College of Medicine Rockford Welcomes Record Number of Students

On Monday, August 7, 55 first-year medical students arrived at the University of Illinois College of Medicine Rockford for the first time in the history of the Rockford campus.

The first class to arrive on campus in 1972 came as second-year students, having completed their first of four years of training at the University of Illinois College of Medicine campus in Urbana. That’s how it’s worked every year since, including this year when the college also welcomed a new class of second-year students fresh from their first year of basic science education in Urbana. This class of second-year students, the Class of 2020 or the "M2s" as they are called on campus, is the largest incoming class in the college’s history at 66 students. Total enrollment for the Rockford medical school will top out at a record 235 students this academic year.

The first-year students in the Class of 2021, the "M1s," represent a historic turning point in the College of Medicine Rockford as they will be the first to complete all four years of medical school in Rockford. The college began to prepare for this significant change of becoming a four-year medical school about a year and a half before their arrival under the direction of regional dean Alex Stagnaro-Green, MD, MPH, PE. In preparation for the new students’ arrival, the college began undertaking a redesign of the medical school curriculum, a capital campaign to help fund necessary improvements to the campus, hiring of new faculty and staff, and renovation of space to accommodate a new high-tech classroom and anatomy lab.

Over $1.5 million was raised through the generosity of local health systems, foundations, businesses, alumni, faculty and other individuals through the capital campaign. The investment will enhance the medical student experience and will benefit the community as well.

The coming of these M1 students will add $2.2 million in annual economic impact to the Rockford metro area, according to an independent report by EMSI. The same report estimated the economic impact of having the UIC Health Sciences Campus-Rockford, which houses the College of Medicine Rockford as well as the College of Nursing and College of Pharmacy, was $58.2 million in 2015. That’s equivalent to 898 jobs.

Mercyhealth Pledges $250,000 to M1 Expansion Project

The University of Illinois College of Medicine Rockford is delighted to announce Mercyhealth’s $250,000 pledge in support of the Bringing Docs to the Rock: Today’s Students, Tomorrow’s Doctors capital campaign. Mercyhealth president and CEO, Javon Bea, announced Mercyhealth’s commitment during a formal check presentation at the UIC Health Sciences Campus-Rockford on July 19, attended by a large crowd from both organizations.

Mercyhealth CEO Javon Bea shakes hands with Dean Stagnaro-Green as new M1 faculty looks on during the check presentation ceremony.

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University of Illinois College of Medicine Rockford Receives $250,000 from the Woodward Charitable Trust

The Woodward Charitable Trust, the charitable arm of Woodward, Inc., also pledged $250,000 to the University of Illinois College of Medicine Rockford’s recent expansion to a four-year medical school campus.

Woodward is a publicly traded independent designer, manufacturer and service provider of control solutions for the aerospace and industrial markets, based out of Fort Collins, Co. The company was founded in 1870 as A.W. Woodward Company in Rockford, Ill., and currently has two manufacturing facilities in Loves Park, Ill., including a 450,000-square-foot campus opened in 2015.

These gifts directly supported the creation of the new Team-Based Learning (TBL) Classroom, Gross Anatomy Lab, and Virtual Anatomy Lab, innovative new learning spaces renovated to support the new basic sciences curriculum in the education of our first-year medical students (M1s) in Rockford.

In addition to educating medical students, new classrooms allow enhanced inter-professional learning and research opportunities in collaboration with other UIC Health Sciences Campus-Rockford colleges, including pharmacy and nursing. The TBL classroom and anatomy labs will also be accessible to the college’s pipeline and career-readiness programs targeting high school students, as well as other community-based organizations that may offer similar program-centered in workforce development and career readiness.

“We are grateful for the support of Mercyhealth and Woodward, along with so many others, who believe in our mission and understand the incredible impact our expansion to a four-year medical school will have on our partners in health care and on our region,” says Alex Stagnaro-Green, MD, MPH, PE, dean of the College of Medicine Rockford.

The M1 capital campaign successfully concluded in June with more than $1.5 million in funds raised in support of the expansion project.

College Hosts M1 Ribbon Cutting & Donor Appreciation Reception

Students, faculty and friends of the College of Medicine Rockford gathered at the UIC Health Sciences Campus-Rockford to celebrate the public unveiling of the new M1 learning spaces on August 23 and to welcome the new first- and second-year medical students to the College of Medicine family.

The evening’s events began with a ribbon-cutting program that included remarks from Alex Stagnaro-Green, MD, MPH, PE, regional dean of the University of Illinois College of Medicine Rockford; Gary Kazaz, chair of the M1 campaign task force; and Stephanie Grach, third-year medical student and medical student council president.

“It truly cannot be overstated how much you have done for us as students and for the community we are all so lucky to be a part of, and whether you are a health professional teaching us in the classroom or on the hospital floors — nurses, doctors, anyone, we really do learn from all of you! — or you are simply a friendly face of support as we go through our journey here in Rockford, we look forward to having you share in the incredibly bright future of our students at the College of Medicine,” said Grach.

