My Fellow Alumni,

Twenty-five years have come and gone since I graduated from UB’s medical school. Graduation was followed by a residency in ophthalmology at UB and a fellowship in glaucoma at the University of Toronto.

I went into private practice in Western New York, participated in resident training and headed the glaucoma service for several years. Private practice has supplied its share of satisfying achievements and rewards, and I think often about my education and training at UB.

Now it’s a whole new world for the Department of Ophthalmology—it has a new home in the state-of-the-art Ross Eye Institute (REI). The REI provides the opportunity for great advances in resident training, as well as potential for both clinical and basic science research. Through the efforts, vision and financial support of an alumna, Dr. Elizabeth Olimsted Ross, the REI made the transition from concept to reality.

This story is but a single example of the promising winds of change that currently are swirling around our medical school while it follows a course that seems destined to take it into a bright future. Those of us who are close to the school are energized by what we see and hear and have great hopes for the future of the school and the university.

One of the most exciting ways that the school can move forward is through the roles that alumni can play. Alumni have the opportunity to help fund scholarships to attract the best and brightest students, and endowed chairs to help recruit world-class faculty. Dean Cain has, in fact, named endowed scholarships and chairs as two of his top priorities, and I hope that the efforts, resources and generosity of our dedicated alumni can be tapped for support of these key goals. We anticipate UB HOST, designed to assist current medical students in their search for a residency program, to be a huge success. Alumni throughout the country are encouraged to participate in this effort.

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As I start my term as president of the Medical Alumni Association, I look forward to helping the School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences meet its challenges and capitalize on its many opportunities. I am lucky to follow Dr. Helen Cappuccino, our immediate past president, who has taught me much through her leadership of the Medical Alumni Association. I also am lucky to serve with an extremely dedicated board and to follow Dr. Helen Cappuccino, our immediate past president, who has taught me much through her leadership of the Medical Alumni Association.

I am happy to attend the reunion, but our happy thoughts shall be with you. Shirley and I still have our full heads of hair, and fortunately our minds are still fairly sharp. This June we shall have been married 60 years. A short resume: After Carlisle, I was sent to Brooks Hospital in Saigon. The Yule Medical School general hospital in Saigon. By causing Hirohito to surrender, Truman probably saved my life since I was scheduled for the invasion of Japan. After this, I was in charge of anesthesia at the Tripler Hospital in Honolulu, Hawaii, and returned to the U.S. emergency. My last assignment was at Fort Sills. After that I had my fellowship at the University of Minnesota in ophthalmology. I have practiced in Portland, Maine, since then. I still have my medical license but this may be the last year since I no longer drive and can’t attend the staff meetings at Maine Medical Center. Again, best wishes to all our medical school friends.

Thank you,

Charles Niles, MD ’83
President, Medical Alumni Association (2008–2009)
What’s Up Doc?

Dr. Beth J. Wutz Memorial Award

T HIS YEAR’S HONORS CEREMONY, the first Dr. Beth J. Wutz Memorial Award was presented to Lauren Dunford, MD ‘08, by Michael Aronica, MD ‘93, program director of the UB combined internal medicine and pediatrics residency program, who made the follow- ing statement.

“I am his honor and privilege to introduce to you the Beth J. Wutz Memorial Award. Beth was a colleague of mine and a very esteemed friend. She graduated from the University at Buffalo in 1992, after which she completed her training in combined internal medicine and pediatrics in 1996. She remained on as a faculty member until starting her own private practice as both an internist and a pediatrician.

“Beth’s life was cut short after a tragic illness, but her memory lives on in her patients, her colleagues and her family. Beth’s career was a bright spot here in Western New York. She was a local girl who grew up and pursued her dream to become a doctor, and she went to school here locally and stayed here. She worked extraordinary hours as a dedicated, empathetic, intelligent and down-to-earth physician. While she cared for a number of complex adult patients, she was especially dedicated to her pediatric patients. Beth loved children. She was a great teacher and understanding colleague. There was one choice this year for the Beth J. Wutz Memorial Award to Lauren Dunford.”

