

Giving matters

A newsletter for supporters of



University of Massachusetts Medical School



3

Generous gift for ALS research



4

Making a difference



5

Research flying high

Backed by philanthropy, Vaccine Corps is launched

PHILANTHROPIC DONATIONS TOTALING

\$435,000 HAVE BEEN RAISED to support the Vaccine Corps launched by UMass Medical School, the statewide initiative to recruit and deploy volunteers to accelerate the COVID-19 vaccine rollout in Massachusetts.

The Vaccine Corps began with Medical School faculty and students supporting the equitable distribution of vaccine to vulnerable populations and has been expanded in partnership with Commonwealth Medicine, the public service consulting and operations division of UMass Medical School.

“Wherever the greatest need exists is where we want to be helpful,” said Chancellor Michael F. Collins. “The Vaccine Corps will prioritize providing volunteers to sites that address health equity by inoculating vulnerable populations that are eligible according to the state’s guidelines. A pilot effort began in January when hundreds of our students, working under the direction of Worcester’s Division of Public Health, helped vaccinate first responders and residents of homeless shelters.”

Philanthropic support of the effort was led by a \$200,000 gift from the Woburn-based Cummings Foundation that UMass Medical School was challenged to match. In response, the leadership and board of directors of the United Way of Central Massachusetts approved a six-figure donation. Generous contributions were also received from the Frias family/S&F Concrete, The Kraft Group, the Tsotsis



Kara Kennedy, SOM '21, (right) is among the UMMS students volunteering at the large-scale COVID-19 vaccination site at Worcester State University.

family, the Melvin S. Cutler Charitable Foundation and the DuFour family.

Donations are being used to facilitate the development of project management tools, the design of a comprehensive staffing resource and allocation plan, and community outreach and education initiatives.

Bill Cummings and his wife Joyce founded Cummings Foundation and its New Horizons assisted living communities in Marlborough and Woburn. Cummings said, “Although our senior living communities have fared remarkably well, the experience of serving this vulnerable population throughout the pandemic made us especially motivated to support efforts to expedite vaccine distribution. UMass Medical School’s Vaccine Corps proposal demonstrated innovative thinking and a

continued on page 2

Vaccine Corps *from page 1*

sense of urgency. We were delighted to contribute to an effort that would accelerate the immunization timeline and help safeguard Massachusetts residents.”

“Great ideas demand strong and swift support,” said Tim Garvin, president and CEO of the United Way of Central Massachusetts. “Within a matter of hours after hearing about this concept, we enthusiastically offered our support as a way to help more of our neighbors get vaccinated and protected from COVID-19 as soon as possible.”

“UMass Medical School could not be more grateful to Cummings Foundation, the United Way of Central Massachusetts, the Frias family, The Kraft Group and all of the benefactors who have offered their support,” said Chancellor Collins. “The Vaccine Corps will be an important and effective component of our country’s unprecedented effort to protect Americans and end the pandemic.”

As of late March, more than 6,400 volunteers have registered through the Vaccine Corps to volunteer at vaccination sites in

a variety of roles. Trained and licensed volunteers and medical and nursing students are eligible to administer vaccines and perform other clinical duties. Unlicensed individuals and community members are eligible to volunteer for administrative roles such as greeters and customer service assistants. ■

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Corps**

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MASSACHUSETTS
AGAINST COVID-19

 [www.commed.umassmed.edu/
vaccine-corps](http://www.commed.umassmed.edu/vaccine-corps)

Timeline to the Vaccine Corps



Jan
01

THE CONCEPT OF THE VACCINE CORPS is outlined in a Boston Globe opinion column authored by UMMS Chancellor Michael Collins and UMass President Marty Meehan, in which they called for the creation of a national COVID-19 Vaccine Corps. The Vaccine Corps provides people with an opportunity to serve their communities during the historic effort to end the pandemic, while offering public health leaders the opportunity to leverage an untapped reservoir of talent, energy and selflessness.

<http://bit.ly/UMMSVaccineCorpsOpEd>

Mid
Jan

UMMS STUDENTS ARE TRAINED to administer COVID-19 vaccinations to Worcester-area residents. Thirteen Graduate School of Nursing students taught more than 150 School of Medicine students to give the intramuscular injections. Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences students tracked participants.

