

Connect

FOR ALUMNI & FRIENDS OF UNMC

A Kaleidoscope of Care

Nurses are the backbone
of the health care system.



Ready to change the world.

Every May and December, a new wave of dedicated, skilled and compassionate health care professionals step into the workforce – armed with knowledge, empathy and a commitment to care. From small-town clinics to bustling hospitals, UNMC graduates are prepared to heal, innovate and create healthier futures for all.

#WeAreUNMC

Mission-driven work has broad impact

H. Dele Davies, MD
UNMC Interim Chancellor

Welcome to another edition of UNMC Connect magazine.

Within these pages, you — valued members of our university community — will learn about the impactful and transformative work taking place at your university, the only public academic health science center in Nebraska.

I'm especially pleased to introduce this magazine, as it is my first issue as your interim chancellor. I am humbled to lead this great institution and grateful for the work UNMC does every day to enhance the lives of all Nebraskans. While I've met many of you during my dozen-plus years at UNMC, it is a privilege to re-introduce myself in this new role.

As you already know, the cover theme of this issue is "Kaleidoscope of Nursing Care." I could not think of a more apt metaphor. A singular vision is transformed into a multitude of opportunities in research, outreach, education and, of course, clinical care. I'm proud of how our UNMC College of Nursing carries out its mission throughout our 500-mile campus and beyond.

For example, UNMC has teamed with both Scottsbluff Public Schools and Western Nebraska Community College to provide eligible students with guaranteed admission to the UNMC College of Nursing West Nebraska Division. These collaborations take us one step closer to closing the nursing shortage while also removing barriers and allowing students to train close to home. The impact on our rural communities will be felt for generations.

You also will meet the director of the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center, Joann Sweasy, PhD. She'll explain the road ahead on the cancer center's quest to achieve National Cancer Institute-designated comprehensive status. She'll also describe why this designation is more than just an accolade and what achieving it would mean to the people of our state.

Please join me in celebrating the UNMC VETSmile Clinic, a donor-funded program that provides dental services to eligible veterans

at the UNMC College of Dentistry in Lincoln — truly transformative work for our veterans, students and faculty. Additionally, our uBEATS program, which provides free, high-quality, vetted health-related STEM e-modules to teachers across Nebraska and the nation, enrolled its 100,000th student this academic year.

I hope you enjoy these stories and share the same pride I have in UNMC's far-reaching impact on students, science, the health care workforce and economic sustainability of our state. ♥



TOP RANKING
UNMC is among
the nation's top
research and
doctoral-degree
universities.

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UNMC Connect is published annually by Strategic Communications and Alumni Relations at the University of Nebraska Medical Center and the University of Nebraska Foundation. See past issues at unmc.edu, News and Events. Permission is granted to reprint any written materials herein, provided proper credit is given. Direct requests to Today@unmc.edu.

UNMC is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (HLC-NCA) and enjoys full accreditation of all its professional academic programs.

We are Nebraska Medicine and UNMC. Our mission is to lead the world in transforming lives to create a healthy future for all individuals and communities through premier educational programs, innovative research and extraordinary patient care.

UNMC does not discriminate in its academic, employment or admissions programs, and abides by all federal regulations pertaining to same.

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2024 Ozzie Award honorable mention
for design of *UNMC Connect*

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Travel beyond the printed page with digital content that magnifies the transformative work being done at UNMC. Visit unmc.edu/news/connect and be inspired by the people and programs making a difference in Nebraska and beyond.



PHOTOS BY KILEY CRUSE, JOHN KEENAN, KENT SIEVERS AND CHRIS CHRISTEN

1. LIVING TRIBUTE: Watch as the Nebraska Nurse Honor Guard pays tribute to retired UNMC faculty member Louise LaFramboise, PhD, in November 2024. The beloved educator, mentor and registered nurse died Jan. 21, 2025.

2. UNUSUAL PATIENTS: Learn how UNMC's Departments of Anesthesiology and Orthopaedic Surgery are providing care in unexpected places.

3. THE GIFT OF VISION: Discover how donations to the Lions Eye Bank of Nebraska help individuals see the future.

4. MATCH DAY MAGIC: See the excitement as UNMC medical students learn where their residency training will begin. ❤️

Visit unmc.edu/news/connect for online storytelling.



CAMPUS
HIGHLIGHTS



RENDERING BY RDG PLANNING & DESIGN



Expanding health education in central Nebraska

As UNMC expands its presence in central Nebraska, the first cohort of UNMC College of Pharmacy students will begin their education on the University of Nebraska at Kearney campus this fall. Learning will take place in the Douglas A. Kristensen Rural Health Education Complex, which includes ongoing construction of the Health Science Education Center II. Once complete, the one-of-a-kind, rural, health-focused learning environment will make it possible for UNMC to expand the presence of the UNMC Colleges of Allied Health Professions and Nursing, and add the UNMC Colleges of Medicine, Pharmacy and Public Health to co-locate in two buildings on the UNK campus.

700

By 2030, nearly 700 learners from UNMC will be enrolled in Kearney.

EMERGENCY RESIDENCY PROGRAM

Impacting ER care statewide

The UNMC Emergency Medicine Residency Program marked its 20th anniversary in June 2024 with a recognition of the impact the training program has had across Nebraska and beyond.



Michael Wadman, MD

For two decades, the emergency medicine residency program has been a cornerstone of excellence in shaping the careers of emergency physicians, said Michael Wadman, MD, professor and the Robert L. Muellemann, MD, Distinguished Chair of Emergency Medicine.