The program was followed by student-led tours and a formal donor appreciation reception to celebrate the success of our Bringing Docs to the Rock – Today’s Students, Tomorrow’s Doctors campaign by honoring those whose contributions made our expansion possible.
In Memoriam

Bernard "Buz" Salafsky, PhD 1935-2017

Bernard “Buz” Salafsky, PhD, the longest-serving dean at the University of Illinois College of Medicine Rockford, passed away Sept. 27, 2017, in Rockford. He received his doctorate in pharmacology from the University of Washington before embarking on assignments all over the world. Dr. Salafsky joined the faculty of the college in 1977 in biomedical sciences and was the dean from 1983 until 2004. His extensive contributions included developing the Rural Medical Education Program, researching tropical disease prevention, gaining status for the medical school as a World Health Organization collaborating institution and championing medical education that placed emphasis on the patient and the value of primary care. In his professional life, he was a thoughtful leader, a gifted communicator and an accomplished innovator. According to his sons, he lived modestly and had a love of books. The Economist, plants and storytelling. Dr. Salafsky’s memorial service was held on the campus as his sons requested, largely because of the important role it played in his life and his recent reconnection to the College of Medicine through events he attended. He is survived by his wife Marilyn, brother Ira, sons Joshua, Daniel, and David (Yissel), granddaughters Madeline and Phoebe, and grandsons Isaac and Ethan. A memorial fund in honor of Dr. Salafsky has been established at the University of Illinois College of Medicine Rockford. For more information, contact the College of Medicine at (815) 395-5649 or visit http://rockfordmedicine.uiuc.edu/giving/give-now.

Students Turn to Health Professions Thanks to Illinois AHEC Network Program

Every medical student has a story about what sparked their interest in medicine and, for third-year medical student Hunter Winstead, it all started when his high school physics teacher in rural Stillman Valley, Ill., handed him a brochure from the Illinois Area Health Education Center (IL AHEC) Network Program, a program of the University of Illinois College of Medicine Rockford’s National Center for Rural Health Professions.

“I found out about the Rural Health Careers Camp that was going to be held at the College of Medicine Rockford and I went with another guy from my school,” says Winstead. “It was a great experience learning about health professions and how they were needed in small towns around the state. I kept in touch with the AHEC staff and the rest is history.”

That history includes continued involvement with the IL AHEC Network Program. He first became a counselor for the Rural Health Careers Camp he himself had participated in after he became an undergraduate student at Augustana College and also participated in a three-day rural health experience in Gibson City, Ill. Winstead and his wife Samantha both participated in a one-week rural experience in Pana, Ill., and served as head counselors for the Rural Health Career Camp the summer after college graduation and before starting medical school. Both Hunter and Samantha were accepted to the Rural Medical Education Program at the University of Illinois College of Medicine Rockford and started their first year of medical school at the Urbana campus before coming to Rockford as second-year students. Currently doing their third-year medical school rotations, they are still figuring out what specialties they want to pursue, but they both are interested in working at a hospital in rural Illinois.

“Our end goal is definitely to end up practicing in a rural community,” says Winstead of the couple’s plans after medical school and residency — a goal that’s just what the IL AHEC Network Program had in mind. The IL AHEC Network Program is part of the National AHEC Organization developed by Congress in 1971 to recruit, train and retain a health professions workforce committed to underserved populations. Established in 2010, the IL AHEC Network Program has eight regional centers throughout the state to serve both rural and urban underserved residents through access to health professions education, health careers development and community and public health promotion activities. Through previous network efforts, more than 60,000 participants have been a part of IL AHEC-supported programs.

Enjoying the picnic at Allerton Park is (front row) Barbara and Gonzalo Florido, MD, Bark and Alex Stagnaro-Green, MD, MHPE; Will Klein, Marileane Florido.
Joe Sniezek, MD ’82, MPH ’85, has worked at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention since 1985 and will be retiring at the end of the year. During the past eight years, he has worked in the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities leading the Prevention Research and Translation Branch and as the acting director of the Division of Congenital and Developmental Disorders. His main areas of focus are the prevention of fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, prevention of neural tube defects globally and to increase awareness of developmental milestones among parents of young children. Previously, Dr. Sniezek has worked in several Centers at CDC, including the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, addressing injury surveillance and working with states to develop injury control and surveillance programs, especially related to traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries. Dr. Sniezek served as the chief of the Arthritis Program in the National Center for Choric Disease Prevention and Health Promotion from 1989 through 2007, where he managed a multi-disciplinary team, working to develop and implement public health approaches to improve the quality of life among persons affected by arthritis. In addition, he served two years as an Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS) officer at the CDC. Dr. Sniezek received his MD from the College of Medicine Rockford and his master’s in public health from the University of Illinois at Chicago, where he also trained in preventive medicine. He is a retired captain of the United States Public Health Service.