Herbert Newton, MD ‘84, writes:

“I remain professor of neurology and oncology and the Esther Dardinger Endowed Chair in Neuro-Oncology at the Ohio State University Medical Center and James Cancer Hospital. I recently published a new book, titled Handbook of Neuro-Oncology Neuroimaging, which is now the most comprehensive textbook available regarding the imaging of brain tumors and other neuro-oncological illnesses. An update on my children: Alex continues to play soccer and is also a lead guitar player for several bands. Ashley is heavily into YMCA swimming and also takes guitar and singing lessons.”

Lauren Dunford, MD ‘08, writes:

“I am proud to award the first Beth J. Wutz Memorial Award to Lauren Dunford.”

Summer 2008 Buffalo Physician 40
Health and Healing

Brian French, MD ’04, is an educator at heart

Between his second and third years of medical school, Brian French, MD ’04, decided to take a year off and join AmeriCorps, a federal agency whose mission is to improve lives, strengthen communities and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering. While some of his friends and teachers were hesitant when he told them what he was going to do, French decided to follow his heart because he knew better than most that life is short—and precious.

When French was five years old, his older brother, David, died of a brain tumor at age 13; three years later, his father died of lung cancer at age 45. French received no counseling at the time, nor did his mother or older brother and sister. Instead, he says, “We all shut down, not because we wanted it that way, but because we didn’t have the tools. We didn’t know how to help each other.”

A talented athlete, French focused his energy and unresolved anger on football at Williamsville East High School. Although he received several letters to play football in college, he decided to concentrate on academics with the goal of becoming a doctor. He began his undergraduate studies at Canisius College, and after two years transferred to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he majored in Asian studies and at age 20 gained entrance to UB’s medical school through its early assurance program.

He did well in medical school, but still there was the calling to join AmeriCorps, which he acted upon. While participating in the program, one of his four assignments involved his spending two months working at King-Chavez Elementary School in a poor, inner-city neighborhood in San Diego, California. There he met principal Dennis McKeown, who, French says, “changed my life.”

“I loved the school, I loved what they were doing and I loved the mission,” he explains. “This was about social justice and social reform and someone who was doing something about it, not just talking.”

After his 10-month commitment with AmeriCorps ended, French returned to UB and completed medical school. While serving a hospice rotation in Ireland during his fourth year, he says he “had an epiphany” that there was something else out there for him, although he didn’t know what it was.

In the intervening years, his mother had remarried and moved to California. On a trip out to see her after medical school, French again visited King-Chavez Elementary School and met with McKeown, who not only offered him a job teaching physical education and coaching sports, but also held out the possibility that he could be principal of his own charter school.

Under Proposition 39 in California, anyone can start a school if they write a charter and have it approved by the local school district board. McKeown and French did this and were granted approval to take over operation of a neighborhood school that had been failing for more than 30 years. In 2005, the administrative transfer took place, at which time the school was renamed King-Chavez Athletics Academy, and French was appointed principal.

Today the academy has 150 students, grades three through five, 95 percent of whom are Latino and considered “urban poor” (all qualify for free or reduced lunches).

“We teach to the mind, body and spirit of each child, all of whom have the same struggles and who experience the same social ills as do many children in every community, except that they are more pronounced here,” says French. “You have addiction, you have neglect, you have fathers and brothers and cousins who have been in gang shootings or who are in jail—any dysfunctional situation you can imagine is here. So this is a place where love is needed the most.”

Love and discipline, he emphasizes, with both grounded in mental and physical health. In addition to having 40 minutes of physical education and 40 minutes of free play every day, the students begin their day with warm-up exercises led by French. Staff pay special attention to nutrition and to teaching healthy eating habits, with a focus on preventing obesity and diabetes.

Among other things, this has resulted in adjustments to the traditional Mexican-diet in school meals; for example, olive oil is substituted for lard in beans.

