How three elements factor into WVSOM’s strategies to promote healthy behaviors

HEALTH, WELLNESS and NUTRITION
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Our mission statement

The mission of the West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine (WVSOM) is to educate students from diverse backgrounds as lifelong learners in osteopathic medicine and complementary health-related programs; to support and develop graduate medical education training; to advance scientific knowledge through academic, clinical and basic science research; and to promote patient-centered, evidence-based medicine. WVSOM is dedicated to serve, first and foremost, the state of West Virginia and the health care needs of its residents, emphasizing primary care in rural areas.

A message from the President

In the time since the last WVSOM Magazine was published, we’ve stayed busy fulfilling our most important mission: providing the highest-quality education to those we’re entrusted to teach. The students who come to us with the goal of becoming physicians are talented, resourceful and hard-working, and we take very seriously our commitment to help them reach their goals.

We’re also serious about the well-being of the people who make up the school’s community, from our students to the faculty and staff who serve them — as well as the communities we serve outside the school. This health and wellness-themed issue focuses on some of the innovative ways we’re accomplishing our goals. We want our graduates to be able not only to improve the short-term physical condition of the patients they serve, but to give those patients resources to live healthier lives. We also want to apply those same strategies to our own lives.

One way we’re addressing wellness at WVSOM is through our new clinical nutrition and culinary medicine elective, which launched last spring. In this issue you’ll learn how the elective is preparing students to combat poor nutrition among their future patients — a topic that’s particularly important in West Virginia, where obesity and diabetes rates are among the nation’s highest.

In an effort to promote healthful living on WVSOM’s own campus, the school’s Health and Wellness Committee is working to help students and employees take charge of their well-being. On the following pages, you’ll read about a program that’s already proven popular among members of the school community: a monthly walking challenge that allows participants to take “virtual tours” of different geographical areas, thanks to a special app. We’re also very proud of the progress at the Clingman Center for Community Engagement, located in downtown Lewisburg, from which WVSOM will implement programs that encourage wellness among the town’s residents and those of surrounding areas. Our ribbon-cutting ceremony for the center took place Oct. 29, and it was great to see so many WVSOM friends in the audience.

Graduation is one of our most celebratory annual events, and in our 2019 ceremony more graduates walked across our stage than in any previous year. We tell the stories of four of them in this issue. As one group of students moves on from their time at WVSOM, another group is just getting ready to arrive, and elsewhere in the magazine we recap the Convocation and White Coat Ceremony that marks the beginning of students’ journeys through medical school. We also celebrate the life of the accomplished physician O.J. Bailes, D.O., one of our school’s four founders, who showed his devotion to students by regularly attending these important ceremonies until his passing in August at age 95.

I hope you’ll take some time to read the rest of the stories in this publication that show how the people of WVSOM continue to strive for excellence. I’m proud to be part of this school, and I’m just as proud that WVSOM is an integral part of the communities we serve. After all, we’re all in this together!

James W. Nemitz, Ph.D.
If you own a fitness tracker, receive nutrition-based meal deliveries on your doorstep, have purchased at-home fitness equipment such as Peloton bikes or have begun adding kale to your permanent grocery store list, you are one of many people contributing to health trends in the U.S.

More than one-third of American adults are considered obese, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and many find it difficult to stay motivated enough to make health-conscious decisions. But there seems to be a recent shift in thinking that has led people to realize they need to take more steps to lead healthier lives.

According to findings by the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 59 million Americans spend about $30 billion a year on out-of-pocket complementary health approaches. Complementary health can include diet programs, fitness facilities, yoga courses, vitamins and supplements, at-home equipment, and app services and wearables.

With focuses on personal health, wellness and nutrition, it’s fitting that a medical school would emphasize these components of learning so that students have knowledge to pass along to future patients. WVSOM is doing so by introducing a new elective that addresses culinary medicine, providing programs that promote health, forming a wellness committee to address campus needs, and creating new facilities that will empower and educate the community.
WVSOM offers clinical nutrition and culinary medicine elective to students

WVSOM students aren’t just using their hands for osteopathic manipulative treatment; they’re using them to cook healthy meals.

In May 2019, the school began offering a new elective for students that addresses clinical nutrition and culinary medicine. In the first session, five third- and fourth-year students took part in a two-week course that included not only a culinary lab where they received hands-on kitchen experience making plant-based dishes, but classes that explained mindful meditation exercises through yoga, clinical visits with diabetic patients, exercise physiology information from a sports trainer at The Greenbrier, and nature hikes to identify edible mushrooms.

While the school’s curriculum addresses nutrition, the elective is the first time WVSOM has offered in-depth information about culinary medicine.

“This elective helps students look at the cause of a disease instead of just putting pills in a patient’s body,” said Bob Foster, D.O., WVSOM’s assistant dean for osteopathic medical education.

“We are training students to become physicians who can change a patient’s lifestyle and reverse degenerative diseases. The body can repair itself, and that is a very osteopathic way of thinking.”

Foster and other WVSOM faculty, including Brian Griffith, Ph.D., and Dina Schaper, D.O., act as advisors in the course.

In the first culinary lab, students put on their aprons and tested their chopping skills to make cucumber salad, black-eyed pea salad and wheat spaghetti with lentils. The students were under the guidance of WVSOM O’Cafe chefs Adam Sydenstricker and Paul Ciciora.

“People tend to eat with their eyes first, so food needs to look good or else people won’t be inclined to taste it,” Ciciora told participants. “We want to try to cook with all the senses.”

Hayden Moore, D.O., was a fourth-year student nearing graduation when he took the elective. He said it is important for students to take time to learn valuable cooking techniques that could be shared with patients, especially since many students have so little time to prepare healthy meals themselves.

“It’s such a critical part of health. The reason we have such a problem with diabetes is because we’ve lost control of healthy eating,” Moore said. “What I want to get out of this elective is how to use this information as a tool. I’m doing a residency in surgery, and I’m going to need to know what kind of food will keep patients healthy after surgery.”

Brittany Ross was a third-year student at the time she took the elective. She said she is glad to see more schools incorporating nutrition into their curricula.

“This is an aspect of medicine that makes a huge impact. We learn a lot about the ‘micro’ aspects of everything, but it doesn’t easily translate to patients, so this is a better way of conveying information,” she said.

A 2017 research finding in *The Journal of the American Osteopathic Association* suggests that many practicing physicians and medical students feel unqualified to discuss specific dietary recommendations with patients, which may be attributed to inadequate nutrition education during medical school. The article, titled “Assessment of Nutrition Knowledge and Attitudes in Preclinical Osteopathic Medical Students,” states that nutrition knowledge is vital for the osteopathic student population because it aligns with both the osteopathic philosophy that the body has the ability to

“We are training students to become physicians who can change a patient’s lifestyle and reverse degenerative diseases. The body can repair itself, and that is a very osteopathic way of thinking.”

~ BOB FOSTER, D.O., WVSOM’S ASSISTANT DEAN FOR OSTEOPATHIC MEDICAL EDUCATION
self-regulate, self-heal and maintain health as well as the focus of primary care on prevention and wellness.

The findings concluded that a majority of research participants felt comfortable counseling future patients on nutrition recommendations; however, most participants lacked knowledge of dietary reference intakes and medical nutrition therapy. Because about half of osteopathic medical students typically enter primary care, students and their future patients would benefit from the integration of more nutrition education in medical school.

WVSOM now offers the clinical nutrition and culinary medicine elective about three to four times each academic year. Schaper said those involved are passionate about creating a rotation that will enable health and wellness.

“This academic year our concentration is diabetes treatment and prevention,” she said. “The prescription is knowledge of food choices, food preparation, moving our bodies and using mindfulness to guide those choices and change the way we think about food. Every aspect of our program dovetails with osteopathic tenets. Unfortunately, West Virginia is ranked No. 1 in obesity and No. 2 in diabetes, so our long-term goals include involving as many students as possible in the elective in order to improve the health of our population.”

The next electives, which are open to third- and fourth-year students, will take place from March 23 to April 3 and from April 20 to May 1.

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Health and Wellness Committee works to increase health activities on WVSOM campus

Another group of WVSOM community members whose goal is healthy outcomes consists of the staff, faculty and students that make up the WVSOM Health and Wellness Committee.

The committee formed in July 2017 after the American Osteopathic Association’s Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation required all osteopathic schools to form a committee that would establish policies related to student, faculty and staff mental health and wellness and fatigue mitigation. In its inaugural year, the committee hosted a Wellness Activities Showcase, established a collection of wellness books at the WVSOM library and added text concerning wellness to the student and employee handbooks.

In the past year, the committee has taken a more active role in increasing the promotion of health activities at WVSOM. That includes the launch of a walking campaign in September 2019 through the use of an app called Walker Tracker, which allows individuals and teams to take “virtual tours” of real-life locations while getting exercise where they work or live.

“We thought it would be good to develop some team cohesiveness across campus,” said Griffith, a WVSOM biomedical sciences professor who came up with the idea of a walking campaign after reading an old article in The Journal of the American Medical Association. Researchers found that if a
person walks between a quarter and a half mile each
day, it decreases all causes of mortality by 10 percent.

“The idea was to generate an engaging activity
in which more people would be encouraged to
participate and have fun. The committee thought the
walking tracker could work great for us because we
could have groups compete against each other,” he
said. “Our campus has a gym that students and staff
can access, but I’m not sure the school has done a
campus-wide recruitment or engagement activity like
we are doing now. This is one way we can provide an
engaging environment where faculty and students
compete. Students love the President’s Softball
Game, but that’s just once a year.”

The walking campaign starts over each month with
a new virtual trail for participants to explore. Staff,
faculty and students walked more than 30 million
tracked steps in September 2019, the first month
of the campaign, virtually hiking the Appalachian
Trail leading from Georgia to Maine. A more recent
challenge took participants to Harriet Tubman’s
birthplace, crossing the Mason-Dixon line into
Philadelphia and up to New York, and ending at
St. Catharines in Ontario, Canada. This challenge
was for individuals only, with a daily goal of 7,500
steps per day.

Kyle Varon, a third-year graduate teaching assistant,
was one of the winners with his team in the October
challenge. He said it’s nice to see WVSOM promoting
physical activity among its students and employees.

“I think incorporating more of these types of
challenges into faculty/student life is a great way to
improve health and activity levels among the WVSOM
community,” he said. “These challenges are a fun and
healthy way to promote living a more active lifestyle
among friends and family.”

Griffith said the wellness committee has been
working to design walking tracks on the school’s
campus. So far, a quarter-mile track and a one-mile
track were developed for WVSOM community.

The committee purchased a one-year license for
the Walker Tracker app through a grant provided
by the WVSOM Alumni Association. The proposal
was granted after an explanation of how the
campaign would directly benefit students by
helping to prevent a decline in overall student
health by increasing awareness of the options for
physical activity on campus.

“By mapping the campus and encouraging the use
of tracking software, students will be able to see the
impact that they can have on their overall fitness and
health, particularly if they are able to only engage in
several short bursts of physical activity in a day, rather
than set aside a long, committed block of time for
exercise,” the proposal stated.

It also stated that the committee has had discussions
with the city of Lewisburg to potentially map walking
trails in town.

The 19-member Health and Wellness Committee
meets a few times a year to create health and
wellness projects on campus. The organization will
also devote more effort to providing healthy recipes
from the culinary medicine elective, which can be
found on the committee’s website.

www.wvsom.edu/OMS/wellness-recipes

Griffith said he thinks the need for health and
wellness activities and education will continue as
people search for “alternative” forms of medicine.

“People are bored with the same talks. They want
more engaging and holistic lifestyle management,” he
said. “People are changing, and we have to change
with them.”

Paul Keckley, Ph.D., managing editor of The Keckley
Report, a health care policy analyst and industry
expert, agrees that the time has come for the so-
called “wellness economy.” In an article about that
economy, he writes that Americans recognize the
importance of physical health, but think healthiness
involves much more.

“They are using their time and money in pursuit
of wellness, and the market is taking notice,”
Keckley wrote. “It’s a major trend with monumental
implication for the future of health care in the U.S.”
WVSOM leases Clingman Center for Community Engagement to expand health and wellness among community

While much work is being done to promote health and wellness on campus for the WVSOM community, efforts are expanding off campus that will benefit residents of the local community.

WVSOM first showed its commitment to investing in rural and community health by signing a long-term lease with the Greenbrier Valley Restoration Project to operate programs and activities at the Montwell Commons barn, situated just two blocks from the WVSOM campus. In partnership with the Greenbrier County Health Alliance (GCHA), the barn, now named the Clingman Center for Community Engagement, serves as a bridge between WVSOM and the surrounding area that will allow the school to deliver programs, services and opportunities for community members to learn skills and practices to help improve and manage healthier lives.

WVSOM President James W. Nemitz, Ph.D., said, “This partnership is creating an intersection between health and the community where everyone is encouraged to visit and engage in healthy activities. WVSOM is excited about this collaboration and the opportunity to be working within the community.”

The building was named for the late Gwen Clingman, who for many years provided meals to WVSOM students, faculty and administrators at her downtown Lewisburg business, Clingman’s Market.

The Clingman Center is used for community workshops and trainings and will provide further options for community engagement and healthy activities as its infrastructure develops. A commercial teaching kitchen has been constructed in the building to offer culinary training and outreach on healthy cooking, and the site also will be used for workforce development programs and community-based health research.

The center will serve as headquarters for the Waste Not/Want Not local food justice program, currently in its second year. GCHA sponsors the project to buy fresh, unsold produce from farmers at a reduced rate at the end of the market day to be shared with those in need. With the support of local farmers, the surplus provides nutritious food to seniors and low-income residents across Greenbrier County. Local farmers also cultivate a demonstration garden adjacent to the facility, where free weekly gardening lessons are offered.
Clingman Center ceremony emphasizes importance of giving back

The value of serving others was a recurring theme of those who spoke at the school’s October ribbon-cutting ceremony for its new facility.

Bob Foster, D.O. served as master of ceremonies at the event. Clingman’s daughters, Alice Hollingsworth and Sharon Clingman Shutzer, and a granddaughter, Heather Hollandsworth, spoke at the ceremony. Other family members were also present.

Hollingsworth said her mother loved WVSOM and the thousands of students she fed.

“Our mother used to say that there’s no use passing this way if you don’t help people,” Hollingsworth said. “She would say that the osteopathic school was born in her little store. Mother knew that the vision Roland [Sharp, WVSOM’s first president and Clingman’s cousin] and other doctors discussed over lunch was to educate men and women to be the best physicians they could be, serving in rural communities while being compassionate and caring for all people.”

West Virginia Gov. Jim Justice, who attended the ceremony with First Lady Cathy Justice, spoke about the school’s history in Lewisburg and commended WVSOM for its significance to medical education and to West Virginia’s rural population.

“This school is essential not just to Lewisburg and Greenbrier County but to our state, to our nation and to the world,” Justice said. “You’re pumping doctor after doctor into our rural areas. I celebrate all that you’re doing.”

Others who spoke at the ceremony included Florian Schleiff of the Greenbrier Valley Restoration Project, from whom WVSOM is leasing the building that houses the center; Nemitz, the school’s president; and Heather Antolini, WVSOM’s director of institutional development.

Nemitz said the Clingman Center is an example of WVSOM’s commitment to meeting the health care needs of West Virginians. He highlighted the fact that the center’s programs will address nutrition, chronic disease management and addiction recovery, among other community health concerns.

“Many West Virginians are dying of chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and heart problems, so we’re going to teach people to eat right. We’re also going to bring people who are in recovery because of the opioid epidemic here to learn skills so that they can be contributing members of society,” he said. “We’re going to teach people how to live better and healthier lives.”

Nemitz said he thinks the Clingman Center could become a model for other, similar community facilities statewide.

“I believe this will be the start of something even bigger,” he said. “We’re going to collect data to see which programs work, and then we’re going to share it with others and encourage other communities to create centers like this around the state so that we can improve the quality of life for all West Virginians.”
ALUMNUS DELIVERED KEYNOTE SPEECH AT WVSOM

Along with the pomp and circumstance, the green and black regalia, the gold tassels hanging from caps and the exuberance and pride of family members and friends, graduates in the Class of 2019 waited in anticipation of the moment that they would walk across the stage and receive their Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine degrees from WVSOM.

“Your successes are not final and your failures are not defining. It is your discovered inner strength that will guide you forward.”

- CHRISTOPHER “DINO” BECKETT, D.O., CLASS OF 2000
The 2019 graduating class was the largest in WVSOM’s history, with 199 medical students participating in the school’s 42nd annual commencement ceremony on May 25.

