

A Dramatic Path

As UMHS and the Medical School embark on the Victors for Michigan campaign, fourth-year medical student Jonathan Awori reflects on philanthropy and his unlikely path

IN MARCH 2011, I WAS ONE committee meeting away from being granted tenure and a promotion to associate professor of theatre at Murray State University. Five months later, I was a first-year medical student at the University of Michigan Medical School. My story, which probably deserves explanation, reveals the ennobling power of philanthropy.

Leading up to this dramatic shift, I had obtained my M.F.A. in acting, was teaching everything from Shakespeare to postmodern experimental acting, and traveling the country during the summers playing various professional musical theatre roles. I loved what I was doing and yet, almost like a latent virus, a long held interest of mine in science and medicine persisted. This underlying attraction to medicine would occasionally find expression in research directions like “Theatre for Development,” the use of theatre as an intervention in public health campaigns. My wife, with her trademark perceptiveness, first proposed the idea of switching careers to medicine several years before I applied to schools.

It was a wild idea at the time, but I also knew it was a serious one. I had no prerequisites, was working full time in a tenure-track job and was



Jonathan Awori

raising a young family. My wife and I faced several difficult questions, perhaps the most challenging being: How we could afford medical school? With that question still up in the air, I began my prerequisites, sometimes experiencing unusual situations like having a lab partner in organic chemistry who had just been my theatre student in the previous period. I eventually took the MCAT and applied to medical school, six years after taking my first prerequisite.

Even then, another question lingered: Would medical schools' admissions committees consider my arts background as interesting but peripheral, or would they value how the arts could fundamentally and positively shape my identity as a physician? I was gratified to find that Michigan had the latter response. I did not, however, only receive words of support. I was ultimately awarded the Dean's Merit Scholarship, humbling support that pays for all four years of Medical School tuition in full. This made all the difference. Now, I did not have to worry about the impact of hefty loans on my family. I wrote my resignation letter to Murray State shortly afterwards and took the leap to the Medical School because I knew I had true support.

Three years into school, this award continues to free me to focus on my studies, my family and other interests. I have worked on creative projects such as a staged reading of the play "Molly Sweeney," based on a case study by neurologist Oliver Sacks. In this way, I am heeding the

counsel I first received in my U-M admission letter: to feed my creative side and keep discovering links between the artistic and the scientific.

That is what philanthropy does for me; it does not dictate conformation in exchange for support. Instead, it challenges me to follow Shakespeare's advice to "above all else, be true to yourself." Philanthropy pushes me, pushes anyone touched by such generosity, to fulfill potential. This was the vision of Alexander S. Vida, a neuropsychiatrist at Michigan, who firmly believed that medical students should have a background in the liberal arts. A memorial scholarship was established in his name, and I was honored to receive it during my second year at Michigan. (The additional funding came as a complete surprise.) I still remember reading the description of the award, moved by Dr. Vida's validation of the kind of path I took to medicine.

Yes, this change seemed to me an audacious move. I had a more comfortable and predictable path ahead. But the philanthropy I encountered at Michigan would not let me settle for that. Such faith and confidence does not simply recognize my past; it inspires my future. I can now focus on procuring the knowledge that will help my patients while demonstrating the humanism that motivated this choice in the first place. This could have been a one-act play. Because of the support I have received at Michigan, there is a second act.

— Jonathan Awori

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VICTORS FOR MICHIGAN

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Celebrating the Future

ON APRIL 26, THE U-M HEALTH System held the Discovery Ball, a celebration of the Victors for Michigan campaign that aims to raise an unprecedented \$1 billion in philanthropic support for UMHS.

The event itself raised more than \$1.7 million, a total that includes contributions to the Discovery Fund, which supports innovative research into today's most pressing health care issues.

Held at the U-M North Campus Research Complex, itself home to some of the most groundbreaking medical research anywhere, the event drew more than 500 guests — including Richard Rogel and A. Alfred Taubman, respectively the UMHS campaign chair and co-chair.

Sanjay Gupta (M.D. 1993), CNN's chief medical correspondent, emceed the celebration, leading the audience through an evening that included a discussion with James O. Woolliscroft, dean of the U-M Medical School, and a musical performance by Grammy Award-winning singer Michael McDonald.

Ora Pescovitz, M.D., who recently completed a five-year term as U-M executive vice president for medical affairs and as UMHS CEO, wrote in a blog post after the ball that, "To be a Victor for Michigan means refusing to stop fighting for answers and cures. It means refusing to believe that anything is impossible. And it means that the University of Michigan — the home of victors valiant — is where the future of health care can and will be created."