<http://bit.ly/UMMSstudentsTrained>

Feb
04

UMMS ANNOUNCES PARTNERSHIP with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the City of Worcester, Worcester State University and Saint Vincent Hospital in a large-scale COVID-19 vaccination site in Worcester.

http://bit.ly/UMMS_partnership_vaccine_site

Feb
16

LARGE-SCALE VACCINATION SITE in Worcester opens. Volunteers from the UMass Medical School Vaccine Corps were among the health care providers administering shots to eligible patients. A Worcester partnership, the site is supported by UMass Medical School; Commonwealth Medicine, the health care consulting and operations division of UMMS; clinical partner Saint Vincent Hospital; Worcester State University; and the City of Worcester.

<http://bit.ly/UMMSstudentsVaccineCorps>



University of
Massachusetts
Medical School

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UMMS Office of Advancement
333 South Street, Shrewsbury, MA 01545

Explore giving:

www.umassmed.edu/giving
giving@umassmed.edu
508-856-5520

Generous gift for ALS research supports next step in treating 'disgraceful' disease

Lewis Family ensures spirit of husband and father perseveres

THE EXPERIENCE OF A GRANDSON AND GRANDFATHER, snuggled in a hospital bed at the grandfather's home watching cartoons together on a Saturday morning, would seem unremarkable if it weren't so heartbreak. In this case, the boy had moved the man's arm himself in order to wrap it around his little shoulders; the man couldn't do it on his own. He couldn't laugh at the antics on the screen either, or walk to the door and give the boy a goodbye squeeze when the show was over.

The man was Christopher Lewis. He was loving and fun-loving, a bold entrepreneur and an avid boater. And he had ALS.

Chris was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis in January 2012. During the dreadful days that followed, his wife Joan and their sons, Chip and Keith, were helpless to stop the inevitable. But hopeless? Not with Chris, who passed away at age 64 in August that year, nor with Dr. Robert Brown, his caring and devoted physician, as their inspiration.

"This disease took away one of the most amazing guys on the planet," Keith said. "But if there could be a cure for ALS in my lifetime, even though it's bittersweet there wasn't one for dad, that would be amazing. And to know that we are contributing to this? My dad would have a big smile on his face."

UMass Medical School's Robert H. Brown Jr., DPhil, MD, not only treated Chris, he is also a leader in neurodegenerative research. The Lewis family has supported his focused efforts around ALS at UMMS since 2013, when they launched a foundation and its annual musical event, ChrisFest. In 2020, they generously gifted funds to boost the Brown lab's latest ground-breaking endeavor: a series of novel clinical trials to treat forms of ALS through gene silencing therapeutics that could one day become commercially available medications.

"With ALS, you lose everything except your mind. You're aware of what's going on, but you're paralyzed," Joan said. "For me, it was the worst thing I ever witnessed. To see someone so full of life, so independent, remembering all the good times ... to be reduced to this. ALS is disgraceful and horrible. We do whatever we can to help Dr. Brown and his research team."

Widely recognized as a pioneer in neurodegenerative disease research, Dr. Brown, who is the *Leo P. and Theresa M. LaChance Chair in Medical Research* and



Above: **Joan Lewis with her husband Chris (front) and their sons Chip and Keith in the mid-2000s.** Right: **Dr. Brown in the lab.**



“ALS is disgraceful and horrible. We do whatever we can to help Dr. Brown and his research team. **”**

The Lewis Family

director of the Program in Neurotherapeutics at UMMS, has dedicated his more than 40-year career to unlocking the secrets of ALS. In 1993, he helped discover SOD1, the first gene linked to the inherited form of ALS. Ten years ago, he was recruited to UMMS specifically to develop gene silencing therapeutics for this disease.

In recent years, Dr. Brown has partnered with colleagues in the Medical School's RNA Therapeutics Institute and Horae Gene Therapy Center to launch a series of groundbreaking clinical trials using novel advanced therapeutics to treat ALS in new and innovative ways. The results from one of those gene therapy trials, which focused on silencing the same SOD1 gene Brown discovered, were featured in a July 2020 edition of the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

The generous funding that Joan, Keith and Chip have given to support Dr. Brown's ALS research stipulates that he have complete control in directing its use.