Christopher “Dino” Beckett, D.O., Class of 2000, delivered the keynote speech to graduates, their families and friends, and WVSOM faculty and guests. He discussed his journey practicing family medicine in southern West Virginia for more than 16 years. After returning to his hometown of Williamson, W.Va., upon completing his residency, Beckett opened a family practice and offered a monthly free clinic for patients who had little or no insurance. This led to the transition of his practice to a Federally Qualified Health Center called the Williamson Health & Wellness Center. His work for his community eventually led to a farmer’s market, community garden and mobile produce truck.

“I’m here not just to tell you about the things that I’ve done, but how my education at the West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine has been essential to the success that I’ve experienced,” he said. “The foundation of osteopathic principles and passion for community have been a part of the very fabric of my story. When you leave here you will have the skills and tools to be a successful physician. It is up to you how to use them.”

His advice to graduates was to be bold and to not be afraid to make mistakes, because they are opportunities to learn.

“Your successes are not final and your failures are not defining,” he shared. “It is your discovered inner strength that will guide you forward.”

Before concluding his speech, Beckett reminisced about the last time he spoke at WVSOM, during his graduation speech as class president. With the ceremony taking place outside and uncovered, rain poured throughout the ceremony.

“What that reminded me of were words John Kennedy spoke when visiting West Virginia. He said, ‘The sun may not always shine in West Virginia, but the people always do.’ As you leave here, I hope you, too, will continue to shine. The mountains and people of this great state are now part of you as you are them. Go forward and become mountains in your community,” he said.
Class of 2019 President Nicholas Rawson reflected on the past four years during the class address, noting the perseverance and compassion of his classmates.

“Survival is exactly what medical school entails. The curriculum is demanding, the expectation for extracurriculars is high and there is always the looming specter of a board exam and residency any time you close your eyes,” he said. “It takes blood, sweat and tears.”

He said that the world doesn’t stop turning while students are in medical school, but that the Class of 2019 still managed to shine in times of crisis.

“Whether it was a signed card, kind words or hanging a banner so that a woman we never met, several hundred miles away, would know that we were rooting for her,” he said, “we pulled together any way we could. This is what makes this class stand out. This is what makes me proud to be counted in our number. This is our class personality, if there is such a thing. Our compassion for one another and our patients is one of our greatest assets.”

Rawson also reminded classmates of the tireless work they performed in response to the historic flooding in southern West Virginia in 2016, when the group was in their second year of medical school.

“Never let anyone tell you that this group of doctors is afraid to get their
hands dirty,” he said, speaking of classmates trudging in mud, dirt and debris to help the community.

This was the first commencement ceremony as WVSOM’s president for James W. Nemitz, Ph.D. He said he was honored to confer the graduates’ degrees in his new institutional role. He also shared the four characteristics he thinks define a physician.

“Quality, excellence, commitment and caring — that’s what makes an excellent osteopathic physician, and we expect no less from each of you,” he said to graduates. “You will have patients’ lives in your hands. That is an awesome responsibility, and I know you are well prepared for that role.”

Nemitz and Craig Boisvert, D.O., FACOFP, vice president for academic affairs and dean, led the ceremony and awarded the degrees. WVSOM Board of Governors Chair Charles Davis, D.O.; WVSOM Alumni Association President Robert Olexo, D.O.; and West Virginia Osteopathic Medical Association President Arthur Rubin, D.O.; provided brief messages to guests.

The ceremony concluded with graduates reciting the osteopathic oath, which officially acknowledges their transition from student to physician.

Class of 2019 graduate Devin Francillon watched his mother, Christine Woodward, receive her college diploma on May 23. Just 48 hours later, he was awarded his Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine degree as his mother looked on from the audience.

“She’s a first-generation student, even if I technically graduated before her,” said Francillon, who received an undergraduate degree in biology from Maryland’s Frostburg State University in 2015.

“She was the first among her four siblings and her parents to go to college. She supported me through my journey, so it was important for me to be there to support her.”

Woodward graduated magna cum laude with a psychology degree — also from Frostburg State — just two days before Francillon was to take the stage during the ceremony marking the end of his medical education at WVSOM.

“When we found out that my event was on Thursday and his was on Saturday, at first I wasn’t going to walk. But Devin and his three sisters got together and decided they didn’t want to miss my graduation,” Woodward said. “It meant a lot to have him there.”

Woodward said she plans to pursue a master’s degree in social work. Francillon, who is completing an anesthesiology residency at University of Toledo Medical Center in Toledo, Ohio, said he’s proud of his mother’s accomplishments.

“It was funny to watch her going through the graduation line and hugging professors I already knew,” he said. “But it’s really great to see her do so well and find success.”
The event recognized 21 students who graduated with honors. In addition, 32 students were recognized as members of Psi Sigma Alpha, a national osteopathic scholastic honor society. Nine students were recognized with the American Medical Women’s Association Glasgow-Rubin Citation for Academic Achievement. Forty-seven students received cords reflecting their membership in Sigma Sigma Phi, a national osteopathic medicine fraternity that supports medical scholastic excellence. Fifteen graduates were recognized with special coins for their military service.
Congratulations TO THE WVSOM CLASS OF 2019 AWARD RECIPIENTS

Benjamin McMillion
Olive Claire Obrokta
Pediatric Award

Daniel Truong
Gwen Clingman Memorial Scholarship

Pauline Phan
Stephanie Dawn Barragy Memorial Scholarship

Ondrea Timmermann
Dr. William R. Holmes Scholarship

Janet Kowalsky
Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield West Virginia Farson-Smith-Earley Award

Karthik Shankar
Opal Price Sharp Memorial Award

Melissa Villa
West Virginia Chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians Award

Taylor Markell
Olen E. Jones WVSOM Foundation Academic Achievement Award

Nicholas Rawson and Audreanna James
WVSOM Alumni Association Roland P. Sharp Graduate Award

Daniel Truong
Donald Newell Sr. Memorial Award for Outstanding Graduating Senior

Aaron Haag
Order of the Vesalius Award

Salman Kermalli, spouse of Sepeedeh Araghiniknam
Donna Jones Moritsugu Award

Callum Lewandrowski
Dr. Catherine A. Bishop Scholarship Award

David De Wit and Hannah Mick
MSOPTI Rural Scholars

Andrea Loving and Jennifer Bannister
RAMS Head Award
WVSOM’s Rural Health Initiative (RHI) recognized 11 graduates who participated in the program. The RHI program is designed to enhance the rural primary care curriculum at WVSOM and produce graduates uniquely qualified to practice medicine in underserved communities in rural West Virginia.

### RURAL HEALTH INITIATIVE PARTICIPANTS

- **Taylor Markell, Callum Lewandrowski, Sana Siddiqui and Anjali Varghese**

### Merck Manual Award for Academic Excellence

- **Jillian Blalock and Melissa Villa**

### NORTHERN:

- **Jillian Blalock and Melissa Villa**

### SOUTH CENTRAL:

- **Hayden Moore and Kayla Rizzo**

### EASTERN:

- **Callum Lewandrowski and Puja Patel**

### CENTRAL EAST:

- **Aaron Haag and Daniel Lofgren**

### CENTRAL WEST:

- **Aaron Estep and Lisa Smith**

### SOUTH EAST:

- **Kaitlin McDade and Daniel White**

### SOUTH WEST:

- **Justin Hanson and Benjamin McMillion**

### STATEWIDE CAMPUS AWARDS

Two students from each of the seven Statewide Campus regions received awards for their third- and fourth-year clinical rotations.

- **Nicholas Rawson**
  - John and Nancy Chambers Memorial Scholarship

- **Delaney Keane and Scott Gay**
  - Clinical Sciences Award

- **Jillian Blalock**
  - David Hinchman, D.O., Emergency Medicine Scholarship

- **Adrian Renaldi and Ashley Rubin**
  - National Health Service Corps Scholarship

- **Taylor Markell, Callum Lewandrowski, Sana Siddiqui and Anjali Varghese**
  - Merck Manual Award for Academic Excellence
Descendant of WVSOM founder follows in his family’s footsteps

As a child growing up in Huntington, W.Va., JOHN APGAR, D.O., didn’t know that he’d one day attend the medical school his grandfather helped create. In fact, the Marshall University biology major wasn’t sure he wanted to be a physician.
“My family always told me to do what makes me happy,” Apgar said. “As I went through college, they said that no matter what I decided, they would be there to support me. Since medical school is such a commitment, it was a difficult decision to make. I toyed with other professions but in the end I chose medicine.”

The Class of 2019 graduate’s grandfather was Carlton Apgar, D.O., one of WVSOM’s four founders. Along with three other osteopathic physicians — O.J. Bailes, Don Newell Sr. and Frank Wallington — Apgar worked in 1972 to form the Greenbrier College of Osteopathic Medicine to educate medical professionals to treat patients in rural West Virginia and throughout Appalachia. The institution opened in 1974 and was renamed the West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine two years later.

Apgar’s family connection to medicine runs even deeper than that, as both of his parents also are osteopathic physicians. In all, he has six family members who are physicians and a handful of relatives who work in other medical professions such as nursing and physical therapy.

With so many role models serving as inspiration, it’s no wonder that Apgar took on a leadership position during his time at WVSOM. He was Student Government Association (SGA) vice president for the 2016-17 academic year, and his tenure was an active one from the start. Just eight days before he took office, one of the worst floods in West Virginia history hit Greenbrier County, destroying homes and washing away roads. Apgar and the SGA president-elect got to work quickly, coordinating student efforts to help clean up after the disaster.

Apgar subsequently received the Cheryl and Michael Adelman WVSOM Leadership Scholarship, awarded to students who demonstrate character and leadership and who have the potential to be future leaders in the osteopathic profession. He said WVSOM’s Class of 2019 exemplified the spirit of cooperation that’s an essential part of leadership.

“A great team around you is important, and our class was a phenomenal one,” he said. “We were very collaborative and would always come together in order to get through problems. We were able to talk with one another and pick each other up when we were down, to be there for each other through any hardships.”

Apgar, who began a family medicine residency at Marshall University’s School of Medicine this past summer, said he envisions himself someday helping to shape legislation that positively impacts West Virginia’s medical professionals and improves the health of citizens of the Mountain State.

“One of the specialty tracks within my residency program is health policy, and it allows you time to work with state legislators,” the Huntington native said.

“I think that’s an important part of medicine — being aware of what’s going on in the legislative environment and advocating for policies that are beneficial to your community. So I’d like to eventually be involved with policy along with caring for patients and having my own practice.”

But no matter where his journey takes him, Apgar said he’ll forever treasure the family that helped shape him into the person he is — and helped make WVSOM a school that produces well-educated physicians.

“It’s been a privilege and an honor to come from such a unique family, and I’m proud of being the grandson of one of WVSOM’s founders,” Apgar said. “In graduating from the school, I feel like I’ve had an opportunity to continue what my family started. It will always be a special connection for me.”
WHILE studying animal science at West Virginia University, though, Kowalsky spent a summer working at a veterinary facility and found the experience heartbreaking. After graduating, she returned to her hometown and began a job as an emergency room registration clerk at Greenbrier Valley Medical Center (GVMC).

“I didn’t think I’d be there long,” she said. “But as I worked there and interacted with patients, I started thinking that maybe a career in human medicine was the right path for me.”

Kowalsky began taking prerequisite courses for medical school while working part-time as an EMT in Greenbrier County, and later returned to GVMC to work as a medical scribe. John Johnson, D.O., a physician who worked in the hospital’s emergency room, gave her some much-needed support along the way.

“I was grateful for John’s encouragement. He saw something in me that I didn’t see in myself. Even when our ER was very, very busy, he saw that I kept a calm and cool head and was still courteous and able to spend time with patients who had questions,” Kowalsky said.

During her time at WVSOM, she participated in the Rural Health Initiative (RHI) and received the Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield West Virginia Farson-Smith-Earley Award. Now, Kowalsky is serving in a family medicine residency at GVMC.

But her career as a physician doesn’t mean she has stopped working with animals. Kowalsky and her husband, Dennis, operate a farm in the small town of Wayside, W.Va., where the couple wrangles 153 cows and a much smaller number of chickens and goats.

“You’re always trying to keep up, because there’s always some task to be done,” she said. “I’ll get on the tractor and rake the hay, then Dennis will come behind on another tractor and bale it. I’ll help make repairs to the fence or put up new posts. And in the spring and fall, we bring the cattle in and give them vaccinations.”

Kowalsky said that in some ways, a day on the farm isn’t all that different from a day at a health facility. In either profession, you never know what to expect from one day to the next.

“In farming, nature makes things unpredictable,” she said. “A wind storm could come through and take out all your trees, or a cow could have difficulty calving and you have to pull the calf. Medicine is the same way, because with each patient that
comes in, you’re uncertain of what the visit is going to require.”

WVSOM’s RHI program, in which students participate in unique experiences to learn about local industries and the daily lives of West Virginians, seems a natural fit for a woman whose hobbies include fly-fishing and hunting deer and turkey. But Kowalsky said her most memorable RHI experience had little to do with nature.

“I had the opportunity to go to the West Virginia Rural Health Conference, and one of the sessions was on substance addiction,” the Class of 2019 graduate explained. “The conference included people from Lily’s Place, in Huntington, where mothers and babies bond after a child is born with neonatal abstinence syndrome. Hearing stories and seeing firsthand how the opioid epidemic has affected West Virginia’s rural families was eye-opening.”

At the culmination of her medical education, it was Johnson, whom Kowalsky calls her mentor, who hooded the new graduate during the school’s commencement ceremony. Kowalsky said she’s pleased to have the chance to care for southern West Virginians.

“I’m excited to be able to help the people I know the best — those I grew up with, went to school with or know through the community,” she said. “It’s a challenge, and I’m excited to meet that challenge and help people to the best of my ability. It’s a dream come true.”
Shepherd spent much of his teenage years sleeping on a different couch or floor each night. For the second time, his parents’ marriage was deteriorating and by 17 years old he was living on his own. He took odd jobs to make money — working in restaurants and painting apartments, where he would often sleep because he had no better place to go. With a turbulent personal life on the streets, the Phoenix, Ariz., native was witness to stabbings, shootings, drug deals and other catastrophic situations.

At 19 years old, Shepherd decided he wanted to finish high school. That was, after all, where he first realized he wanted to be a physician, when a serious automobile accident involving him and his cousin left his cousin in a hospital for several weeks with Shepherd at his bedside. During that time a seed was planted, and that seed grew into action after Shepherd met his wife, Sally, who gave Shepherd a reason to leave the streets behind and pursue a new journey.

“Sally was the spark in my world, the catalyst for my academic endeavors,” he said. “An amazing woman with a passion for learning, she saw potential in me and encouraged me to pursue a childhood dream — becoming a physician. In the space of a year, Sally completed her master’s degree in public education, I received my bachelor’s degree and we married. With my wife’s support, I continued taking classes and set my sights on medical school, which I began in 2006.”

But the path to becoming a physician is not always a straight one.

While Shepherd said he initially struggled with the rigorous demands of medical school and caring for his first child, who was born just weeks after school started, he eventually found a way to balance his responsibilities. After Shepherd and his wife learned they were expecting a second child, they learned during Sally’s third trimester that she had lung cancer.

“My wife had been coughing up blood occasionally while pregnant. Ultimately, she was sent to University of Virginia hospital in Charlottesville, Va., and diagnosed with lung cancer. Surgery was scheduled following the delivery of our daughter at 36 weeks. After Sally’s surgery it was determined that she had had a collapsed lung for about a year, and she then suffered complications of acute respiratory distress syndrome, necessitating a stay in the ICU [intensive care unit] for several weeks,” Shepherd explained.

Due to complications from the respiratory distress, Shepherd’s wife was placed in a medically induced coma for several weeks. Between his wife’s hospitalizations and trying to care for his 14-month-old daughter and new baby, Shepherd missed more than a month of classes. Sally returned home, but an oncologist cautioned the couple that recurrence was a possibility.

“In the hospital, when her fate was uncertain, I knew my focus on Sally would hurt me academically, possibly to the extent of preventing me from becoming a physician. I also knew that my time with her was more important. I could live with the regret of not finishing medical school,” Shepherd said. “Between the hardships of the year and the toll they exacted on my academics,
I realized the best thing to do was to step away from medical school and rally around my family.”

