,

A

re you a member of the Medical Alumni Association (MAA)? Do you even know if you are a member of the MAA? At various medical school class reunions, I have spoken with classmates who assumed incorrectly that because they receive each edition of *Buffalo Physician* they are members of the MAA. In fact, *Buffalo Physician* is free for all alumni of the School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. The MAA depends on membership dues in order to fulfill its purpose, which, as I outlined in my previous column, includes supporting the alumni, as well as offering a variety of programs to support and improve the quality of life of the medical students. Programs sponsored or cosponsored by the MAA include the following:

- Community Physician Lunches, at which a community physician speaks with medical students about his or her career, outside interests, family and how to achieve a balance amongst these facets of one's life.
- Distinguished Medical Alumnus Award Dinner, at which a nationally recognized alumnus is recognized and honored.
- Reunion Weekend and Spring Clinical Day—festivities on Friday evening and Saturday evening, and a nationally renowned speaker on Saturday morning, followed by lunch.
- Student Clinician Ceremony, at which Medical Alumni Association provides third-year medical students with a reference guide, which will aid them throughout their clinical years.
- Polity Student Government Clubs and Programs, student-run interest groups, and medical organizations host educational opportunities for current students.
- Student Mentoring Program—a mentor directory is provided to the students, listing by specialty local physicians who have volunteered to mentor medical students.
- UB HOST (Help Our Students Travel) Program, whereby alumni in other cities volunteer to house and provide services for the fourth-year students traveling to these cities to interview for residency positions.
- White Coat Ceremony, an initiation of first-year students into the medical profession.



Emeritus members of the Board of Directors of the MAA are actively involved in creating a healthier environment on campus (Helen Cappuccino has spearheaded a campus-wide commitment to create a smoke-free environment at UB, which was reported on in the last issue of *Buffalo Physician*) and creating a substantial Medical Alumni Scholarship Fund so that UB can compete with other medical schools for the best and brightest medical students (John Bodkin and the *Practice Giving* campaign).

If you are not a member of the MAA, please visit <http://alumni.buffalo.edu/how-join-renew> to join today. Dues are \$75 per year for a joint membership in the MAA and the UB Alumni Association, or \$1,000 for a Life Membership of the MAA. The MAA has partnered with the UBAA in order to better serve our members, including offering a variety of perks. If you are uncertain if you are a member, please email jlobaugh@buffalo.edu.

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