"If we could give Dr. Brown a billion dollars, we would," said Keith. "With this money, we are able to contribute to a potential cure, and we love that there are no strings attached. Dr. Brown can use it the way he wants, and that's a great feeling." ■

Making the most of it

Alumnus Mark Dowell and his wife Caryn strive to make a difference whenever they can

MARK DOWELL, MD'85, LEANS INTO OPPORTUNITIES

whenever and wherever they present themselves. As the medical director of Rocky Mountain Infectious Diseases in Casper, Wyo., he has seen firsthand how a sliver of understanding can lead to a wider analysis of how a disease operates—an experience that has helped him navigate the unexpected and move toward positive outcomes.

He's applied this ethos to other areas of his life as well, transforming various gateway opportunities into defining moments. For example, working with AIDS patients in Texas uncovered his passion for infectious disease treatment. The decision to open an infectious disease practice out west directed him to become Wyoming's first specialist in the field. Reconnecting with his college girlfriend Caryn led to a marriage that occurred decades after they first dated.

So, it was no surprise, then, that the Dowells turned a sudden and frightening auto accident into a way to help others.

During a two-and-a-half-hour drive to a University of Wyoming football game in late August, an 18-wheeler going 75 miles an hour struck the back of the Dowells' pickup truck, propelling it into a nearby pasture. Caryn wasn't injured, but Mark suffered a broken collarbone and a severe concussion that put him out of work for six months.

Upon receiving a settlement as compensation, the couple's first thought was to make something good come out of something so bad. As regular supporters of UMass Medical School, they decided to make a \$125,000 donation to create The Dowell Infection Connection Scholarship for School of Medicine students who are members of a UMMS diversity organization.

"If I hadn't gone to UMass, I never would have had the career that I have," Dr. Dowell said. "The university set a foundation for me and gave me an opportunity to find myself and launch my career. I never thought I'd reach the amount of professional satisfaction and pride that I've been able to develop, and it's because of the education I received there."

Dr. Dowell's first encounter with UMass was when his father took a position as a virologist at UMass Amherst and moved their family from California to



Caryn and Mark Dowell

Massachusetts. Mark later attended UMass Amherst—when he met Caryn, who attended nearby Mount Holyoke College—then went on to graduate from the Medical School in 1985.

The two dated throughout college and while he was in medical school, but broke up when Mark, a Texas native, completed his infectious disease fellowship training at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

Mark was then recruited to work in Wyoming. The nation's least populous state had never had an infectious disease specialist, he said, so he started and built a practice that now serves all of the state's residents.

Meanwhile, Caryn served as a research assistant in psychology at both Northwestern University and Princeton University before earning a master's degree at the City University of New York. After marrying and raising two children, she returned to the workplace as president of a multicounty chamber of commerce in New Jersey.

Wondering where Mark ended up, Caryn found him online and called him on his 50th birthday. That phone call was brief, however, and they didn't connect again until four years later. Even though it had been 30 years, with marriages, kids and divorces for both, these college sweethearts said it was like no time had passed.

Caryn then settled in Casper, Wyo., with Mark, and became the executive director of the Wyoming Medical Center Foundation, a position she held for more than three years. The couple married in January 2017. They both love the state and see Dr. Dowell's practice and community involvement, which includes serving on the board of Wyoming Medical Center and as the Natrona County Health Officer, as a way to give back to the place they now call home together.



Learn more about scholarships:
www.umassmed.edu/giving/scholarships

The Dowells also remain very grateful for their deep connection to UMass Medical School. Mark credits the school's emphasis on hands-on patient care as setting the stage for his professional success. He hopes the Dowell Scholarship will lay the foundation for students from diverse backgrounds who have the talent and drive to become

accomplished doctors, but may not have considered medical school because of barriers like access and cost.

"We created this scholarship because we're thankful," he said. "We want to do our part to say, 'We hear you, we understand, and we want to make your medical education possible.'" ■

Fraternal Order of Eagles keeps UMMS research flying high



WHILE CERTAIN SCIENTIFIC ACHIEVEMENTS, such as the coronavirus vaccines, can break through quickly when fueled by funding in the millions, most research efforts are decades-long explorations into the causes of humankind's most devastating afflictions. And in order for those explorations to yield meaningful and viable results, they require many years of funding support from both federal and private sources.