Life’s hardships can change the trajectory of one’s path. While Shepherd had a new appreciation for spending time with his family, he continued to feel the pull of medicine, so he gave himself a personal goal of returning to medical school within five years. Ultimately, giving up on his dream wasn’t an example he wanted to set for his two daughters.

“As a father, I felt that this was an important lesson to teach my daughters, that while life may not always go your way, you should continue to believe in yourself and persevere through the difficult times,” he said. “I also felt my experience could be an asset to future patients, as I had a deeper understanding of what some of them might be going through in their most difficult times.”

After a handful of difficulties to deal with, Shepherd re-enrolled in medical school in 2015. The second time, the path was a bit straighter. With less worry about caring for his family and a solid study group with a few classmates, Shepherd was more inspired than ever to become a doctor.

“This group was important because we all helped each other with different learning styles. We were really good about making sure no one was left behind when it came to understanding the material. As a group we tried to simulate the difficulty of our exams and practicals by posing tough questions, never pulling our intellectual punches. We challenged and pushed each other, and I believe this was integral to all our successes throughout medical school,” he said.

Thirteen years after Shepherd began his medical education, he was one of 199 medical students in the Class of 2019 to receive his Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine degree from WVSOM. He is completing an internal medicine residency at Laredo Medical Center in Laredo, Texas, where he said he hopes his life experiences will make him a more understanding physician.

“I believe my life experiences will make me a better physician,” he said.

“Life’s trials have made me strong, and I intend to be an advocate and champion for my patients,” he said.
Bestoyong was an immigrant arriving in the U.S. on one of the last planes allowed to land in San Francisco — on Sept. 11, 2001, a day that is now infamous for four terrorist attacks against the U.S. Bestoyong was just 9 years old at the time and was unaware of the events unfolding while her family was 36,000 feet in the air.

“We had no idea that was happening and didn’t expect any of that, which I believe no one could have expected,” she recalled. “My family and all the passengers in that plane have a different point of view, I’m sure. We were flying in the air as opposed to watching the events unfold on television and in the news. It was very surreal, and I still think about how life could have turned out very differently.”

When Bestoyong and her family deplaned, she said she noticed something different about the airport upon their arrival.

“The airport was not full of its usual hustle and bustle and we were escorted to a shuttle bus that took us to a nearby hotel because the airport was shutting down,” she said. “From the hotel, we were picked up by our family members so that we could stay with them.”

Bestoyong was born in Manila, Philippines, where she lived until she was 7. Her parents planned to complete missionary work in Japan for two and a half years, so Bestoyong and her sister moved with them to Saitama-ken. After their work was complete, her parents decided to immigrate to the U.S., with her father’s side of the family living in the San Francisco Bay area and her mother’s side of the family living in Northeast Florida.

Had her family been on a different airplane, or flown on a later date, her life may have turned out much differently. Bestoyong said she understands how that experience shaped her journey.

“I definitely live life with a gratefulness for all the opportunities presented to me. I have continually learned to not take things for granted,” she said. “It also shows me that everyone has their own unique journey and that everything happens for a reason. This experience as an immigrant, but also as someone who has been impacted by a major event in our country’s history, has made me a more resilient individual and gives me confidence that we can accomplish more than we can ever imagine.”
Bestoyong’s family lived in San Francisco until she was 16 years old. They then moved to her current hometown of Jacksonville, Fla., where she attended undergraduate school at the University of North Florida, majoring in biology with a concentration in biomedical sciences.

She knew in high school that she wanted to become a physician after listening to a missionary speak about his mission trip alongside a doctor who handled a complicated pregnancy. The story and its positive outcome — the baby was safely delivered, and the mother had a full recovery — stuck with Bestoyong throughout medical school. She is completing her obstetrics and gynecology residency at UCF/Osceola Regional Medical Center in Kissimmee, Fla.

“I wanted to be a doctor because I wanted to empower and be a positive influence on people and my community in terms of their health and wellness,” she said. “Being able to attend an osteopathic school taught me that not only could that include physical health but also your mind and spirit.”

Bestoyong and her family’s timing in immigrating to the U.S. couldn’t have been more fortuitous. One flight created a ripple effect that allowed her to attend an American college, complete her medical education and graduate as a physician who will provide care to women and their babies.

Bailes was one of four osteopathic physicians, along with Carlton Apgar, D.O., Don Newell Sr., D.O., and Frank Wallington, D.O., who founded the osteopathic medical school — then referred to as the Greenbrier College of Osteopathic Medicine — in 1972 on the campus of the former Greenbrier Military School.

The 95-year-old osteopathic physician had made a lifetime of contributions that helped move the profession forward, from his own career as a practicing physician to the founding of medical schools and his guidance in medical education.

“We are saddened that WVSOM’s last remaining founder is no longer with us,” WVSOM President James W. Nemitz, Ph.D., said. “Dr. Bailes was a loyal, passionate supporter of the school he helped to found. He will be remembered for his many contributions to the osteopathic medical profession and his dedicated service to the people of southern West Virginia.”

Nemitz recognized Bailes during the school’s 2019 graduation. Bailes attended WVSOM Commencement and Convocation and White Coat ceremonies frequently, representing the four founders and their vision.

“Dr. Bailes was instrumental in establishing the West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine as well as other osteopathic medical schools,” Nemitz said during the ceremony. “Dr. Bailes, along with his devoted wife, Jean, have attended many graduation and white coat ceremonies held at WVSOM.”

John Manchin II, D.O., a member of the school’s first graduating class in 1978, recognized Bailes during his keynote speech at WVSOM’s Convocation and White Coat Ceremony in 2017.

“I have to pay tribute to our founders, and I’m reminded of a famous quote from Winston Churchill: ‘Never was so much owed by so many to so few.’ Please take the time to learn about these early founders of WVSOM—Dr. Apgar, Dr. Bailes, Dr. Wallington and Dr. Newell,” Manchin said to the students in that class.

Bailes and the three other WVSOM founders were determined to create a successful osteopathic medical school that would serve the rural areas of West Virginia. Bailes has shown his support of WVSOM in many ways, including contributing to the school’s Capital Campaign and attending continuing medical education seminars.

Bailes earned a degree from the Kansas City College of Osteopathy in 1952 and completed an internship at Lakeside Hospital in Kansas City, Mo. Shortly after the Nicholas County, W.Va., native became a physician, he began working at his retired in-laws’ practice. Jean and O.J. Bailes worked alongside one another for about 25 years — she ran the office while he saw patients — before he transitioned to medical education.

Osteopathic schools across the U.S. benefited from Bailes’ leadership and medical knowledge. He was a dean at the College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific in Pomona, Calif., where he worked for nearly a decade. He also offered guidance to students at the Ohio University of Osteopathic Medicine and Pikeville College of Osteopathic Medicine.

In the late 1980s, Bailes was awarded two honorary doctorates: a Doctor of Science from WVSOM and a Doctor of Humane Letters from the College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific. In 2006, he was named Osteopathic Physician of the Year by the West Virginia Osteopathic Medical Association, formerly the West Virginia Society of Osteopathic Medicine. He was also honored by the American Osteopathic Association (AOA) with induction into the AOA Mentor Hall of Fame in 2012 for his dedication and inspiration to other physicians.

Bailes’ accomplishments and accolades span more than 50 years. He also provided medical
Osteopathic schools across the U.S. benefited from Bailes' leadership and medical knowledge.

care internationally, with medical trips to India and Bangladesh, where he taught osteopathic manipulation to physical therapists.

He spent the latter part of his career working with his colleague Jana Peters, D.O., a 1984 WVSOM graduate affiliated with Princeton Community Hospital, for more than 20 years before retiring a few years ago.

“I feel privileged, honored and blessed to have known him,” Peters said. “Dr. Bailes was my mentor, my colleague, but first and foremost he was my friend.”

Peters was also Bailes’ physician and was with him at his home when he passed. She recalls his quiet yet mischievous antics, even on his final day.

“I don’t think we ever spoke one nice word to each other until the past couple months. We picked on each other relentlessly,” she said. “I asked him on Saturday afternoon, ‘Can you tell me what’s wrong?’ and he joked, ‘You.’ He never lost his humor.”

It’s no secret to those who had the pleasure of knowing Bailes that he credited all his accomplishments to his wife, Jean, who passed away Feb. 12, 2020. The couple, who were rarely ever seen apart, celebrated 73 years of marriage in May. They have two daughters, Cheryl Bredeaux and Suzy Fry; seven grandchildren; and 13 great-grandchildren. Their son, Charles Jerrell, preceded him in death.

Bailes spent decades devoted to the osteopathic medical profession, both as a physician offering care in rural areas and as a visionary helping to found schools that would educate future physicians. And through it all he did it with a spry smile.
Student scholarships and awards were:

The Roland P. Sharp President’s Award and Foundation Award of Excellence for Student Achievement is given to a student based on academic performance, osteopathic professional interest, leadership and citizenship to a first-year student. The 2019 winner was Aaron Byczynski.

WVSOM Alumni Association Scholarships are given to two students who exemplify scholarship, osteopathic professional interest, leadership and citizenship. The winners were Benjamin Kastenbauer and Nicholas Ralston.

The Greenbrier Military School Alumni Association Scholarship is presented to two students who excel academically and show strong leadership, determination and discipline. The 2019 recipients were Matthew Santer and Michael Yost.

The Fredric W. Smith Memorial Scholarship is awarded to a student completing his or her first year of medical school. The student must plan to practice family medicine and have a strong interest in the school and community. The winner was Matthew Santer.

The Dr. William B. Mullen and Jennifer White Scholarship was created in recognition of Dr. William B. Mullen of Logan, W.Va., who cared for patient, Jennifer White, who passed away in 2011. Valene Toppings, Samantha Garretson and Thomas Powell were the scholarship recipients.

Six WVSOM students received recognition for BrickStreet Scholarships donated by the BrickStreet Foundation. The 2019 scholarship recipients were Jordan Allen, Ashley Blake, Alexandra Bowman, Lucas Goodwin, Madeleine Gwinn and Elena Hunsanger.

The West Virginia Emulation Endowment Trust/Dr. Olen E. Jones Jr. Scholarship was established in 2016 and named after Olen E. Jones Jr., Ph.D., who served as president of WVSOM from 1987 to 2009. The scholarship is awarded to West Virginia students based on literary and scholastic attainments, morality, leadership and physical vigor. The 2019 scholarship recipients were Tanner Tuggle, Eric Saunders and Natan Harel.

The West Virginia State Medical Association (WVSMA) Alliance Scholarship Fund provides scholarships for medical students from West Virginia who have a desire to practice in the state after they graduate. The alliance is an organization that comprises physician spouses, who in the fall of 2016, established a $30,000 endowment at each of the three medical schools in West Virginia. The 2019 WVSOM scholarship was presented to Caleb Martin.

The James R. Stookey, D.O., Manipulative Medicine Scholarship was formed in honor of James Stookey, vice president for academic affairs and dean from 1988 to 2002. The scholarship is given to a student who has demonstrated proficiency in manipulative medicine. The 2019 the scholarship was awarded to Salima Conte.
The MOSS Scholarships honor the late Marlene Wager, D.O., and are presented to students who are not West Virginia residents. For 2019, 15 students received the scholarship. They were Austin Bennett, Melanie Bennett, Michael Brown, Aaron Byczynski, Natasha Carrero Mercado, Logan Cheshire, Brittany Erwin, James Ferrick, Olivia (Erica) Holodnik, Sarah Jones, Vincent LaMantia, Abigail Mayfield, Christopher Musil, Heather Reeves and Alfredo Wong Jr.

The Marlene Wager 10-Fingered OPP Scholarship was created by the Osteopathic Principles and Practice (OPP) department in 2008 to recognize a second-year student with outstanding skills in osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT). Candidates are nominated and voted by classmates. The winner has his or her name engraved on a plaque that is displayed in the osteopathic clinical skills lab. The 2019 recipient was Nicholas Ralston.

The Paul Kleman, D.O., Family Practice Student Award (Kleman family and West Virginia Society of the American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians) recognizes a student who plans to use osteopathic manipulation in treatment of their patients and is willing to instill the importance of osteopathic principles and practice in the next generation of WVSOM students. Whitney Workman received the 2019 award.

The WVSOM Family Practice Scholarship is awarded to a second-year West Virginia resident who has intentions of practicing family medicine upon graduation. The scholarship was awarded to Natan Harel.

The Ronald P. Billips Memorial Scholarship was formed by a 2002 WVSOM graduate to honor his friend and classmate killed in a car accident. The award is given to a second-year medical student from Barbour, McDowell, Taylor, Preston or Harrison counties in West Virginia who plans to remain in the state to practice in a primary care specialty. The 2019 scholarship recipient was Patricia Wilt.

The Student D.O. of the Year award acknowledges a student’s commitment to his or her school, community and the osteopathic profession. The recipient was Lindsey Kent.

The U.S. Public Health Service Excellence in Public Health Award is given to a student who has developed and implemented a program advancing the overarching goals and achieving the objects of Health People 2020. The student has also developed and implemented a program that addresses the priorities of the National Prevention Strategy. The 2019 recipient was Caroline Gormley.

The WVSOM Diversity Task Force – Eva Teter Hammer Award is given to a student who demonstrates an interest in osteopathic medicine and eliminating the inequities of individuals. Henry Manigat was recognized for 2019.

The Student Government Association (C.O.R.E.) Special Award Presentation recognizes members for their efforts in teaching, as well as those who have excelled in integrating OPP in their classes. The 2019 winners were Gabor Szalai, Ph.D. (biomedical sciences), Gretchen Lovett, Ph.D. (clinical sciences), and Suzanne Courtney, D.O. (adjunct clinical sciences preceptor).

The Atlas Club Golden Key Award is given to a biomedical sciences faculty member and clinical sciences faculty member selected by students. This year’s recipients were Peter Ward, Ph.D., and Kathleen Martin, M.D.

The Student Government Association Appreciation Recognition is given to employees by SGA members for their work and support on behalf of medical students. The 2019 recipients were Kenneth Bays, Amy Crickenberger, Lisa Howard, Kyle Jones, Lisa Seldomridge, Cliff Stone, Stephanie Taylor, Mark VanBuren and Alicia Winters.
Keynote speaker to medical students:

‘This is your story, this is your song’
Robert B. Holstein, D.O., who has 40 years’ experience as a physician, said the most fulfilling aspect of being a doctor is building personal relationships with patients.

The importance of defining one’s story and listening to patients’ stories was the main message Holstein shared with the newest class of medical students at WVSOM. Holstein delivered the keynote speech to 198 first-year students during the school’s annual Convocation and White Coat Ceremony on Aug. 24.

“To this day, I learn so much from my interaction with my patients — hearing about their families, their vacations, their hobbies and things that interest them. I have a sincere interest in hearing their story. I guess it is part of my heritage as a West Virginian where storytelling is deeply rooted in our culture,” the Class of 1979 graduate said to the audience. “I find that getting to know my patients on a personal level enhances the doctor-patient relationship. I truly believe I give them better care because I know them personally. Sharing life stories with one another is about being human and engaging in life together. It exemplifies mankind’s drive to be relational.”
Medical students navigate a long road in becoming physicians who take the time to invest in patient relationships. The Convocation and White Coat Ceremony marks the Class of 2023’s commitment to a life of health care service and is the first step in one’s medical school journey. The coat symbolizes a student’s pledge to the osteopathic profession and to serve communities and individuals.

WVSOM President James W. Nemitz, Ph.D., told the class that the ceremony welcomes students not only to WVSOM but into the community of osteopathic physicians.

“We are gathered here today on this beautiful campus because of the dedicated hard work of people who came before you,” he said. “We stand here on the shoulders of giants: Our founders, Drs. Apgar, Bailes, Newell and Wallington; our first president, Dr. Roland Sharp; and many others. I especially want to remember Dr. O.J. Bailes, who was our last living founder until his passing a couple weeks ago. Dr. Bailes was a remarkable man and a giant in the osteopathic medical profession.”

Nemitz encouraged the first-year students to envision themselves as the osteopathic physicians they want to become, even though it will require perseverance and commitment.

“Putting on the white coat will not transform you into an osteopathic physician. There’s a lot of hard work that will be required of you to earn your white coat. It will require growth, both intellectually and emotionally, and in time you’ll make your white coat your own. Have a vision for yourself,” he said.
Holstein also spoke about the symbolism of the white coat. “When you are presented with your white coat this morning, wear it as an outward symbol of an inward calling — a calling of genuine love and care for your patients,” he said. “Take the time to hear their personal story without silencing them or allowing yourselves to be silenced. Class of 2023, dare to hear the diverse stories of your peers, of one another and of those seated with you this morning. Hear their stories with ears that are open and hearts that are gracious. Engage in life together. The relationships you develop at WVSOM will last forever. You are now part of each other’s story. You are now part of the WVSOM story, and your lives will be changed. This is your story, this is your song.”