1. The Auscultations, a medical student group, perform at the ball. 2. Dean James Woolliscroft and Sanjay Gupta 3. Michael McDonald 4. U-M President Mary Sue Coleman and A. Alfred Taubman 5. Susan and Richard Rogel 6. Ora Pescovitz.

Professorships Recently Inaugurated

Endowed professorships are among the highest honors the University of Michigan Medical School awards to our faculty. These professorships, often made possible by the generosity of private individuals and foundations, honor the groundbreaking work that our faculty members pursue — in the name of education, patient care and research. Below is a list of professorships inaugurated from August through December 2013. Expanded descriptions of each are online at: medicineatmichigan.org/magazine



The **Cis Maisel Professorship in Oncology** was inaugurated in an August 1, 2013 ceremony. **Maha Hussain, M.D.**, the associate director for clinical

research at the Comprehensive Cancer Center, is the first Maisel Professor. Geneva "Cis" Maisel Kellman has been a staunch supporter of the Comprehensive Cancer Center since its inception 25 years ago.

In an August 15, 2013 ceremony, **William Rainey, Ph.D.**, became the first **Jerome W. Conn Collegiate Professor**. Conn was the first director of the Division of Metabolism, Endocrine, Nutrition and Diabetes (1943-1973) and Rainey, a professor of molecular and integrative physiology and internal medicine, is an expert in the area of endocrinology.

Honoring a long career in orthopaedics and contributions to knee and hip replacement prostheses, the **Larry S. Matthews, M.D., Collegiate Professorship in Orthopaedic Surgery** was established in a September 30, 2013 ceremony. **Jon Sekiya, M.D.** (Residency 2001), professor of orthopaedic surgery, associate director of MedSport and team physician for the U-M Athletic Department, was installed as its first professor.

Battle Creek psychiatrist **Carlos Solano-Lopez, M.D.** (Residency 1991), celebrated his mother with the establishment of



the **Rosa Casco Solano-Lopez Research Professorship in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry**. **Soo-Eun Chang, Ph.D.**, an assistant professor in psychiatry,

was inducted as the first professor in an October 15, 2013 ceremony.

The **Bartley R. Frueh, M.D., and Frueh Family Collegiate Professorship in Eye Plastic and Orbital Surgery** was inaugurated in an October 17, 2013 ceremony. Frueh was a renowned expert on thyroid-associated eye disease, who served on the Kellogg Eye Center faculty for 30 years. The first Frueh professor, **Christine C. Nelson, M.D.**, is a professor of ophthalmology and surgery, and her research focuses on disorders of the eyelid and orbital diseases.

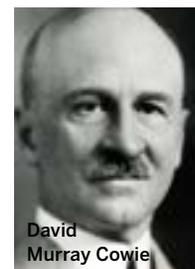
Richard D. Swartz (M.D. 1970), was honored for his dedication as an expert teacher and passionate physician with the establishment of the **Swartz Collegiate Professorship of Nephrology**. In recognition of his many teaching awards and his more than 25 years of supervising chronic dialysis, **Joseph Messana** (M.D. 1982) became the first Swartz Professor in an October 23, 2013 ceremony.

The **Melvyn T. Korobkin, M.D., Collegiate Professorship in Radiology** was established during a November 11, 2013 ceremony, recognizing Korobkin's seminal contributions to diagnosing

abdominal disease using CT scans. The first recipient of the professorship, **Isaac Francis, M.B.**, is an outstanding radiologist with expertise in gastrointestinal and genitourinary oncology.

Established through an estate gift, the **Richard D. and Katherine M. O'Connor Research Professorship in Alzheimer's Disease** was celebrated in a November 20, 2013 ceremony. Associate Professor of Neurology **Judith Heidebrink, M.D.** (Residency 1995, Fellowship 1997), was named the first professor, recognizing her outstanding care of dementia patients while continuing to play a key role in advancing the understanding of Alzheimer's disease.

Recognizing the first chair of the Department of Pediatrics, the **David Murray Cowie, M.D., Research Professorship in Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases** was inaugurated with **Ram K. Menon, M.D.**, the first recipient. Menon, a profes-



sor of pediatrics and communicable diseases and of molecular and integrative physiology, is an internationally respected scientist in pediatric endocrinology.

Saluting a pioneer in the field of systems biology, the **Michael Savageau Collegiate Professorship in the Department of Computational Medicine and Bioinformatics** was established with **Brian Athey** (Ph.D. 1990), installed as its first professor on December 4, 2013. Savageau, Ph.D., had the vision and dedication to make the department a reality in 2012. Athey, the first chair of the department, is a leader in biomedical informatics and computational medicine, and he has made key contributions in research, clinical translation and education. Athey is also a professor of computational medicine and bioinformatics, a professor of psychiatry and of internal medicine.