UMass Medical School molecular medicine faculty Gregory Pazour, PhD, and Paul Greer, PhD, have seen lab costs and the number of investigators vying for grants continue to increase. For scientists like them, community-based funding from an organization famous for its bake sales, meat raffles, golf outings and trivia nights, has been vital.

"I tell members of my lab that when they look through our dissecting microscope, they are looking through the Fraternal Order of Eagles scope," Dr. Pazour said, appreciative of the \$30,000 the Eagles donated last year to support his lab's research into the causes of polycystic kidney disease, one of the most common and life-threatening genetic disorders. "We are limited by money, and the fact that the Eagles are supporting us makes all the difference. Their donations go toward helping us to keep the lab running optimally. It's just critically important."

The Pazour and Greer labs became beneficiaries of the Fraternal Order of Eagles through Robert Krusas, administrator of the Department of Animal Medicine at UMMS. Like all members of the Eagles' aeries, as the thousands of local clubs in towns and cities across the U.S. and Canada are called, Rob's commitment springs from the organization's

humble yet energizing mission statement: People Helping People.

"There is real camaraderie within the local aerie and it just seems to build the higher you go in the organization," Krusas explained. "Fourteen years ago, a friend brought me to the Worcester Club, and I was hooked." So much so that Rob moved methodically from a position on his local aerie's board in his first year to his current position on the national Eagles board. It will take additional steps, but he has set his sights on becoming Grand Worthy President of the organization.

Obviously, Krusas is a natural at community fundraising, and his advocacy is focused on UMass Medical School.

"From the moment I started my job here, I found the researchers and their studies to be fantastic and unbelievable, but the funding wasn't always there," he said. "I went to my aerie thinking, it's too bad we can't help out. But the Eagles told me, 'Rob, we can, and this is how we'll do it!'"

Through outings and raffles, breakfasts and dinners, "even when you're crazy enough to stand out in the middle of the road, people donate," Krusas said. Whatever amount is raised locally, the State Eagles organization can add to it within their guidelines, with the caveat that no part of the contribution is to go toward a recipient's administrative costs.

The giving adds up: Over the last 20 years, Eagles aeries throughout Central Massachusetts have donated almost \$460,000 to the Medical School's research programs. ■



Robert Krusas

“We are limited by money, and the fact that the Eagles are supporting us makes all the difference. **”** Gregory Pazour, PhD

Leading with leadership

Hudsons establish endowed lecture fund to support training of future physicians

THERE IS A GRACEFUL HARMONY AT PLAY as Doranne and Randall “Randy” Hudson, MD’78, lead by example, endowing a new fund at UMass Medical School to foster leadership among medical students.

“Leadership is an unsung characteristic, yet it crops up almost everywhere in a person’s environment,” Dr. Hudson said. “I firmly believe that every medical student needs to be cognizant of the characteristics of leadership, how they can develop their own leadership capabilities and integrate that into their daily practice.”

Dr. Hudson is an anesthesiologist and internist who focused his career on critical care, both taking care of patients and eventually leading organizations. After graduating from UMMS and completing two residencies, Dr. Hudson worked in critical care for several years at Beth Israel Hospital in Boston and South Shore Hospital in Weymouth.

The Hudsons met at Duke University where they both did their undergraduate work. Mrs. Hudson went on to earn an MBA at Harvard University and joined Gillette Corp. in Boston, where she worked on brand management and new product launches. In 1988, this husband-and-wife team accepted new opportunities in Kansas City, Mo.: he joined the medical staff at Saint Luke’s Hospital, to focus on cardiac anesthesia and critical care, and she took a senior management position at Hallmark, Inc.

At Saint Luke’s, Dr. Hudson helped to build an anesthesia-based critical care system that now can treat 50 to 60 critically ill patients daily. He was also called on twice to become chair of the Department of Anesthesiology and lead its anesthesiology residency program. During his second time as chair, he hired nearly 30 clinicians in response to the department becoming part of a larger multispecialty group, and to integrate critical care anesthesiology.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Hudson rose to become a senior vice president at Hallmark, leading a \$2 billion business unit for the company. She then launched a second career as an educator, focused on leadership development, and became an executive-in-residence and associate teaching professor at the Bloch School of Management at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. She also serves on the university’s board of trustees.