The ceremony also included brief greetings from WVSOM Board of Governors Chair Steven Sarver, Alumni Association Secretary/Treasurer Ryan Newell, D.O., and West Virginia Osteopathic Medical Association President Arthur Rubin, D.O.

Holstein is board certified in family medicine and had a career in solo practice until 2015 when he transitioned to employment with MyHealthOnSite, a wellness medical facility that provides care to employees and dependents of the Charlotte County Sheriff’s Department and the Charlotte County Government in Port Charlotte, Fla. He is the vice chair of the WVSOM Board of Governors and received the WVSOM Distinguished Alumni of the Year award for 2019.

The Convocation and White Coat Ceremony coincides with WVSOM’s Alumni Weekend hosted by the WVSOM Alumni Association. Graduates return to campus for continuing medical education and other events including an outdoor concert, barbecue and reunion dinner. Some alumni assist in the ceremony by presenting white coats to students.
WVSOM Gala raised more than $35,000 for student scholarships

The palm trees, pink flamingos, straw tiki huts and pops of vibrantly colored table décor created the perfect eye candy for WVSOM’s “Tropical Nights” gala in September.

The 2019 WVSOM Gala, formerly known as the Grand Affair, is the Student Government Association’s (SGA) largest fundraising event that directly benefits scholarships for students who exemplify academic leadership, community involvement and the osteopathic medical profession. This year, more than $35,000 was raised.

SGA President Aaron Byczynski, Class of 2022, helped organize the gala. He has also benefited from money raised at the event as a past scholarship recipient.

“The gala was such a success this year. The Student Government Association could not have been happier with the turnout. This event is very important to me, and I am happy to say that we surpassed our donation goal. The night was filled with great food, great people, dancing and fun. I would like to thank all those who attended, all those who donated and those who contributed to the success of the silent auction,” he said.

The gala offers WVSOM students, staff and members of the community a semi-formal evening with a strolling dinner, silent auction, photo booth and dancing. Aside from its primary purpose of fundraising, the gala offers an opportunity to build relationships.

WVSOM President James W. Nemitz, Ph.D., said opportunities for students to engage with community members are valuable.

“It’s such a wonderful thing to witness our community celebrating WVSOM students,” he said.
“Medical students are involved in such a rigorous journey to become physicians, and with contributions from sponsors and silent auction donors our students know that there are people out there supporting them. There are people who are committed to helping WVSOM students reach their goal of becoming a health care provider, and it warms my heart to see it firsthand. I can’t think of a better way to raise scholarship dollars for our students to become great osteopathic physicians.”

- WVSOM PRESIDENT JAMES W. NEMITZ, PH.D.
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WVSOM, MU announced collaborative agreement

WVSOM and Marshall University, through its Joan C. Edwards School of Medicine, announced a memorandum of understanding that will allow for collaborative medical education efforts between osteopathic and allopathic programs at each institution.

WVSOM President James W. Nemitz, Ph.D., and Marshall University President Jerome A. Gilbert, Ph.D., signed the agreement at Marshall’s South Charleston campus. Both higher education institutions share the goal of advancing first-class medical education in West Virginia and improving access to quality physician care in communities throughout the Mountain State.

“I believe the signing of this memorandum of understanding will result in a stronger collaboration between Marshall University and WVSOM that will increase opportunities for the benefit of our students and the citizens of West Virginia,” Nemitz said. Gilbert also spoke in support of the collaboration.

“For years, we have partnered with the West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine on providing quality clinical education for their students in our region,” Gilbert said. “This agreement formalizes our relationship and paves the way for a more integrated, collaborative framework that will continue to ensure a top-notch clinical experience for all medical students and better access to physicians for citizens in the southern part of our state.”

The agreement states that the schools will work to develop and expand clinical rotations for medical students at institutions associated with the Mountain Health Network, a regional health system comprising three hospitals, and explore opportunities to enhance residency placement for graduates. WVSOM and Marshall will also advocate jointly on issues of mutual interest before the West Virginia Legislature, the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (HEPC) and other governmental bodies.

Michael J. Farrell, Esq., chairman of the West Virginia HEPC, attended the signing. He said the collaboration is an important step for the state.

“I commend these two presidents and look forward to the results of this agreement, which will be fantastic for students and patients of West Virginia. The HEPC strongly endorses what you all are doing.”

Robert C. Byrd Clinic named new CEO

Scot Mitchell, MHSA, FACHE, now oversees clinic operations in his role that began July 15. Most recently he was the CEO of Cordova Community Medical Center, a critical access hospital in Alaska.

“I’m really looking forward to getting to know and work with the staff and physicians at the clinic and the staff at the West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine. Working together we will create an organization that continues the successes the clinic has had over the years and expands upon them so the community views the Robert C. Byrd Clinic as their health care provider of first choice,” he said. “I’m also excited to become a part of the nationally recognized WVSOM training program where the clinic serves as one of the first locations that the medical students work with their professors to provide quality health care services.”

John Garlitz, D.O., RCBC Board of Directors chair and WVSOM professor, said the board selected Mitchell based on his past experience, ties to the local area and interaction with the staff during the interview process.

Mitchell has more than 27 years of experience working in health care services in rural communities. For more than 15 years, he served as a hospital and clinic CEO in facilities ranging in size from a 23-bed critical access hospital to a 95-bed sole community hospital.

He previously served as a budget and policy analyst for the Senate Health Committee in the West Virginia Legislature. He is a native of Oceana, W Va., and lived in Summers County for several years, where he served as administrator of Summers County ARH Hospital, part of Appalachian Regional Healthcare.

Mitchell has a Master of Health Services Administration degree from the Medical University of South Carolina and a Bachelor of Science degree in biology from Concord University, formerly Concord College. He is a fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives.
WVSOM and CAMC announced collaboration

The new collaboration between WVSOM and CAMC will provide a stable system of core and elective rotations, didactics and other educational components for WVSOM students.

WVSOM will determine a curriculum, appoint accredited faculty and perform administrative functions at the site. CAMC will provide space for the campus and will allow the use of its Simulation Center for all students from the South Central Region of the school’s Statewide Campus system.

“WVSOM is pleased to be working with Charleston Area Medical Center on this exciting and mutually beneficial project,” said James W. Nemitz, Ph.D., WVSOM’s president. “We’re always looking for opportunities that will allow our students to enhance their education, and we believe this collaboration will be a positive one both for students and for the community of Charleston.”

The two organizations have a strong history, with CAMC serving as one of the locations at which WVSOM students can participate in clinical education rotations. The CAMC campus is expected to launch in June 2020, with WVSOM students beginning rotations at the site in July 2020.

“We are one of the major players in addressing this crisis in regard to education, prevention and the possibility of what we can do with treatment and workforce development,” Nemitz said. “Being able to provide resources like the opioid education series for our students will continue to help reduce the stigma of substance use and hopefully work toward reducing the number of people affected by this epidemic.”

WVSOM addressed opioid issue with educational series for students

WVSOM is taking another step toward educating future physicians about an issue that has made headlines and has made its way to the forefront of the health care profession in the state.

The medical school addressed substance use and opioid addiction through an educational series designed for students. This was the first time the school offered an opioid series aimed toward students. The original idea for the series came from Jovan George, president of WVSOM’s chapter of the Neuro-Psych Club in 2018-19.

The series included five sessions that addressed panel topics such as family and patient perspectives; first responders and law enforcement perspectives; management, treatment and naloxone administration; and health professional management and treatment.

One session included the screening of the Oscar-nominated Netflix documentary Heroine(s), which follows three women — a fire chief, a judge and a street missionary — battling West Virginia’s opioid epidemic. The documentary was followed by a discussion with Jan Rader, Huntington fire chief and one of Time magazine’s 100 most influential people for 2018; Rev. Dr. Jana Stoner, quick response team; and Lt. Brian Baker, of the Greenbrier County Sheriff’s Department.

Juliana Quick, a WVSOM student counselor/learning specialist and the school’s Neuro-Psych Club advisor, helped organize the series. She said one goal of the series was to increase knowledge and awareness of the opioid epidemic among first- and second-year students.

“Another goal of the series is to reduce the stigma surrounding addiction and increase awareness of resources throughout the state,” she said.

WVSOM presented information about the opioid series at the annual WONCA World Rural Health Conference in Albuquerque, N.M., in October. The conference, hosted by the National Rural Health Association, was the first time in eight years the event had been held in the U.S.

Preparing the Next Generation of Physicians to Address the Opioid Epidemic was presented by Haylee Heinsberg, M.Ed., and Juliana Quick, M.A., Ed.S., LPC. Heinsberg and Quick highlighted the school’s pilot opioid educational series for medical students. Dr. Drema Mace, vice president for community engagement and development, presented at the conference on a related CRCH project, The Opioid and Prescription Drug Awareness Toolkit.
WVSOM re-accredited by HLC

WVSOM received continued accreditation by the Institutional Actions Council of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) for the next five years.

Since WVSOM graduated its first class in 1978, the school has remained fully accredited by the appropriate body of the American Osteopathic Association, which is currently the Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation. WVSOM voluntarily sought additional accreditation by the HLC and has been accredited by the organization since 2014.

“HLC accreditation is the gold standard for institutional accreditation and validation of the quality of the institution,” said WVSOM President James W. Nemitz, Ph.D. “Achieving continued HLC accreditation is a testament to the outstanding efforts by WVSOM’s faculty and staff to provide a quality education to help our hard-working, dedicated students achieve their goals.”

Receiving re-accreditation status remains part of the school’s strategic plan in fulfilling its mission of educating lifelong learners.

Edward Bridges, Ph.D., WVSOM’s vice president for administration and external relations, said administrators are pleased the organization recognized the value WVSOM brings to the osteopathic medical community.

“Achieving accreditation standards such as these demonstrates that we are meeting our mission to serve West Virginians and emphasizing primary care in rural areas,” he said. “For nearly two years, various groups worked to draft a report detailing how the school is meeting the HLC’s accreditation criteria. We owe this excellent news to everyone’s hard work in delivering the outstanding educational experience that makes WVSOM a leader in rural primary care.”

The commission’s review of the school involved a rigorous self-assessment process, a site visit by a team of educators and a review of the site visit report by the HLC.

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Tracey Anderson, Ed.D., WVSOM’s director of accreditation, said the accreditation process takes a team effort.

“No single person can maneuver all the moving parts alone. Helping people understand how the work they do every day contributes to the big picture of accreditation is a vital part of achieving continued accreditation status,” she said.

“When an institution successfully demonstrates that it meets its mission, conducts its activities with integrity, provides quality education, continually evaluates and improves all facets of the institution, and plans for the future, a positive outcome is achieved.”

While the comprehensive evaluation visit is complete and continued accreditation has been granted, Anderson said, the school soon will begin preparation for the next review visit, which will take place in the 2024-25 academic year.

WVSOM continues work on retaining wall, sidewalk as part of green space project

WVSOM began a construction project to renovate the “green space” between the school’s main building and Lee Street. As part of the project, the area of Lee Street that runs directly in front of the school was closed to traffic.

Both Silo Lane and Greenbrier Avenue have remained opened during the project.

The closing is necessary because the retaining wall along Lee Street was demolished due to its poor condition. A new wall is being built and a 5-foot-wide sidewalk is being added on the street-facing side. Additionally, some trees have been removed from the green space for safety reasons and to reduce pressure on the wall from root growth, and cracked pillars that line a driveway in front of the school will be replaced.

“WVSOM is concerned with the safety of residents because of the weakening of the concrete wall and the failing health of some trees,” said Larry Ware, MBA, CPA, vice president for finance and facilities. “We are taking this opportunity to move the wall away from Lee Street and provide an additional sidewalk for pedestrian traffic. We appreciate everyone’s patience as we make these improvements.”

Workers also demolished the crumbling, uneven sidewalk adjacent to the flagpole in front of the main building.

The work is the first phase of a larger project to renovate the green space. Later phases will include repaving the school’s circular drive, additional landscaping and adding new handicap parking spaces. When work on the green space is complete, an electronic sign to advertise WVSOM events will be permanently placed near the Silo Lane entrance to the school.

Ware said he hopes that all phases of the renovation will be complete by spring.
Marc Goodman, a global strategist, writer and consultant, provided a general session during the American Osteopathic Association’s annual Osteopathic Medical Education (OMED) conference in Baltimore. He spoke about how allopathic schools of medicine and the American Medical Association had information on cybersecurity in health care but no osteopathic associations or osteopathic medical schools did — except WVSOM.

During the OMED session, he provided a specific example of how the medical school had published information on its website regarding National Cybersecurity Awareness Month and encouraged students and staff to view the information.

“Cybersecurity and medical cybercrime are critical issues facing the health care industry. Few in osteopathic medicine have dedicated the resources and training required to not only protect patients’ HIPAA-protected information, but patients’ lives themselves,” Goodman said. “As technology increasingly becomes embedded in hospitals, doctors’ offices and even patients’ bodies, physicians will need to understand more and more about these grave risks. To date, the only osteopathic medical school which has publicly posted information on their website about these challenges is WVSOM — a great initial effort that should be built upon extensively in the future.”


Kim Ransom, WVSOM’s chief technology officer, said to be acknowledged for doing the right things by an expert in the cybersecurity field is a great accomplishment.

“IT’s surprising to hear that WVSOM was the only osteopathic medical school out there providing cybersecurity information, and I’m glad we are leading that charge,” Ransom said. “I personally feel like WVSOM is trying to do all the right things within

the information technology department to make sure our network and servers are secure and that we are educating the campus community on what they should and shouldn’t be doing online.”

October is National Cybersecurity Awareness Month. Aside from awareness information posted on the school’s website, WVSOM also flags external emails as possible spam, releases information on cybersecurity in the monthly electronic newsletter and has a webpage dedicated to submitting potential fraudulent emails.

WVSOM recognized for cybersecurity awareness during OMED conference

A New York Times best-selling author recognized WVSOM for its awareness efforts in cybersecurity.
Students visited Peru and North Carolina to help those in need

For some students, spring break is a time to relax with their families. For others, it offers a chance to enjoy the sand, sun and shorelines of a favorite beach. But for two groups of WVSOM students, spring break 2019 was about helping those in need.

Sixteen students from WVSOM’s student chapter of DOCARE International visited the Calca region of southern Peru, near the city of Cusco, for a medical service trip. They were accompanied by WVSOM faculty members Dr. Kathleen Martin and Dr. Maple Landvoigt, as well as more than a dozen other health care professionals and volunteers.

The group treated about 1,300 patients during the trip, which included four clinic days. WVSOM student Chance Rohrbaugh, 2018-19 president of WVSOM’s DOCARE chapter, said common medical problems included generalized joint pain, women’s health issues, and a variety of parasitic and viral infections. The group also helped provide reading glasses to elderly patients, conduct dental procedures and perform osteopathic manipulation. Rohrbaugh said it was humbling to see the limited resources with which the local population lived.

“Most of the people were from the mountains and didn’t have traditional doctors. They would have to go to Cusco for medical care, and because many of them didn’t have vehicles or horses, that would have meant a four- or five-hour walk,” he said.
Supplies for the Peru trip were purchased using proceeds from DOCARE’s 2019 International Festival and from fundraisers such as bake sales, a carnation sale, an open-mic night and a crowdfunding website created in conjunction with the WVSOM Foundation. In all, the club raised about $9,000 for the trip, and the WVSOM Foundation matched $7,500 of that amount. The funds were used to purchase antibiotics, anti-inflammatory drugs, injectables and other medications, and tools such as needles, scalpels and speculums.

Another organization — the WVSOM student chapter of the Christian Medical and Dental Association (CMDA) — spent spring break in Monroe, N.C., helping Habitat for Humanity work on three buildings in which the Shining Light Baptist Church will house orphans from across the East Coast. Ten students, along with the club’s faculty advisor, Dr. Abigail Frank, traveled to the Charlotte suburb.

Students spent three days painting interiors, building decks and cleaning up the property by picking up scrap wood and pieces of drywall.

“The buildings were donated and were ready to move into, but vandals came in and broke windows and busted the walls,” said Jessica Keenan, 2018-19 president of WVSOM’s CMDA. “The church had to rip out the insides and put up new drywall and new paint.”