In the three years French has been principal of the school, test scores, as measured by the state, have improved 150 points, reflecting the highest gain made by any elementary school in San Diego County. French is the first to say that because the scores “started at the bottom of the barrel,” improvements still need to be made.

He is convinced this will happen with the extra tutoring, mentoring and counseling available to the students, all of which have resulted in low absenteeism and tardiness.

When French began as principal, none of these support services was in place; instead, the former administration had hired a police officer to patrol the campus and had cut physical education, art and recess in order to allocate more time for test preparation. What little sports equipment and art supplies the school had at that time were later discovered in storage behind the auditorium stage.

Today, after-school clubs and activities abound—“Yoga, taekwondo, soccer (two teams), music, dance, art, theater, service learning, peace makers, family wellness, jump rope, gardening, fitness arcade, lacrosse, modeling, academic support,” recites French.

“It’s like a private-school atmosphere in a public-residential neighborhood,” he adds. “We’re showing the larger systems that mountains can be moved with a more holistic, well-rounded program that makes for happier students and an environment where learning is positive, not punitive.”

As he looks to the future, French sees limitless possibilities for his student body and eagerly anticipates focusing his energy on new projects that involve even more nutritious student meals and medical advocacy.

In working to improve the health and well being of his students and their community, he acknowledges that a healing process has begun to take place within himself, as well.

“When I first started teaching, I was more of a drill sergeant. Now I’m just like this teddy bear of a guy,” he says. “But it’s taken me a long time to get there.”

To view videos of the students at King-Chavez Athletics Academy working out in their fitness arcade, or on a recent field trip, go to YouTube.com and search “King-Chavez Athletics Academy” and see:

“Childhood Obesity: King Chavez Athletics Academy Solution”

“King-Chavez Athletics Academy—Chicano Park Field Trip”
In Memoriam

Stanley L. Cohen, MD ‘53, associate clinical professor of medicine emeritus at UB and former chief of internal medicine at Kenmore Mercy Hospital, died April 15, 2008, in Millard Fillmore Suburban Hospital, Amherst, New York. He was 87.

Born in Buffalo, Chassin attended Bennett High School and earned his bachelor’s and medical degrees from UB in 1942 and 1945, respectively.

He maintained a practice in internal medicine in Kenmore from 1945 to 1975 and during that time served on the staff at Kenmore Mercy, where he also was chair of the internship Program and the Institutional Ethics Committee. He later helped found the fundraising foundation for the hospital.

Chassin also was an attending physician at E.J. Meyer Memorial Hospital (now Erie County Medical Center), where he served his residency; Millard Fillmore Hospital; and Buffalo Veterans Affairs Medical Center. He began teaching in the UB Medical School in 1951 and was codirector of the program in bioethics and humanities from 1977 to 2000.

Chassin was instrumental in establishing the medical ethics program at the school and was president of the UB Medical Alumni Association, particularly involved in the annual Spring Clinical Days.

He was founder of the Western New York Network of Institutional Ethics Committees and founder and president of UB’s Friends of the Health Sciences Library.

Chassin was honored by the American College of Physicians for his lifetime achievements. At ECAMC, an award is given annually in his name to the outstanding resident in internal medicine.

He received the Sister Mchilde Memorial Award from Kenmore Mercy Hospital in 1989 and the UB Medical Alumni Association Career Achievement Award in 2000.

Surviving are his wife of 64 years, the former Charlotte Sokolien; two sons, Dr. Marvin and David; a daughter, Joan Holmlund; and a sister, Lois Davis.

Joel Shugar, MD ’85, 47, founder and medical director of Nature Coast Eye Care Institute & Regional Surgery Center in Perry, Florida, died May 26, 2008, in a skydiving accident in Eloy, Arizona. A fellow skydiver collided with Shugar about 80 to 100 feet above the landing zone, rendering him unable to control his chute.