Wendy Miller Rashidi, MD ’84, FAAP, FAABHM, is the founder and director of Women’s View Medical Group, an Integrative Family and Women’s Health Center in Upland, California. She is also an assistant clinical professor of family medicine at Western University of the Health Sciences. She is board-certified by the American Academy of Family Physicians and by the American Board of Holistic Integrative Medicine. She is a member of The Institute for Functional Medicine and a fellow of the American Holistic Integrative Medical Association and the American Academy of Family Physicians. She chose a career in medicine because of her strong interest in the role of nutrition in health and a desire to make an impact by helping promote optimal wellness for individual patients and the public by incorporating nutrition and safe natural approaches to health care into her practice of medicine. She has over 20 years experience with prescribing bio-identical, custom-compounded hormones for menopausal hormone replacement therapy and also addresses the effects of stress on adrenal and thyroid health. Dr. Rashidi is recognized in Suzanne Somer’s latest book “Ageless” as one of the region’s experts in bio-identical hormones and in nutritional and functional medicine. She has lectured extensively on this topic, and also appeared in a televised interview on “The Wellness Hour” program discussing bio-identical hormone replacement therapy.

Leslie R. Walker-Harding, MD ’90, is chair of pediatrics and pediatrician-in-chief at Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center and medical director of Penn State Children’s Hospital. Before starting this position in September 2016, she was chief of the Division of Adolescent Medicine at Seattle Children’s Hospital and a professor and vice chair of faculty affairs in the University of Washington School of Medicine. She was co-director of the Adolescent Substance Abuse Program at Seattle Children’s Hospital and conducted research focusing on adolescent risk behaviors, from substance abuse to Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder to pregnancy prevention. After graduating from the College of Medicine Rockford, Walker-Harding completed pediatric residency training at the University of Chicago and an adolescent medicine fellowship at the University of California, San Francisco.

It was a great turnout from the Class of 1987 at the reunion. Pictured here are Dr. Siqi Mayer, retired staff member Mary Camacho, and Drs. Sylvia Melder, Mark Merrihim, Morris Hassan and David Bilkerstrom.

Jarrod Almaroad, MD ’04, is now director of clinical science at the new Carle Illinois College of Medicine in Urbana. Dr. Almaroad will serve as the principal administrative officer for clinical science, guiding it into status as an academic department within the college. In this role, he will manage the clinical component of the engineering-based Doctor of Medicine degree curriculum, including students’ clinical experiences and physician educator involvement. Dr. Almaroad served as an anesthesiologist with Carle Health System for the past nine years and has a clinical affiliation of associate medical director of perioperative services. After graduating from the College of Medicine Rockford, he completed his residency at Indiana University in Indianapolis.

Joon Kyu Lee, MD ’14, is now chief resident in radiation oncology at Henry Ford Health System in Detroit. Dr. Lee earned a bachelor’s degree in business and served as a research assistant at the University of Washington before attending the College of Medicine Rockford. He’s served in research positions at Washington University School of Medicine and MD Anderson Cancer Center and completed a transitional year residency at Ascension Crittenton Hospital in Detroit before starting his residency at Henry Ford Health System in 2015.

Now is the time to start planning for Rockford Alumni Reunion 2018!

We need class representatives from the following classes celebrating anniversary years next year:

- 1978 – 40th Anniversary
- 1983 – 35th Anniversary
- 1988 – 30th Anniversary
- 1993 – 25th Anniversary
- 1998 – 20th Anniversary
- 2003 – 15th Anniversary
- 2008 – 10th Anniversary
- 2013 – 5th Anniversary

Family Medicine Residency 1978-1982
Any other class year that wants to get together and individual alumni are also welcome to participate.

If you’d be willing to contact classmates through phone, mail, email or social media to encourage attendance at the reunion, please contact Carrie Hermanson at (815) 395-5601 or caherman@uic.edu.

Watch for more information on dates and activities for the next reunion.
Grant Funding Allows AHEC Expansion

The Illinois AHEC (IL AHEC) Network Program recently received five years of additional grant funding totaling nearly $6.9 million through a competitive grant award from the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration.

The grant funding will allow for the continuation and expansion of these programs, according to Hana Hinkle, associate director of the National Center for Rural Health Professions and the IL AHEC Network Program.

“Our goal is reaching young people early with messages and programs to help them understand that, no matter where they come from, there are pathways to rewarding careers that can bring them back to their roots and allow them to really make a difference,” says Hinkle.

The IL AHEC Network has a main program office in Rockford; a satellite program office in Chicago that is part of the University of Illinois College of Medicine Chicago and the UIC School of Public Health; and eight health education centers around the state that develop and offer innovative and long-term solutions to health and workforce disparities. These are AHEC of Northwest Illinois in Polo, South Central Illinois AHEC in Centralia, South East Illinois AHEC in Fairfield, Chicago Area Health Education Center in Chicago, West Central Illinois AHEC in Galesburg, Central Illinois AHEC in Normal, East Central Illinois AHEC in Gibson City and Chicago South AHEC hosted at Project Brotherhood, a community-based prevention organization serving African-American males in the south side of Chicago.

The renewed funding will allow expanded and enhanced education and training within the state’s communities, academic institutions and community-based organizations to increase the diversity and distribution of health professionals, promote healthcare quality and improve healthcare delivery to rural and underserved areas throughout the state. In addition, funding will be used to establish the ninth regional AHEC center serving the suburban collar counties around Chicago.

For more information, visit ahec.rockford.uic.edu.