The group also had the opportunity to meet some of the kids the homes will host. Keenan said the children, whose ages ranged from 8 to 15, were grateful for the homes.

CMDA members also spent a day assisting with a separate Habitat for Humanity project. The organization is building a new home for an adult in need, and the group helped with stud work as well as painting a shed and providing roofing for a porch.

The trip was funded entirely by the CMDA’s 2018 Thanksgiving dinner and auction, which raised $2,855.
WVSOM Day recognized at Capitol

The West Virginia State Capitol was filled with green and gold on March 4, 2019, which West Virginia Gov. Jim Justice declared “WVSOM Day” in the state. For the seventh year, WVSOM faculty, staff and students in the Statewide Campus system represented the medical school in the House of Delegates and Senate halls.

A proclamation by the governor’s office was presented to WVSOM President James W. Nemitz, Ph.D., with other leadership, students and employees recognizing the school’s mission to provide quality health care to West Virginia’s residents. WVSOM was also presented with a resolution from the Senate and a citation from the House of Delegates. The school’s “Living Our Mission” campaign was the day’s main theme.

Booths provided blood pressure readings by students and information from marketing and communications, Statewide Campus, alumni, human resources, the WVSOM Foundation, the Rural Health Initiative, the Center for Rural and Community Health, the Healthy Children’s Initiative, the Southeastern Area Health Education Center and Mountain State Osteopathic Postdoctoral Training Institutes.
AACOM staff addressed legislative issues

Members of the government relations staff of the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM) — a nonprofit organization that serves as a unifying voice for the nation’s accredited colleges of osteopathic medicine — spoke to WVSOM students, faculty and staff about legislative issues facing osteopathic education.

Pamela Murphy, AACOM’s former senior vice president of government relations, and Mary-Lynn Bender, the organization’s senior director of government and public relations, addressed legislative topics relevant to medical education and offered ways students can ensure their voices are heard by lawmakers.

Murphy informed attendees about the PROSPER Act, a House bill she said would eliminate public service loan forgiveness and abolish the popular Grad PLUS loans in favor of a program that would leave the average osteopathic medical student $93,000 short of covering their education. She also spoke on AACOM’s efforts to address the opioid epidemic.

Bender encouraged students to participate in AACOM’s “ED to MED” campaign to promote continuation of the Higher Education Act, which funds financial aid and student loan repayment programs. She emphasized the importance of advocacy for osteopathic medical education and discussed ways members of the WVSOM community can become involved, asking students to become “campus ambassadors,” using blogging and social media to support the effort to preserve student aid programs.

Hoops Family Children’s Hospital is newest Abracadabra sponsor

Hoops Family Children’s Hospital at Cabell Huntington Hospital signed on as a sponsor of Season 7 of Abracadabra, the children’s television series produced as part of WVSOM’s Healthy Children’s Initiative.

Abracadabra is a television show aimed at children ages 4 to 10 that combines health education, nutrition and science with magic, ventriloquism and original songs. The half-hour series is hosted by Michael Adelman, D.O., J.D., WVSOM’s president emeritus.

Adelman, who is the show’s creator, said he is thankful that the Huntington, W.Va.-based hospital will be among the organizations that underwrite the program.

“We’re thrilled and honored to have Hoops Family Children’s Hospital as a sponsor,” Adelman said. “We know that they believe, like we do, that healthy children are vital to a healthier future for West Virginia. Together we look forward to working to improve the health and welfare of our children.”

Eduardo Pino, M.D., FAAP, medical director for Hoops Family Children’s Hospital, visited the Abracadabra set last summer and has a walk-on role in Season 7. He said he appreciated being able to participate in a series that makes learning enjoyable for young people.

“Being a part of Abracadabra was a wonderful experience,” Pino said. “Educating children on the importance of their health is extremely important, so we are pleased to support this show that introduces healthy habits to children in such a fun way.”

Abracadabra’s seventh season was filmed in July at Concord University. The program is produced in partnership with West Virginia Public Broadcasting.
Psychiatry poster won at national research forum

WVSOM students presented posters at the 60th National Student Research Forum, organized by the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, Texas. Muhannad Kurtom, Class of 2020, won best case report in the psychiatry category for “Hallucinogen-Persisting Perception Disorder in a 21-Year-Old Man,” co-authored with Ashley Henning, Class of 2020, and Eduardo D. Espiridion, M.D. Henning, with Kurtom and Espiridion, presented a poster on “A Case Study of Acute Stimulant-Induced Psychosis.”

Four students attended officer development school in Rhode Island

WVSOM Class of 2022 students Brendan Blackford, Alex Foster, Joshua Morin and Noel Mellor attended officer development school June 1-July 5 in Newport, R.I. The purpose of the intensive five-week course was to provide a foundation for service in the U.S. Navy as a staff corps officer. The course provided comprehensive instruction on naval structure, traditions, culture, legal systems, military strategy and military etiquette.

Two of the WVSOM students participated in leadership roles at the course. Blackford served as a division officer, running company operations, answering for infractions incurred by those in his company and ensuring corrections were made accordingly. Mellor served as watch bill coordinator for her company, designing and implementing a schedule to ensure sailors performed scheduled watches at a designated building or patrolled the base for security.

Daily activities in the course included physical training, lectures on a variety of topics ranging from the mission of the Navy to asset management, parade marching drills, and uniform preparation. Participants also attended specialized training sessions on firefighting and on saving a ship that has been struck by enemy fire.

Oral presentation won second place

Jason Gilbert, Class of 2020, won second place at the 2019 meeting of the West Virginia chapter of the American College of Surgeons’ Medical Student “Quick Shot” Oral Presentation Competition on May 10. In the competition, students from the three medical schools in West Virginia presented surgical case studies to the attendees of the conference, which takes place annually at The Greenbrier Resort in White Sulphur Springs. Gilbert’s presentation on surgical management of severe coagulopathy took second place in the competition.
**Student named to national SOMA board**

Amanda Buzzetta, Class of 2021, was named the national Student Osteopathic Medical Association’s (SOMA) OPP director for the 2019-20 term. In her role, Buzzetta will guide students toward resources for further training in osteopathic principles and practice, such as the American Academy of Osteopathy’s annual conventions. She will also be responsible for the engagement of SOMA members in activities relating to osteopathic principles and practice.

Buzzetta previously served as a first-year SOMA representative at WVSOM and later as the school’s national liaison officer to the organization. She has been involved with the group since her time as a student at the University of Central Florida, where she was a member of the organization’s undergraduate division, Pre-SOMA.

**SOMA** is the nation’s largest network of osteopathic medical students. Its mission is to educate and prepare osteopathic leaders and advocates, maintain transparent lines of communication to its members, advance collaborative relationships that promote osteopathic medicine in the greater health care community, and use its affiliation with the American Osteopathic Association to advance the interests of osteopathic medical students.

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**Marketing and communications department received ACOM awards**

WVSOM was well represented at the 2018 American Academy of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine’s (AACOM) annual “Educating Leaders” conference, which took place April 10-12 in Washington, D.C.

In AACOM’s Excellence in Communications Awards, WVSOM’s marketing and communications department was awarded first place in the Annual Report category for 2017-18. In the Recruitment Piece category, the department won first place for its 2017-18 Viewbook and received second place for its “Future D.O.” T-shirt and promotional campaign. In the Advertising category, the department won second place for a series of ads announcing the installation ceremony for WVSOM President James W. Nemitz, Ph.D.

The Excellence in Communications Awards are presented in honor of the outstanding marketing, media relations, public education, writing and design efforts of the nation’s colleges of osteopathic medicine.

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**Marketing and communications department honored by industry**

WVSOM’s marketing and communications department won seven awards in the 34th annual Educational Advertising Awards. The department received the following awards:

- **GOLD**
  - 2018 Summer CME items
  - 2018 Grand Affair items
  - #WVSOMLivingOurMission social media campaign
  - Admissions Viewbook

- **SILVER**
  - Abracadabra cookbook
  - Presidential installation multimedia items

- **MERIT**
  - 2017-18 Annual Report

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**Students earned top prize for LGBTQ+ awareness poster**


The students received a check for $500 and an award plaque. The competition highlighted activities and issues related to eliminating health disparities with an emphasis on LGBTQI+ and minority populations (including African Americans, Latinos and Latinas, Asian Americans, Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders, Native Americans and Native Alaskans) by providing education, resources and awareness to colleagues and patients.
Three graduates received HEPC grants

Three students from WVSOM’s Class of 2019 were among 12 West Virginia health sciences students to receive grants from the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission in exchange for a commitment to practice in rural or underserved communities in the state. Carrie Beard, Caleb Judy and Janet Kowalsky were selected to receive the grant based on their academic achievements and strong commitment to advancing rural health and the health care of underserved populations. The awards range from $15,000 to $30,000 per student and are part of the state’s Health Sciences Service Program.

Sigma Xi inducted seven associate members

The Greenbrier Valley chapter of the scientific research honor society Sigma Xi brought seven WVSOM student members into its fold on May 9: Stephanie Haddad, Brooke Kania, Raymond Lam, Vivian To, Steven Veselsky and Kate Warren, all Class of 2021; and Caleb Martin, Class of 2022.

At the chapter’s annual associate member induction lunch, Sigma Xi member Ellen Broudy led students in reciting the organization’s pledge. Chapter president and WVSOM professor emeritus Larry Davis, Ph.D., detailed the history of Sigma Xi and of the Greenbrier Valley chapter. Barbara McCutchan, Ph.D., the chapter’s secretary and treasurer, spoke about recent additions such as the chapter’s Distinguished Lecturer series. The new inductees also shared some of the research projects they’ve undertaken.

Chapter member and WVSOM associate professor Brian Griffith, Ph.D., said he’s pleased to see students who are passionate about scientific inquiry.

“We’re one of only two osteopathic schools affiliated with Sigma Xi, so it’s inspiring to see a good turnout from students and faculty. It’s nice to see the organization continue to grow at WVSOM.”

- BRIAN GRIFFITH, PH.D.
Middle-schoolers visited campus for science fair

WVSOM hosted the seventh annual Southern West Virginia Regional Middle School Science Fair on April 9.

The school partnered with the Greenbrier Valley Chapter of the scientific research society Sigma Xi to host the fair, in which 69 sixth- through eighth-graders registered 43 projects. The schools represented were Eastern Greenbrier Middle School, Peterstown Middle School, Mountain View Elementary and Middle School, Green Bank Elementary-Middle School and Marlinton Middle School.

A panel of WVSOM students judged the science projects based on creativity, scientific thought, understanding, clarity, dramatic value and technical skill. Middle-schoolers could enter projects in the experimental or non-experimental category. WVSOM’s Surgery, Pathology, Wilderness Medicine and OB-GYN clubs presented workshops as part of the fair.

WVSOM professor emeritus Larry Davis, Ph.D., president of the Greenbrier Valley chapter of Sigma Xi, helped organize the fair and said he was pleased with the event.

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WVSOM professor emeritus Larry Davis, Ph.D., president of the Greenbrier Valley chapter of Sigma Xi, helped organize the fair and said he was pleased with the event.

“The conscientious efforts of the students, teachers and administrators of the middle schools in Pocahontas, Greenbrier and Monroe counties enabled the undertaking of these projects,” he said. “The medical school and members of its student research club have for years provided this excellent avenue for the exhibition of the scientific works of young people. Their judging of the projects and creation of interesting workshops have been excellent. It was also good to see that there was a fairly even distribution of winners among the five schools.”

Fifth-graders received early look at WVSOM careers

Students from Ronceverte Elementary School visited the WVSOM campus on May 21 for the school’s Fifth-Grade Career Day. After a welcome message from President James W. Nemitz, Ph.D., students watched a live magic and science presentation from some of the cast of Abracadabra. Jandy Hanna, Ph.D., discussed the role of research at WVSOM and showed children how to examine slides through a microscope. Clinical Evaluation Center staff led a moulage demonstration and introduced students to the school’s human-patient simulators. Bobbi Morgan and Kevin McCraw of the biomedical sciences department demonstrated fingerprinting and exhibited plastinated bones, and a HealthNet Aeromedical helicopter landed on campus so that children could learn about career options with the organization.
Just Say KNOW! taught high school students about anatomy

It’s not often that a high school student gets to make a plastic skeleton “walk” and shake hands.

But at WVSOM’s Just Say KNOW! summer camp, young learners did exactly that. By attaching strings to mimic the action of muscles, students were able to set skeletons in motion to accomplish the required tasks. It was one of many activities at this year’s anatomy-themed camp, which took place June 24-28.

For one week each summer, Just Say KNOW! turns the WVSOM campus into a place where high-schoolers take part in labs, lectures and exciting hands-on projects centered on a particular theme. Open to ninth- through 12th-graders and recent high school graduates, the program is designed to introduce young people to topics related to medicine.

Allie Douglas, a student who completed 10th grade at Herbert Hoover High School in Elkview, W.Va., said the camp will help her reach her goal of becoming a doctor.

“I’ve had a lot of fun and learned so much,” she said. “I wanted to broaden my understanding of the body, and this has exceeded my expectations.”

Just Say KNOW! exposes teens to many of the same resources medical students use. WVSOM students serve as instructors and demonstrate the uniqueness of osteopathic medicine by relating each activity to an osteopathic tenet. A record number of 17 students attended, with high-schoolers traveling from as far away as St. Albans, W.Va.

Biomedical sciences faculty member Courtney Eleazer, Ph.D., who organized this year’s program, said the camp allows participants to explore science topics they’re unlikely to be exposed to in high school.

“This year, we set the bar pretty high in terms of our expectations of the campers, and they consistently exceeded our expectations,” Eleazer said. “I was so proud of their ability to work together to solve complex clinical cases, some of which were at the first-year medical student level.”

The camp’s 2020 theme is neuroscience and will take place June 15-19. Previous camps in the series have included Just Say KNOW to Drugs! and Just Say KNOW to Infectious Diseases!
Kids Science Carnival drew more than 150 participants

More than 150 kids attended WVSOM’s fourth annual Kids Science Carnival on March 16, 2019, hosted by the school’s student chapter of the American College of Osteopathic Pediatricians (ACOPEDS). Kids had the chance to make their own slime, learn about cells using cookies and use stethoscopes to listen to a teddy bear’s simulated heartbeat. Other stations included X-rays, an anatomy puzzle and face painting.

Brandon Smyth, 2018-19 vice president of WVSOM’s ACOPEDS student chapter, said the event was intended to show kids that science can be fun and interactive. “We give them real-life examples of how science can be helpful and important to our lives,” Smyth said. “Exposing children to science early can stimulate their minds to think outside the box.”

Pediatrics Club raised $300 to help 6-year-old cancer patient

In honor of Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, members of WVSOM’s student chapter of the American College of Osteopathic Pediatricians (ACOPEDS) sold gold ribbon lapel pins in September to raise funds for children diagnosed with the disease. The club sold a total of 86 pins, allowing them to contribute $300 to West Virginia Kids Cancer Crusaders (WVKCC), an organization that has provided financial help to hundreds of West Virginia families. WVKCC selected as a recipient the family of a 6-year-old leukemia patient, according to Brittani Hancock, 2019-20 ACOPEDS president and second-year WVSOM student.
WVSOM offered blood pressure checks, Teddy Bear Clinic at state fair

WVSOM had a strong presence at the State Fair of West Virginia, which took place Aug. 8-17 in Fairlea, W.Va. The school provided 2,068 free blood pressure checks for fair attendees, of which 1,321 were performed by students. WVSOM also offered a free Teddy Bear Clinic that allowed 512 children to take the stuffed animals’ “temperatures” and examine their eyes, ears and nose.

WVSOM declared support for Greenbrier Valley Aquatic Center

WVSOM formally announced its support for the Greenbrier Valley Aquatic Center during an Aug. 16 proclamation signing.

The $6 million, 22,400-square-foot aquatic center, currently in its capital commitment phase, will be an all-ages social and recreational center featuring three swimming areas — a competition pool, a recreation pool and a therapy pool — as well as a cardio room, senior room, classroom, party room, concession area and other amenities. It is projected to open in 2021.

In its proclamation, WVSOM said it supports the Greenbrier Valley Aquatic Center for its potential to improve the health of West Virginians. Swimming is the fourth most popular recreational activity in the U.S., and aquatic exercise can improve the health of people with chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and arthritis, all of which have a higher prevalence in West Virginia than in other states. Aquatic exercise can also benefit older adults and mothers and their unborn children.