Shugar is survived by his wife, Lindsey, and his 8-year-old son, Adam.

In addition to the ongoing care he provided his patients, Shugar was well known for performing cataract surgeries free of charge for uninsured patients each year prior to the Thanksgiving holiday.

Martha Ingraham Bennett, MD ’84, died peacefully at her home in Silver Spring, Maryland, on March 3, 2008, after succumbing to brain cancer. She was 46.

Bennett was born in Rochester, NY, and then moved to Buffalo, NY, where she attended Buffalo Seminary. She graduated from Princeton University before spending three years in Zaire, now the Congo, as a Peace Corps Volunteer and returning to attend medical school at UB. After finishing medical school in 1984, she trained in family medicine at Case Western Reserve Hospital in Cleveland, OH. She then moved to the Washington DC area in 1998 where she practiced medicine for seven years. She is survived by her devoted husband, Francois Bikamba, and their two sons, Tai and Liam Bikamba. She also leaves her father, William B. Bennett, and his partner, Lee Eddy; her brother William M. Bennett; and sisters-in-law, Inezee, a niece Mac, and a nephew Kio. Her mother, Jeanette Bennett, preceded her in death.

Martha will always be remembered for her keen mind; open heart; love of family, friends and food; and her positive contributions toward making the world a better place for everyone.

Family, friends and classmates are invited to send a message for inclusion in a memorial book for Martha’s boys. Please write about a special moment you shared with Martha that might truly tell Tai and Liam how special their mother was and is. Mail your note to Francois Bikamba, 1712 Overlook Drive, Silver Spring, MD, 20903.

In the spring 2006 issue of Buffalo Physician, it was incorrectly stated that Daniel T. Giunturuca, MD ’84, was associate professor emeritus of psychiatry at Duke University. He was professor emeritus.

On February 22, 2008, the school was notified of the death of Edward M. Trucu, MD ’43.

On March 5, 2008, the school was notified of the death of Harold Snidyal, MD ’93.

On June 3, 2008, the school was notified of the death of Eli Gurnamovich, MD ’65.


Robert Goldberg, MD ’92, born on September 8, 1937, died on September 6, 2007.

On March 4, 2008, Herbert M. Polsman, MD ’64, born in 1938, died on March 4, 2008.

On March 4, 2008, Harold L. Sylvan, MD ’72, born on August 8, 1943, died on April 6, 2008.

David Brooks, MD ’08, MPH, MBA

David Brooks, pictured here at commencement with his parents, David and Jeri, is the first student at the University at Buffalo to graduate with a medical degree, a master’s degree in public health, and a master’s degree in business administration.

A native of Lakeview, New York, Brooks attended Cornell University, where he earned a bachelor of science degree in applied economics and business administration, magna cum laude, while also finding time to launch several successful business ventures.

Before he achieved his triple-degree first at UB, Brooks set another precedent at the university, when he became the first medical student elected to the student representa- tors seat on the UB Council.

The 10-member council serves as the primary oversight and advisory board to the university and its president and senior officers.

In 2005, when Brooks was interviewed by Buffalo Physician about his post on the council, he said, “I only do things when I think I can make a positive impact. I chose medicine over business for that reason.”

This summer, Brooks began residency training in physical medicine and rehabilitation at the University of Pennsylvania.

When asked what his goals are for the future, he says, “I have found the best physi- cians bring diverse views to the table when treating patients. Ultimately, the better I can understand the concerns of the doctors, public health professionals and business people, the better health care I can provide. I hope to make a difference in the way medicine is practiced using my degrees and experiences. While I am excited about my accomplish- ments at UB, I look forward to my graduate medical training and continued service. After completing my residency, I plan to return to Buffalo.”

At commencement, UB president John B. Simpson awarded Brooks a Presidential Student Citizenship Award (see photo of the presentation on page 18). The award recogn- izes exceptional leadership, volunteerism and citizenship within the UB community and throughout the Buffalo Niagara Region.

—S. A. UNGER