Together, the Hudsons became successful leaders, and more importantly, they learned how to mentor others to become better leaders.

“[Leadership] is taught at every business school,”



Doranne and Randall “Randy” Hudson

Dr. Hudson said. “In fact, Doranne developed a leadership program specifically for the St. Luke’s system to teach physicians how to be leaders.”

Endowing a leadership program for future generations of physicians was an idea several years in the making, and choosing UMMS as the host institution was an easy decision, according to Dr. Hudson.

“I felt UMass Medical School did an extraordinary job while I was there. It was a formative experience that helped me make the right choices,” he said. “The state of Massachusetts invested in me, and I wanted to give back.”

The Hudson Leadership Development Fund will begin by supporting an annual lecture for medical students about to transition from the classroom to the clinic. The Hudsons will be the inaugural speakers for the lecture, which will hopefully occur sometime in the fall of 2021, depending on the status of the pandemic.

The lecture is a “beachhead for leadership” Dr. Hudson said, and he will work closely with UMMS to extend the concept, perhaps to shared readings, small-group workshops and seminars on the topic.

“The Hudsons’ support will help us enhance our curriculum and broaden the horizons for our students,” said Anne C. Larkin, MD, associate professor of surgery and vice provost for educational affairs. “What’s also so exciting about this is having both Dr. and Mrs. Hudson play an active role, sharing their considerable experiences for the benefit of our students. They are committing their intellect, as well as their financial resources, and that is so impressive.” ■

Construction of new biomedical research and education facility at UMMS underway

CONSTRUCTION EFFORTS BEGAN IN NOVEMBER

2020 on a new, nine-story biomedical research and education facility that will support laboratory research growth and the educational enterprise at UMass Medical School. The 350,000-square-foot structure will be located between the Lazare Research Building and the Albert Sherman Center, and will complete the west face of the Campus Green. Construction is anticipated to be completed in 2023.

The new building will include program space for a projected 77 principal investigators, in addition to animal medicine and an FDA-compliant manufacturing facility for clinical trial therapeutics, and it will help UMMS expand class size to meet growing workforce needs in the health sciences. It will also permit campus expansion of facilities to help meet the needs of the commonwealth and the nation for physicians, graduate nurses, life sciences researchers and other health sciences professionals.

"The New Education and Research Building plays a key role in the future of our institution, as outlined in our strategic plan," said Chancellor Michael F. Collins. "By co-locating strategic



Rendering of the new education and research building

research programs and leveraging the power of collaboration, we will be able to fulfill our vision of life-changing therapies for some of the most intractable diseases we face." ■



Complete details and project updates available online: www.umassmed.edu/NERB



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Final beam of new VA clinic placed during UMMS ceremony

INSCRIBED WITH DOZENS OF VETERANS' SIGNATURES

VETERANS' SIGNATURES, the final steel beam was placed atop the new community-based outpatient clinic (CBOC) for veterans under construction on the UMass Medical School campus in Worcester during a small topping off ceremony in early October 2020.

Scheduled to open in the fall of 2021, the CBOC is a collaboration between UMMS and the VA Central Western Massachusetts Healthcare System. Built on the site of the former Massachusetts Department of Transportation District 3 Headquarters, the 117,000-square foot, four-story building will replace the VA's Lincoln Street facility. The VA clinic will occupy the first two floors, with 65 exam, consultation and procedure rooms designed for patient-aligned care teams.

Chancellor Michael F. Collins and others also signed the beam in the days before it was hoisted into the air. Because of COVID-19 concerns, only a small group from the Medical School and Suffolk Construction were able to take part in the ceremony. Local, state and federal leaders provided recorded messages.

Most of the clinic will be devoted to primary and mental health care,



with some specialty care, including radiology and echocardiology, and physical and occupational therapy. The clinic will also have a clinical lab and a pharmacy. ■



Complete details and project updates available online: www.umassmed.edu/VA

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