The facility is being developed by the nonprofit Greenbrier Valley Aquatic Center Corporation, which so far has received commitments of nearly $2.6 million. The center will be located off U.S. Route 219 in Fairlea, W.Va., on five acres of land provided by the State Fair of West Virginia. It began as a Greenbrier East High School student project during the 2015-16 academic year in collaboration with architect Tag Galyean and engineering teacher Kevin Warfield.

“Part of our mission is to address first and foremost the needs of the citizens of West Virginia by helping them get involved in activities that improve health, so we’re excited about the possibility of working with the center as it becomes a reality.”

- WVSOM PRESIDENT
  JAMES W. NEMITZ, PH.D.

Staff conducted school-supply, canned food drives

In August, WVSOM staff collected items to fill backpacks as part of a school-supply drive for students in Monroe County. Through collection boxes placed around campus, staff gathered notebooks, pencils, pens, markers, crayons, erasers, folders and other goods to be used by the county’s young learners, for a total of nearly 420 items. Later that month, staff hosted a canned food and paper goods drive to benefit the Lewisburg/Fairlea food pantry. Staff members collected 300 items including canned vegetables, soup and chili; cereal; peanut butter; jams and jellies; and condiments.
WVSOM’s Day of Service highlighted orientation events

It may have been a Saturday morning, but that didn’t stop WVSOM students from rolling up their sleeves on July 27 to mow, landscape, paint, clean offices, set up air conditioning units and complete other physical tasks as part of the school’s Day of Service.

An annual partnership with the United Way of Greenbrier Valley, the Day of Service connects osteopathic medical students with organizations in need of volunteer labor. The event, part of WVSOM’s orientation week for incoming students, introduces newcomers to Lewisburg and surrounding areas and offers them a chance to give back to the community. The event also allows students to earn Translating Osteopathic Understanding into Community Health (T.O.U.C.H.) hours.

More than 130 first- and second-year students took part in this year’s event. Nathaniel Jordan, Class of 2022 and WVSOM’s T.O.U.C.H. coordinator for 2019-20, said he thinks students got even more out of the Day of Service than they put into it.

“Showing the community that we’re invested in them had a big impact on us,” he said. “Osteopathic medicine teaches us to look at the whole person, and being part of a community is an important aspect of being a whole person.”

Organizations that benefited from the 2019 Day of Service included the Child and Youth Advocacy Center, Greenbrier Community School, the Montwell Commons barn that is being used as WVSOM’s Clingman Center for Community Engagement, Eastern Greenbrier Middle School, Gateway Industries, Stratton Elementary School, Frankford Elementary School, White Sulphur Springs Elementary School and Alderson Hospitality House.

WVSOM’s Class of 2023 orientation began July 22 when first-year students pledged to abide by the school’s honor code, received laptop computers and were fitted for white coats. Students attended an on-campus Resource Fair to learn about local services and businesses, sat in on seminars to help them prepare for life in medical school, networked at a Mentor-Mentee Cookout and celebrated the start of the academic year at the school’s annual President’s Reception.

“Osteopathic medicine teaches us to look at the whole person, and being part of a community is an important aspect of being a whole person.”

-NATHANIEL JORDAN, WVSOM’S T.O.U.C.H. COORDINATOR
Rural Practice Day showcased panels, simulated case

The WVSOM Rural Health Initiative (RHI) hosted its eighth annual Rural Practice Day on March 2, 2019. WVSOM students, RHI students and pipeline students from the RHI’s undergraduate Green Coat program attended the event.

An alumni panel of James Harman, D.O., Class of 2010; Lyndsi Cress, D.O., Class of 2015; and Michael Bledsoe, D.O., Class of 2014, spoke about their experiences from medical school and residency to their current practices and community involvement. Brandon Carman, of the West Virginia State Office of Rural Health, and Jordyn Reed, of the Higher Education Policy Commission, spoke about financial options and incentives. WVSOM alumna Bridgett Morrison, D.O., of Greenbrier Valley Medical Center, as well as residents and fourth-year RHI students, presented a simulated case related to rural health.

Students also had the opportunity to speak with exhibitors, including rural hospitals, clinics and residency programs.

RHI students awarded scholarships

Two students in WVSOM’s Rural Health Initiative (RHI) program received scholarships that will help offset the cost of in-state tuition.

Class of 2022 students Kacy Harmon and Nick Yost each received $22,000 through the Rural Physician Scholarship Program because of their involvement in the RHI program and previous involvement in programs that prepare undergraduate students for medical school.

Harmon participated in the Green Coat Program in which undergraduate students interested in medical school or a health care profession can gain exposure to clinical responsibilities in a hospital environment. WVSOM partners with Charleston Area Medical Center and Davis Medical Center to provide the Green Coat Program to students from four universities in West Virginia. Yost was involved in the Pre-Osteopathic Program as a student at Concord University. The program is currently offered at seven higher education institutions. Students in a pipeline program were eligible to apply for the RHI scholarship.

Yost said one of the perks of the Pre-Osteopathic Program was an early interview at WVSOM. He interviewed for and was accepted to medical school at the beginning of his senior year of college. The scholarship means that Yost’s tuition, for at least one year, is taken care of.

“Rural medicine isn’t always the most financially rewarding branch of medicine, but you still have the same amount of loans as students who choose not to be rural physicians. This really takes a burden off you and allows you to practice rurally without the weight of student loans,” he said.

Harmon said she participated in a pre-med program during college because she knew she wanted to become a physician in the state in which she’d spent her entire life.
Human Gift Registry service honored 56 donors

Some of the most valuable donations that can be made to WVSOM have nothing to do with money. At the Human Gift Registry memorial service on May 10, the WVSOM community paid its respects to 56 people who bestowed their final gift to the school during the past year, donating their bodies so students could use them to learn about anatomy, disease progression and other subjects that are essential to the practice of medicine.

During a ceremony punctuated by musical performances from WVSOM students, registry director Karen Wines, M.S., spoke to donors’ families about the profound significance the gifts have on medical education at WVSOM.

“Our students’ journeys are long. Their development as confident physicians and growth as compassionate doctors begins with your loved one’s gift,” Wines said.

Tracy Corbin, medical education coordinator for Jan-Care Ambulance Service, which helped organize the mass casualty exercise, said other “injuries” sustained in the mock vehicle attack included long-bone fractures, blood loss and multisystem trauma — and, for a victim trapped under an overturned bus, a pelvis fracture. A U.S. Army Black Hawk helicopter transported victims to Raleigh County Memorial Airport in Beaver, W.Va., and in a real incident, the wounded would then be distributed among West Virginia’s major trauma centers.

Students, staff helped stage mass casualty exercise

Autumn Spears, Class of 2021, was one of 26 WVSOM students and four staff members who volunteered as role players in a mass casualty exercise at the Summit Bechtel Reserve, a national Scouting center near Glen Jean, W.Va.

“I had facial trauma consistent with a basilar skull fracture,” Spears said. “I was triaged in the field by medics, who placed a label around my wrist to mark me as a patient who needed immediate life-saving emergency care. I was taken by military gurney to a red tarp where patients waited for transport to the appropriate facilities. Medics then carried me and placed me in a military ambulance with three other victims.”

The exercise, which simulated the aftermath of a vehicle-borne attack, took place July 20, one day before the start of the World Scout Jamboree. It was intended as a training opportunity for the Summit Bechtel emergency and medical staff who would come to the aid of more than 44,000 visiting members of the world Scouting community if a real attack were to occur.

Spears, who was outfitted with moulage to mimic the injuries she was assigned, was one of 90 role players from various organizations who participated in the exercise. She said she found the event educational in the way it depicted the team dynamics that are critical for medical professionals to master.

“Taps was played to commemorate members of the U.S. military, and Clifford Stone, pastor of Ronceverte Christian Church, offered words of appreciation for those who donated their bodies. Wearing the white coats that symbolize their commitment to the osteopathic medical profession, first-year students observed a moment of silence to honor the donors.”
WVSOM’s Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

WVSOM’s Office of Research and Sponsored Programs is responsible for overseeing the school’s research resources and ensuring that the school is following federal and granting agency rules that govern research and grants. In addition to a staff of research assistants and a research coordinator, the office includes the following positions.

JANDY HANNA, PH.D., MSB
Associate dean of research and sponsored programs

Jandy Hanna, Ph.D., MSB, manages WVSOM’s Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and reviews all grant requests. She examines the commitments required by a grant to ensure the school is capable of fulfilling them, and can offer feedback on whether a grant is written in a way that can be understood from science and programmatic perspectives. If a grant calls for a hire to be made, Hanna works with the human resources department to determine whether the hire is feasible, and if a grant will take time away from a WVSOM employee’s primary responsibilities, Hanna works with the employee’s supervisors to evaluate whether it constitutes a reasonable use of the school’s resources. She works with regulatory committee chairs to ensure each committee’s policies and procedures are in compliance with current federal regulations and with WVSOM’s own policies and procedures. Additionally, she reviews and develops policies that ensure the school remains compliant with federal mandates governing the acceptance of grant funds, and meets with outside organizations with the goal of developing research-related partnerships.

“Our goal is to have WVSOM’s infrastructure in the best possible shape to make it easy to do research and to submit grants,” Hanna said.

PETER FELTMAN
Research and compliance administrator

As the research and compliance administrator, Peter Feltman works to ensure regulatory compliance of all research projects that come through the department. He evaluates project initiation requests to determine what, if any, training must be completed before undertaking research, and tells researchers which WVSOM compliance committees must approve the research methods. Feltman also helps with the administration of those compliance committees, of which the most commonly consulted are the institutional review board for human subjects, the institutional biosafety committee and the animal care and use committee. He helps produce documents that outline the committees’ standard procedures, and works with institutions across the Statewide Campus to develop agreements to ensure the appropriate review of research conducted by third- and fourth-year students. “It’s interesting to read about people’s research and learn about fields I’m not familiar with,” Feltman said. “I’m motivated to figure out how we can improve our processes and help people do the work they want to do.”

SHERRI MILLER
Grants administrator

In handling much of the school’s pre-award grant work, Sherri Miller helps members of the WVSOM community find research and programmatic grants that match their needs. She aids in the submission process by working with each grant’s principal investigator to coordinate documents for the application, and ensures that all institutional approvals have been attained prior to submission. After a grant has been awarded, Miller approves time-and-effort reporting through the school’s system. She maintains the school’s grant database, which is used to document each step of the grant process, and works closely with the Office of Business Affairs, which handles most of the financial aspects of post-award monitoring and reporting. “I view my position as being service-oriented,” Miller said. “I’m willing to help anybody find what they’re looking for. It’s an exciting process when someone receives a grant.”

DIANA BIRD
Administrative secretary senior

Diana Bird assists with WVSOM’s research efforts by purchasing equipment and supplies so that new faculty members can set up labs when they join the school. She makes air and lodging reservations for students whose research involves travel, as well as for compliance committee members’ training sessions and for department staff. She schedules committee meetings and takes minutes, keeps departmental documents up to date, and ensures the departmental office is stocked with all necessary supplies. “I enjoy working with students the most,” Bird said. “They’re always appreciative of the fact that we allow them to travel and that we try to help cover those costs.”
WVSOM celebrated outstanding employees, 7 retirees

WVSOM celebrated employee achievements by honoring retirees, recognizing employees for years of service and acknowledging work among faculty and staff with various employee awards.

“Over the course of the last year, we entered a new chapter for WVSOM as we installed a new president, Dr. [James] Nemitz. Throughout the last year, and previously at these celebrations, we’ve talked about the importance of remembering and honoring our heritage. From modest beginnings, this institution has risen to national prominence due to the dedication, hard work and commitment to our mission from our former and current faculty and staff,” Leslie Bicksler, WVSOM’s vice president of human resources, told the audience.

In 2019, the Employee Celebration recognized seven retirees: Robin Tuckwiller, Paul Jacoby, Carolyn Komar, Ph.D., Debra Pope, Malcolm Modrzakowski, Ph.D., Mary Richmond and Linda Stidom.

WVSOM’s Office of Human Resources presented the President’s Outstanding Employee Award, which is given annually to selected employees who are identified to the president by a vote of WVSOM faculty and staff as outstanding employees for the current academic year. The award recognizes exceptional and dedicated service to WVSOM. The goal of the award is to raise awareness in the campus community of the indispensable contributions made by the outstanding employee to the quality, diversity and overall mission of WVSOM. Ten employees were nominated. They were Keith Brookman, Brian Griffith, Ph.D., Charlie Lowry, Joyce Martin, Scott Maxwell, Tess McMillion, Sherri Miller, Jennifer Seams, Ronnie Steele and Alicia Winters. The winners were Keith Brookman and Ronnie Steele.

The Statewide Campus PRIDE Award recognizes an employee in one of the seven Statewide Campus regions who goes above and beyond their service to WVSOM and the students they serve. The employee’s characteristics consist of being people-oriented, respectful, innovative, dedicated and effective. Adrienne Tucker was the 2019 award recipient.

The Rising Star Award honors a newly hired employee who has already demonstrated a strong commitment to the school, an understanding of how their position supports the school’s mission and a commitment to working with others to engage the school’s future. The 2019 winner was Erik Ford, a staff member who used training he received at WVSOM to save a woman’s life.

The celebration also recognized employees for reaching milestones in five-year increments of service at WVSOM. In addition to recognizing a number of employees who have reached milestones of service, WVSOM recognized six employees who achieved 20 or more years of service to WVSOM as of June 2019. Marilea Butcher, Rhonda Hughes and Betty Winger have worked at WVSOM for 20 years; Jeffery Cobb for 25 years; Barbara Sanders for 30 years; and Sherry Phillips for 35 years.

Four former WVSOM employees were honored with professor emeritus distinction during the celebration. They were David Brown, Ph.D., George Boxwell, D.O., Helen Baker, Ph.D., and David Leech, D.O. The honor of emeritus is granted at retirement in recognition of meritorious service.

Other WVSOM faculty who received promotions and tenures were Abigail Frank, D.O., awarded tenure and promoted to associate professor; Dina Schaper, D.O., awarded tenure; Rebecca Scopa Kelso, Ph.D., awarded tenure; Victoria Shuman, D.O., promoted to professor; and Peter Ward, Ph.D. promoted to professor.
New hires

Ronnie Collins  
*Director of admissions*

Collins began working at WVSOM on June 17. He oversees student recruitment and the admissions process. This position has the principal responsibility for leadership and management of all phases of the admissions process, including the development and implementation of the annual recruitment plan. Collins has been director of admissions and enrollment at the University of Pikeville-Kentucky College of Osteopathic Medicine since 2011. Prior to Pikeville, Collins served as director of admissions and enrollment at Alice Lloyd College in Kentucky. He has a Master of Business Administration degree from the University of Pikeville and an undergraduate degree from Alice Lloyd College.

Kristin Stover, Ph.D.  
*Assistant professor of anatomy*

Stover began working at WVSOM on June 17. She is a postdoctoral research scholar in the department of ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of California, Irvine. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in biological science from the Ohio University Honors Tutorial College, a Master of Science degree in marine biology from South Carolina’s College of Charleston and a Ph.D. in ecology and evolutionary biology from Brown University. Stover brings to WVSOM extensive training and teaching experience in anatomy and physiology, and plans to continue her research in musculoskeletal physiology and biomechanics.

Chris Pankey, Ph.D.  
*Assistant professor of physiology*

Pankey started working at WVSOM on June 24. He has a Ph.D. in biomedical science-reproductive biology from the Center for the Study of Fetal Programming at the University of Wyoming and a Bachelor of Science degree in physiology from the University of Wyoming. He previously served as a postdoctoral research physiologist at the Human Nutrition Research Center, operated by the Agricultural Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Rebecca Thacker

Thacker became the Rural Health Initiative program coordinator on July 6. In this role, she serves as the lead resource for day-to-day operations, planning and implementing a standardized program to be delivered to students from high school to the undergraduate level by assistant deans and medical students at each Statewide Campus location. Thacker has a bachelor’s degree from Christopher Newport University and has completed most of her coursework toward a master’s degree in agriculture and life sciences from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.
**Asano awarded WVCTSI grant**

WV SOM biomedical sciences faculty member Shinichi Asano, Ph.D., received a $5,000 West Virginia Clinical and Translational Science Institute pilot grant for his project “Metabolic Syndrome Gender Differences in Cardiovascular Function.”

Metabolic syndrome increases incidence and severity of cardiovascular diseases (CVDs), leading to poor outcomes. Premenopausal women are protected against the risk of CVDs compared to same-aged men but are at increased risk of CVDs following menopause.

**Wines published in JAOA**

Karen Wines, M.S., published “WVSOM Anatomy Lab Tour Program: An Osteopathic Medicine Pipeline with Student Teaching Opportunities” in the July 2019 issue of *The Journal of the American Osteopathic Association*. The article discusses how WVSOM reformatted its anatomy lab tour program, using the program as a case study to establish a baseline for the collection of information gained through participant surveys to assess the impact on learners and student teachers.

**Ward crafted spondylolisthesis model and lesson plan**

Biomedical sciences professor Peter Ward, Ph.D., in his capacity as a WVSOM faculty member, created a model to teach about spondylolisthesis, a complex injury involving vertebral fractures and possible compression of the nervous system. Fractures of the pars interarticularis allow the vertebral bodies to detach and slide forward. The models are available through Bone Clones, a company that casts simulated human and animal bones from polyurethane resin. Ward also created a lesson plan that accompanies the model and explains the different grades of anterior sliding of the vertebral body.

**Drema Mace, Ph.D., MSP**

Mace became WVSOM’s vice president for community engagement and development. In her new position, Mace is working at the intersection of higher education, community workforce development, community engagement and partnerships to guide the creation, implementation and evaluation of integrated strategies that generate health improvements. Mace has served as executive director of WVSOM’s Center for Rural and Community Health (CRCH) since 2016. She will continue to oversee the CRCH in her new role and will also lead the work of the WVSOM Foundation.
WVSOM president traveled the state, emphasizing ‘Living Our Mission’ campaign and networking with alumni

James W. Nemitz, Ph.D., made his way across the state of West Virginia to share WVSOM’s “Living Our Mission” campaign.

The medical school president visited alumni across West Virginia to remind them of the campaign that encourages students, faculty, staff and alumni to involve themselves in community service projects and share the work they are doing throughout local communities and the state.

He said he is committed to visiting alumni in other areas of the state to reiterate the importance the group has to WVSOM.

“I feel I have a responsibility to go out and be connected to alumni throughout the state,” Nemitz said. “As president, I want to send the message that I care about them, and one of the ways you do that is by making the effort to be physically present.”

During visits to different parts of the state, Nemitz attends Alumni After Hours events, which are networking dinners intended to connect with alumni in the area. He has attended the events in Martinsburg, Morgantown, Wheeling and Huntington.

“When you do things like this, you not only create goodwill but you learn things about what is going on, and it is helpful for me in understanding what is working and what isn’t working,” Nemitz said.
Alumni reception takes place in Baltimore’s Fell’s Point

More than 30 alumni along with their guests attended an Alumni After Hours dinner reception at Barcocina, a restaurant located along the waterfront in Baltimore’s Fell’s Point neighborhood in October 2019.

The reception was part of the annual AOA’s Osteopathic Medical Conference and Exposition that took place at the Baltimore Convention Center. The conference is an opportunity for alumni to reconnect with former classmates and WVSOM employees and to earn continuing medical education credits.

Reception guests were treated by the WVSOM Alumni Association to a buffet of Mexican-inspired cuisine. WVSOM President James W. Nemitz, Ph.D., took the opportunity to share school news and updates with alumni.
Alumni Weekend highlighted by CME, leisure activities

The WVSOM Alumni Association hosted its annual Alumni Weekend Aug. 22-24, and there were plenty of chances for attendees to obtain continuing medical education (CME) credits and socialize with fellow alumni.

Events kicked off Thursday, Aug. 22, with a welcome from WVSOM President James W. Nemitz, Ph.D., CME sessions and a concert and pizza party at Lewisburg’s Carnegie Hall with the group The B-BAMS, featuring Class of 2006 alumnus Alex Bingcang on cello. Friday was filled with a wide range of CME sessions, including an introduction to the National Acupuncture Detoxification Association protocol, followed in the evening by a family barbecue for alumni and their loved ones. Saturday CME sessions included a presentation on culinary medicine, and the weekend came to a close with a reunion dinner at the Livery Tavern in Lewisburg.
Alumna incorporates yoga techniques among patients

It’s not common to pose in the downward dog or warrior position in a doctor’s office, but one WVSOM alumna is incorporating certain yoga techniques with patients to provide a more holistic way of dealing with health concerns.

Jenny Klaus Flaim, D.O., Class of 2009, is a proponent of yoga medicine, which incorporates breathing techniques among patients. Yoga techniques might not be the first treatment you’d expect from a physician whose specialty is radiology, but Flaim said she considers herself to be a primary care-minded specialist. “I have a subspecialty in breast cancer imaging. We have a multidisciplinary clinic and I make it a point to talk with my patients and interact with them,” she said. “Yoga can be a powerful tool to give to patients. The breathwork aspect of yoga, called pranayama, which includes breathing techniques, can be used with a patient’s own manipulation and can be extremely helpful for those with chronic diseases or in cancer patients.”

Yoga medicine focuses on awareness and visualization of breathing. Being cognizant of one’s own breathing allows individuals to practice reaching a state of mind that increases a sense of calm and comfort about an anxiety-causing situation, such as a surgery or other health procedure.

“This is an immediate tool to help patients get through a difficult moment,” she said. “If they are worried or anxious, or if they can’t sleep, a breathing routine will help them through that. Current research is demonstrating that yoga, meditation and pranayama can have effects on pain control, aging and stress or relaxation response. We can see it on a molecular level.”

The routine begins with noticing one’s breath and the way oxygen is being inhaled and exhaled. Flaim suggests patients take their pulse, inhale, exhale in twice the time and observe how their heart rate changes. She said that information is powerful because it shows patients that they have a degree of control.

Flaim has been practicing yoga personally for 15 years, but it was just under two years ago that she decided to devote the required minimum of 200 hours to be certified as a yoga teacher. She has used breathing techniques with her patients for the past three years and is working to develop a program that would provide tools to breast cancer patients in Baltimore, Md., and the surrounding area where she works at MedStar Radiology.

“What I find is that breast cancer patients are no longer friends with their bodies,” she said. “It’s like their trusted pet has bitten them and they can’t make amends with it. They feel like their vessel has betrayed them. I want to help breast cancer patients take control of their bodies again and show them these tools that can help them do that.”

The Baltimore native has joined the physician’s wellness committee at her company, and she said she is inspired by the thought of teaching colleagues and student doctors about yoga.

“For students, learning in the classroom and lab is incredibly beneficial, but there are adjunctive topics that could be learned in the first two years of medical school that could help in better understanding patients,” she said. “The research coming out in yoga is incredible. Yoga therapists could be the next step in helping patients.”

Flaim isn’t the only person in her family who has benefited from an osteopathic education. Her husband, Nathan Flaim, is a 2008 graduate of WVSOM, and her father-in-law, Anthony Flaim, is a 1981 graduate who practices in Wyoming County, W.Va. She said she thinks WVSOM does a great job of educating physicians who want to practice in primary care but also osteopathic-minded specialists, like herself.

“I always knew I’d use the philosophies and osteopathic principles [in my practice] because that’s what drew me to osteopathic medicine in the first place. They align with my core values. It’s been a natural progression that osteopathic medicine was going to be right for me because I’ve always been a physically active person and because I come from an open and affective family,” she said. “That component of wanting to be present with the people in my life, including my patients, has always been part of my endgame.”
Part of WVSOM’s mission is to graduate physicians who will practice in rural and underserved areas of West Virginia. Scott Keffer, D.O., a 1996 graduate, is one alumnus who wouldn’t want to practice anywhere other than the Mountain State.

Keffer, who lives in the Ansted, W.Va., area, works as a family medicine doctor and is chief of medical staff at Plateau Medical Center in Oak Hill. While he said it’s rewarding to practice medicine in the hospital in which he was born, he receives professional gratification from another source — his biweekly travels to a nursing home a little more than two hours away.

“I wanted to spend time with patients, especially ones who needed extra time, but I hated inconveniencing people and making them wait in waiting rooms,” Keffer said.

“That part of the job was extremely stressful to me, so now I’m a hospitalist and work in nursing homes. I don’t have a specific schedule and I’m seeing patients where they live, so they aren’t waiting around for me. This gives me more time to sit and talk to them and get to know their families. It’s a more intimate setting than having someone come into an office that’s your space. You’re actually in the patient’s space and you can learn some good lessons from them. These patients all lived interesting lives prior to living in a nursing home, and there’s a lot of value in that."

This spring will mark Keffer’s 20th year as the medical director of Wyoming County Nursing and Rehabilitation Center. In 2000, he received a cold call from the facility’s administrator, who asked if he would be interested in caring for its patients. She told Keffer she had “heard good things about him.”

The nursing home was in Mullens, W.Va., and having only ever been to the town once when he was young, Keffer wasn’t even sure he knew where Mullens was. After a bit more conversation, Keffer finally found out that the woman got his name at the beauty salon after asking if anybody knew a good doctor. As is par for the course in small towns, word of mouth ended up being the best way to obtain information.

At that time Keffer had been in practice a little more than six months. A visit to the nursing home, some homemade cookies and a negotiation with the corporate office influenced Keffer’s decision to take the position.

“I found that I really enjoyed the work and the people. There was no one else willing to do that work,” he said.

During his visits to the nursing home, he sees about 20-25 patients. Their issues and ailments can range from complex scenarios requiring the consultation of specialists to simple visits with patients who just need someone to check on them.

Keffer first gained exposure to nursing home visits and making house calls alongside physicians while he completed rotations in his third and fourth years of medical school. He recalls shadowing physicians who...
didn’t have many additional resources and who were “docs in a box” — doctors who performed many roles in hospitals and clinics that didn’t have access to specialists.

The first physician Keffer ever shadowed, however, was his family physician, Donald Newell Jr., D.O., during a mentorship program in his senior year of high school. This is when Keffer realized he wanted to become a physician. Donald Newell Sr., one of WVSOM’s founders, encouraged Keffer to tour campus. He gave Keffer a note with the name Fred Smith on it and was told to call him for a tour. As a high school senior, he visited WVSOM and immediately set his sights on attending medical school there. He completed his undergraduate degree from Marshall University and, in the summer of 1992, began his osteopathic medical education at WVSOM.

“In the year I worked with Dr. Newell, I got to witness his demeanor and the way he thought about patients and knew them as people instead of just a collection of diseases,” Keffer said.

Growing up, Keffer knew more D.O.s than M.D.s. Now he is serving as an osteopathic physician in his home state, and passing that passion to his daughter, Savannah Keffer, who is on track to do the same thing as her father. She’s a Class of 2023 medical student at WVSOM.

“I always wanted to have a profession that would allow me to come back home so I could provide for my family and not have to leave the area,” he said. “That was another reason I was drawn to medicine: It’s stable, and you can actually do some good for your community.”
The WVSOM Alumni Association’s annual Summer Seminar CME offers the best of both worlds. Health care professionals are able to fulfill continuing medical education requirements in the morning and enjoy the beach in the afternoon.

The seminar, which takes place in Myrtle Beach, S.C., offers alumni a relaxed educational experience while allowing them to acquire continuing medical education credits required by the American Osteopathic Association. In 2019, 155 people attended the event, which took place June 12-15 at the Kingston Plantation.

Seventeen presentations were offered to seminar attendees. Presentation topics included burnout and moral injury, yoga and osteopathy, unusual cases in urology, physicians taking on the patient role, osteoarthritis, the Keto diet, medical qigong, treatment of depression among the geriatric population, lung cancer screening, autism spectrum disorder, boundary considerations in a clinical setting, enhancing patient motivation, vaccines in modern medicine and sessions pertaining to managing the opioid epidemic. WVSOM President James W. Nemitz, Ph.D., presented a session titled “Conversation and Updates with the President.” He spoke about his inaugural year as president and some of the changes that will take place at WVSOM in coming months. He also shared information about plans for a testing center for student exams on the school’s campus.
The Family Picnic Reception, hosted by the WVSOM Foundation, took place June 12 at the Palmettos Pavilion. Alumni and their families were treated to a buffet and games including hula-hoop, limbo and cornhole contests. WVSOM swag was given to winners in each of the games.
Class notes

1978


1983

Wesley C. Lockhart, D.O., was promoted to associate professor at Touro University Nevada in Henderson, Nev., where he has served in the osteopathic manipulative medicine department for nine years and has served as second-year OMM course director for eight years.

1985

William D. Moore, D.O., became the women's and children's service line director for Doylestown Health at Doylestown Hospital in Doylestown, Pa. Moore represents the neonatal intensive care unit, pediatrics floor, obstetrics and outlying pediatric practices on the hospital's executive committee.

Keith Speed, D.O., is the associate dean and a professor of clinical science at William Carey University College of Osteopathic Medicine in Hattiesburg, Miss.

1986

Susan P. Osborne, D.O., won the Western Virginia Emergency Medical Services Council's 2019 Dr. Cheryl B. Haas Award for Outstanding EMS Physician on June 20, 2019.

Roland Powers, D.O., MBA, was elected to the Board of Trustees for Orange Park Medical Center in Florida.

1991

Eric Chico, D.O., graduated from Southern Evangelical Seminary with a master's degree in apologetics in May 2019.

1998

Raymond Dahl, D.O., is certified by the American Osteopathic Board of Orthopedic Surgery and specializes in joint replacements and spine surgery in Harrisburg, Pa. Dahl and his wife, Elizabeth, live in Hummelstown, Pa., and have four children.

1999

Robert Blok, D.O., received the Award of Fellow from the American Osteopathic Academy of Orthopedics on Oct. 25, 2019.

2001

Jeff Engel, D.O., was named a 2019 “Top Doc” in Richmond, Va., in the emergency medicine category by Richmond Magazine.

2003

Ray Hayes, D.O., was named medical director for the neonatal intensive care unit at Geisinger Medical Center in Danville, Pa.

2005


Staci Smith, D.O., opened DaVita Lawrence County Dialysis Unit in South Point, Ohio.

2006

Tonya Creech, D.O., is the chairperson of the Department of Family Medicine and an assistant professor of clinical science at William Carey University College of Osteopathic Medicine in Hattiesburg, Miss.

Brandon H. Webb, D.O., FACOI, received a fellowship for the American College of Osteopathic Internists on Nov. 1, 2019.

2008

Emily Thomas, D.O., FACP, was awarded the title of fellow in the American College of Osteopathic Internists on Nov. 1, 2019.

2010

Jason Kirby, D.O., received board certification in addiction medicine by the American Board of Preventive Medicine. Kirby also accepted the role of medical director of addiction services at St. Peter’s Health Partners in Albany, N.Y.

2011

Lindsay Honaker, D.O., is a psychiatrist and assistant professor of medicine at the Cleveland Clinic in Cleveland, Ohio. Honaker also placed second in the amateur figure division at the Arnold Classic bodybuilding competition, and completed her sixth cycling tour in Germany and Austria with her father in summer 2019.

Dominic King, D.O., became director of the esports medicine program at the Cleveland Clinic, focusing on the health, safety and wellness of esports athletes. King and his wife, Nicole, recently celebrated their 10th wedding anniversary.

Dave Williams, D.O., completed an emergency medicine residency in June 2019 after serving in the U.S. Air Force.

Colin Zhu, D.O., started a podcast in May 2019 named Thrive Bites.

2012

Phillip Saunders, D.O., and Angela Saunders, D.O., relocated to Temecula, Calif., after Angela completed a gastroenterology fellowship in June 2019. Both are establishing community medicine practices. Angela works for United Medical Doctors and Phillip works for the Oncology Institute for Hope and Innovation.

Rameen Shafiei, D.O., became chairman of emergency medicine at Western Maryland Health System in Cumberland, Md., on July 1, 2019.

Timothy S. Snow, D.O., became director of bariatric surgery at Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital in Charlottesville, Va., after completing a fellowship in bariatric and minimally invasive surgery at Duke University Medical Center.

2013

Kahren Aydinyan, D.O., was board certified in otolaryngology and facial plastic surgery by the American Osteopathic Colleges of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology - Head and Neck Surgery.

Kenneth B. Proops, D.O., is Charleston Area Medical Center Memorial Hospital medical director for the CAMC Hospitalist Group in Charleston, W.Va.

Brittany Smirnov, D.O., published a case on “Erythrodermic Psoriasis heralding HIV” in The New England Journal of Medicine, as well as three other publications in...
dermatologic journals. She practices medical dermatology in Delray Beach, Fla., with a focus on connective tissue and immunobullous diseases.

2014
Eric Schweller, D.O., completed his service with the U.S. Air Force and relocated with his family to pursue an orthopedic residency in Garden City, Mich.

2017
Andrew Gush, D.O., became chief resident of family medicine at St. Mary Mercy Hospital in Livonia, Mich.

2018
Heidi Henson, D.O., won first place at the National American College of Osteopathic Internists’ Annual Convention for her endocrine research. Henson is a second-year internal medicine resident in California.

ENGAGEMENTS/ MARRIAGES

2001

2011
Lindsay Honaker, D.O., married Timothy Mellish in August 2018.

2012 and 2015
Derek A. Ballas, D.O., Class of 2012, and Julian M. Nicholas, D.O., Class of 2015, married on Oct. 12, 2019, in Chicago, Ill. Ballas is in his fourth year of an OB-GYN practice with Akron City Hospital in Akron, Ohio, and Nicholas is in her fourth year of a general surgery residency in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio.

2018 and 2019
The impact our graduates have on communities in West Virginia and beyond is what motivates the leadership and staff of the WVSOM Foundation to do more. To reach higher. To think bigger.

Our school’s No. 1 ranking in the nation for graduating primary care physicians who practice in rural areas means equal access to quality medical care, which saves lives and improves communities. Our students are motivated to help others and demonstrate their selfless willingness to sacrifice to earn a degree from West Virginia’s only osteopathic medical school. They need your help!

The foundation’s goal is to provide some level of financial support to every WVSOM student.

Gaining momentum

2019 was a momentous year for the WVSOM Foundation. A new website, WVSOMFoundation.org, details our scholarship opportunities and the projects we fund. Most importantly, it features a donation tool through ScaleFunder. Located at DOGive. WVSOMFoundation.org, this tool allows donors to log on, tap and give. It also allows us to fund various campus club activities and medical outreach projects.

Give a latte. It helps a lot!

Foundation leadership partnered with GoMart and designed a new sustained giving campaign that launched on international Giving Tuesday in early December. For committing to give as little as $5 a month, donors receive a Give a Latte travel mug, which GoMart will fill with coffee free for one year at any location. Other gifts for monthly donations of $15 and up include cell phone power banks, stadium blankets, sweatshirts and our popular socks featuring the face of WVSOM President James Nemitz.

Finishing strong

Supported by targeted e-marketing, paid social media, videos and on-campus signage, our Giving Tuesday Give a Latte campaign exceeded expectations. Additionally, a record number of West Virginia Neighborhood Investment Program tax credits fueled the year-end Annual Giving Campaign to its highest level to date. The result of these efforts was a fourth-quarter boost of more than $100,000 to the foundation’s scholarships, unrestricted fund, Annual Fund/5 for 5 Donor Recognition program, capital campaign and student emergency fund.

Building on success

We’re excited to begin 2020 with a strong infrastructure, and we’re grateful to have the continued support of our longtime partners. We’re also thrilled to welcome GoMart and Jim Lively Insurance to the fold. Thank you!

The Give a Latte campaign will continue throughout 2020, supported by a brand awareness campaign designed for social media, outdoor advertising and television. We’ll conduct a new DOGive campaign, engaging local businesses, and will host community outreach events in partnership with physicians from our school who practice in key markets.

Our challenge to you

Do more. Reach higher. Think bigger. Join us in supporting WVSOM students. Whether you give monthly, annually or include the foundation in your will and estate plan, you can make a lasting difference not just in one life, but in the lives of many. And that’s truly inspiring.

Heather Antolini
Director of Institutional Development

THANK YOU TO OUR ANNUAL FUND PARTNERS
Six WVSOM students received BrickStreet Foundation scholarships

Six students at WVSOM were named the 2019-20 recipients of BrickStreet endowed scholarships, donated by the BrickStreet Foundation.

First-year student Anthony Aswad, second-year students Megan Farley and Madeleine Gwinn, third-year student Lucas Goodwin, and fourth-year students Jordan Allen and Lauren Cronise each received scholarships on Aug. 21.

The scholarships, funded through a $900,000 endowment BrickStreet gifted the school in 2016, are the largest annual scholarships provided through the WVSOM Foundation. Each scholarship ranges from $10,000 to $20,000 and is used to cover a portion of a student’s tuition costs.

This year’s awardees received a total of $80,000 through the endowment.

“It is a special day because we’re handing out scholarships to very deserving medical students,” WVSOM President James W. Nemitz, Ph.D., said during an on-campus luncheon at which the awards were presented. “BrickStreet has been a tremendous supporter of WVSOM, and we’re grateful to them for providing these funds.”

BrickStreet Insurance was West Virginia’s first private workers’ compensation carrier. The company integrated its operations with Motorists Insurance Group in July, creating a new entity known as Encova Mutual Insurance Group. Shelby Paxton, a human resources business partner with the company who attended the luncheon, said the mission of the BrickStreet Foundation — now known as the Encova Foundation of West Virginia — is to support the communities in which its employees work and live.

“We’re happy to be able to give these scholarships to students who are studying in West Virginia,” Paxton said. “We have a long history of supporting WVSOM, and I’m always pleased to visit the school. We look forward to seeing what these students do with their bright futures.”

Heather Antolini, WVSOM’s director of institutional development, pointed out that scholarship endowments allow the WVSOM Foundation to help ease students’ minds during one of the most difficult journeys they’ll ever undertake.

“Most medical students take on an extraordinary amount of debt in order to complete their education, and the burden of that financial commitment can be very stressful,” Antolini said. “Our ability to provide meaningful scholarships to help offset that debt for our students is critical. We are so appreciative of donors like BrickStreet who contribute to the WVSOM Foundation’s scholarship endowments.”

First-year student Anthony Aswad said the scholarship will allow him to concentrate more deeply on his studies at WVSOM.

“The generosity of BrickStreet will enable me to focus on my medical education as opposed to the cost of medical school,” he said. “In doing so, it will let me focus on my goal to provide health care to individuals living in rural Appalachia and to make sure we can provide quality care to those who don’t currently have accessible health resources.”
Money Matters series helps STUDENTS PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE

The WVSOM Foundation created Money Matters as an optional program for students who were interested in learning debt-management strategies. Over time, it became a mandatory part of the WVSOM curriculum.

In recent years, the WVSOM Foundation has offered a series of financial management presentations titled "Money Matters for Medical Students" to help aspiring physicians learn to make smart financial decisions and allow them to make a smooth transition from students to medical professionals.

Heather Antolini, WVSOM’s director of institutional development and the creator of the Money Matters program, said medical students are in a challenging situation that makes accessing financial information especially critical.

“Medical students go from living on borrowed money for four years to graduating into a modest income during residency, then to being practicing physicians where they’re in the top 1 percent of wage earners in the country,” Antolini said. “That’s a difficult transition. What we’re trying to do is to teach them to hold off on the temptation to spend it all when they finally do have some disposable income. We want them to stay mindful of the debt they’re taking on. We want them to plan for how they’re going to pay it back so that they’re not overwhelmed by all the choices and decisions they have to make.”

The foundation created Money Matters as an optional program for students who were interested in learning debt-management strategies. Over time, it became a mandatory part of the WVSOM curriculum.

The 2018-19 academic year featured three Money Matters presentations. A session aimed at second-year students took place Feb. 26, with advice from Melissa Wickline, director of physician and client operations for PracticeLink; Matt Roberts, chief executive officer of Raleigh General Hospital; and Bryan Seldomridge, a certified public accountant and managing member of Synergy 360 Consulting Services.

A presentation for first-year students took place April 9, led by 2012 WVSOM alumnus Michael Antolini, D.O. Among other topics, Antolini focused on wealth-building principles such as how to create and implement a budget.

He pointed out that the average medical school debt for graduates across the nation was $183,000, based on the most recent data available, and explained the importance of minimizing the amount borrowed while maximizing repayment strategies.

“Sometimes the same things that make someone a good physician can make them a poor business person,” he said. “We’re trying to connect with students so that they don’t lose sight of where they’re headed financially.”

The final session of the academic year took place May 24 and was aimed at graduating fourth-year students.
It featured a presentation by Brandon Barfield, co-founder of the national student loan advocacy organization Doctors Without Quarters, who detailed different types of loan repayment plans and identified which options are most beneficial to physicians. He said most new medical school graduates with federal student loans are best served by choosing plans that determine payments based on the borrower’s income level and family size.

Barfield also provided an overview of the refinancing marketplace, explained that loan forbearance should be avoided except as a last resort, and noted, to the surprise of some students, that student loans can actually be used as a negotiating tool when dealing with physician recruiters.

Heather Reeves, a Class of 2022 student who attended a Money Matters presentation during her first year, said she appreciates that WVSOM supports students by reaching beyond medical knowledge to offer tools for making wise financial decisions.

“I’m an out-of-state student with a family, and I take out the maximum amount of loans,” Reeves said. “This program has shown me that there are resources to help keep me on track in the future. WVSOM is committed to not letting students get lost in the vast amount of debt we’re taking on.”

“Medical students go from living on borrowed money for four years to graduating into a modest income during residency, then to being practicing physicians where they’re in the top 1 percent of wage earners in the country.”

- HEATHER ANTOLINI, DIRECTOR OF INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Alumni couple exemplify the spirit of giving back

When Andrew Thymius, D.O., and Tiffany Thymius, D.O., first met in an organic chemistry class at Athens, W.Va.’s Concord College (now Concord University), neither knew that they would one day attend medical school together, marry as second-year students and eventually become dedicated supporters of the institution that helped them pursue their dreams.

Andrew is an interventional physician who founded the West Virginia Pain Institute in Beckley, W.Va., while Tiffany is a family practice physician who sees patients at AccessHealth in nearby Daniels, W.Va. The pair have consistently made substantial donations through various WVSOM Foundation campaigns.

A plaque bearing the words “A Gift From Drs. Andrew and Tiffany Thymius and the West Virginia Pain Institute Inc.” adorns the wall outside the President’s Reception Parlor in WVSOM’s Student Center. That commemoration came as a result of the Class of 1998 graduates’ contributions to the Student Center Naming Campaign. The couple have also donated to the foundation’s Annual Fund, achievement-based student scholarships such as the Loretta Moore Memorial Award and the Paul Kleman, D.O., Family Practice Student Award, and the foundation’s new Legacy Scholarship Endowment.

Additionally, Andrew and Tiffany were supporters of the Grand Affair (now renamed the WVSOM Gala), the WVSOM Student Government Association’s largest annual fundraising event.

As a coal miner’s granddaughter who grew up in rural West Virginia, Tiffany said she understands that it’s critical to ensure those who want to attend medical school don’t have to bear the financial burden alone.

“T’m a first-generation college student, so any project that can lend financial support to medical students and make the cost of medical education more affordable is something we want to assist with,” she said. “We both think it’s important to give back to the school that has given so much to us.”

An advocate for children with special needs, Tiffany has been instrumental in the development of tailored educational programs in the Raleigh County, W.Va., school system. She has also taken on leadership roles in organizations devoted to the osteopathic medical profession, serving in the American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians’ Congress of Delegates and in 2017 being appointed to the West Virginia Board of Osteopathic Medicine.

Andrew worked in family medicine at AccessHealth before founding the West Virginia Pain Institute in 2011. His practice focuses on treating patients with chronic spine pain without the use of opioids. Instead, he emphasizes techniques such as epidural injections, sacroiliac joint injections, ablation.
treatment and spinal cord stimulators, which are implantable devices that disrupt pain signals as they travel up the spinal cord to the brain.

“West Virginia has a lot of problems with opioid deaths, and I didn’t want to be part of that,” said Andrew, who has served on special legislative committees that were instrumental in creating West Virginia’s guidelines for prescribing opiates. “What I can provide patients is help controlling their pain and making them more active because they’re not attached to a medication or stuck in a chair.”

Andrew has also served as a preceptor for WVSOM since 2003, a role he said allows him to share knowledge with students that they might otherwise never be exposed to. He said he cherishes furthering students’ education for the same reason he chooses to contribute financially to WVSOM.

“When an institution has done something for you, you need to look at what you can do in return,” he said. “I enjoy giving back to the school that made my ability to take care of patients and our community possible.”

The pair of physicians also have a more practical reason for giving back, Tiffany said.

“For me, it’s about taking care of the next generation,” she said. “One day they are going to be responsible for taking care of us. So I have a vested interest in making sure that future medical students are well trained and are interested in rural primary care.”

The WVSOM Foundation raised $71,250 through Neighborhood Investment Program tax credits

The West Virginia Development Office awarded the WVSOM Foundation — a nonprofit organization that provides financial support to WVSOM — nearly six times as many Neighborhood Investment Program (NIP) state tax credits in 2019 as in 2018, allowing the organization to offer added financial incentives to prospective donors.

The WVSOM Foundation received $14,250 in NIP credits in 2019, up from $2,500 in 2018. The organization used its 2019 credits to raise $71,250 by allowing businesses or individuals who donated to one of two foundation funds to receive a percentage of the contribution as a tax credit.

In all, 21 WVSOM Foundation donors made use of the 2019 NIP credits.

The West Virginia Legislature established the Neighborhood Investment Program in 1996 to increase charitable giving to local nonprofit organizations. Through the program, organizations apply for tax credits and then distribute the credits to businesses or individuals who make financial contributions, allowing donors to use them to reduce corporate net income tax liabilities or personal income tax liabilities.

Heather Antolini, WVSOM’s director of institutional development, said the development office increased the number of NIP credits awarded to the foundation because the organization successfully used the credits to raise funds in 2018. Donors who contributed to either the foundation’s Legacy Scholarship Endowment or its Student Emergency Fund were eligible to receive the credits.

“It’s incredibly advantageous for the WVSOM Foundation to be able to leverage NIP credits to encourage donors,” Antolini said. “When someone gives a gift to the foundation through one of the two approved programs, they’re also giving themselves the gift of a tax credit.”

The goal of the Legacy Scholarship Endowment is to grow an endowment large enough to eventually provide financial assistance to every WVSOM student. The Student Emergency Fund is a way for WVSOM to help students who are experiencing a financial, health or security-related crisis. In one instance, the fund enabled the WVSOM Foundation to provide financial support for a student who lost her belongings in a fire, allowing the student to continue her medical education.

Antolini said the foundation plans to apply for additional NIP credits in June 2020. Credits are typically awarded each September.

“We’re hopeful that we’ll be able to offer these tax credits again this year,” she said. “Anyone who thinks they might be interested in making a NIP-eligible gift should call us to be placed on the list so that we can notify them in September if credits are awarded to the foundation again.”
Gifts to WVSOM

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ERNIE PIERCY TIDBIT:

- When he first started working at WVSOM, employees did everything by hand. There were no forklifts or computers and only one small, two-wheeled aluminum dolly.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU WORKED AT WVSOM?


WHAT CITY/TOWN ARE YOU ORIGINALLY FROM?

Clintonville, W.Va.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE SPOT ON CAMPUS?

When I started I would say the old gym. I enjoyed playing basketball with students, faculty and staff. Now I would say the Student Center, where we all can meet for functions.

WHAT IS ONE OF YOUR MEMORIES AT WVSOM?

New faculty and staff are seeing the results of hard work, sacrifice and the vision of great people who founded and first ran the school. In the beginning, choices had to be made whether to purchase pencils or pay the electric bill. Also, employees could go years without a raise. I remember when classified staff raised $1,000 to pay for an ad in the Charleston paper listing all of WVSOM’s accomplishments during our fight to keep the school open. We have come a long way, and the journey has been worth it.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT WVSOM (AS AN INSTITUTION OR AS AN EMPLOYER) THAT HAS MADE YOU WANT TO CONTINUE WORKING HERE?

The school has stayed true to its mission, and it has a family feel. Early employees had to fight so hard to save the school from being closed for political reasons. We built a bond, stayed true and took pride in saving the school. To this day, that has not been broken. It is a part of my life and I only want the best for WVSOM.

HOW DOES YOUR DEPARTMENT PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE AT WVSOM?

We support the whole school by receiving goods and delivering to all departments. We maintain inventory on all equipment, handle shipping needs and daily mail to and from the post office, perform bank deposits, are responsible for maintaining insurance on all vehicles, buildings and equipment, and work directly with the Office of Business Affairs in keeping all information in Banner, Oasis and BRIM Insurance with the state.

TELL US SOMETHING WE MAY NOT KNOW ABOUT YOU.

I am an active member of Lewisburg Baptist Church and take my faith seriously. I love to spend time with family, hunt, bowl and golf.
West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine

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April 2
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May 30
GRADUATION

SUMMER

June 10-13
SUMMER SEMINAR