All told, the program — designed to improve emergency care for people across Nebraska by directing a pipeline of specially trained physicians into the regional health care system — has graduated more than 150 emergency physicians. 🍷

CONNECT

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PHOTOGENIC SCULPTURE REGAINS ITS SHINE

UNMC's "Healing" sculpture, located outside the Michael F. Sorrell Center for Health Science Education, spent part of fall 2024 under a blue tarp. The iconic stethoscope, which has stood on the eastern edge of the Omaha campus since August 2014, received a fresh coat of red paint — three coats, in fact. The tarp came off in late November to reveal the new shine.



PHOTOS BY KILEY CRUSE



UNMC HOUSING

Residence hall coming in 2026

On an overcast November day, UNMC and community leaders broke ground on a student housing facility on the Omaha campus, fulfilling a longstanding request from its biomedical graduate and health profession students.

The \$66 million, 200,000-plus-square-foot residence hall, located at 39th Street and Dewey Avenue, will accommodate approximately 300 UNMC students. Occupancy of the six-story building is expected in August 2026.

“The availability of safe, affordable housing for our students is important, especially those who come from out of state and are not familiar with the city,” said UNMC Interim Chancellor H. Dele Davies, MD.

The facility will house, in part, UNMC Scott Scholars, a program established by the Suzanne & Walter Scott Foundation to prepare high-achieving medical students to serve as health care professionals in Nebraska. The residential facility will include studio, one-bedroom and two-bedroom units and a “grab-and-go” food option with indoor and outdoor seating, as well as first-floor meeting and study spaces open to all UNMC students, including non-tenants.

“Providing such housing is key to ensuring a seamless education for all students that enables them to thrive both academically and personally,” Dr. Davies said. ♥



RENDERING BY HOLLAND BASHAM ARCHITECTS

Report: NU's impact goes beyond workforce

The University of Nebraska is an engine of growth across the state.

NU generates \$6.4 billion annually and supports one in every 20 Nebraska jobs, according to the latest economic impact report by national consulting firm Tripp Umbach.

“The University of Nebraska is one of the most important investments we can make in the future of our state,” said NU President Jeffrey P. Gold, MD. “For every \$1 the state invests in the University of Nebraska, we generate \$10 in economic activity — an

extraordinary return on investment.”

NU fuels Nebraska's economic engine through:

- **Workforce Development.** NU produces 11,000 graduates annually, with one in seven working-age Nebraskans holding a degree from the university. NU alumni generate \$3.5 billion in additional earnings each year.
- **Job Creation.** One in every 20 jobs in Nebraska is directly or indirectly supported by the University of Nebraska, a number that increases

to one in 11 when including Nebraska Medicine.

- **Innovation and Research.** NU's \$304 million in federal research awards fuel discoveries that benefit Nebraska businesses and communities.
- **Community Impact.** NU students, faculty and staff contribute more than \$38 million in charitable donations and \$76 million in volunteer service annually.

Read the full report at nebraska.edu/economic-impact. ♥

Device cuts autism assessment times

by Kelsey Kirk

UNMC's Munroe-Meyer Institute is piloting a new diagnostic tool — a tablet that shows short videos — that can dramatically cut waitlist times for an autism diagnosis.

Research has shown that children 16 to 30 months old on the autism spectrum concentrate more on different areas of the video — objects instead of faces, for example — than their neurotypically developing peers. The device tracks eye movement 120 times per second and has shown a high degree of accuracy in identifying children on the autism spectrum.

The device, which its makers say has an accuracy rating of about 80%, is not considered the final word on a diagnosis, said Patricia Zematic, PhD, program director of the MMI Autism Diagnostic Clinic. It is used in conjunction with other accepted diagnostic tools.

The video evaluation takes about 20 minutes. Additional observation,

For many children, we will be able to use this device to confirm the presence of autism, when combined with clinical judgment and developmental history ... we're going to be able to see more patients more quickly.

—Patricia Zematic, PhD

including tests such as the Childhood Autism Rating Scale, are completed to ensure accuracy of a diagnosis.

Dr. Zematic estimates that appointments using the device will take about 1 hour and 15 minutes, significantly reducing the traditional four-hour assessment process. In cases where additional testing is required, she said, appointments total about two hours.

Since rolling out the device in March 2024, therapists have evaluated more than 30 toddlers. Feedback from parents has been positive, with praise for the device and shorter assessment times, Dr. Zematic said.

MMI is the first in Nebraska to use the device clinically and one of a handful of sites involved in testing the device's efficacy among older children.

Alice Shillingsburg, PhD, director of the integrated Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders at MMI, and her co-investigator Dr. Zematic describe the device as a game-changer, especially in rural Nebraska where providers currently drive long distances for diagnostic assessment training. With EarliPoint, follow-up tests for patients potentially could be completed via telehealth.

“For many children, we will be able to use this device to confirm the presence of autism, when combined with clinical judgment and developmental history,” Dr. Zematic said. “In cases where we might be uncertain, we can prioritize additional testing and assessments. But if we only do these more complicated, complex evaluations on a smaller number of patients, we're going to be able to see more patients more quickly.” ♥



Jeena Kouris holds daughter Olivia Gebers as Patricia Zematic, PhD, program director of the MMI Autism Diagnostic Clinic, uses the EarliPoint device to evaluate Olivia.



Q When Holly Zimmerman was a student at the University of Southern Mississippi, she took a genetics class during her sophomore year. Little did she know she'd eventually lead UNMC's master's in genetic counseling program and serve as its founding director.

A Called to genetic counseling education and mentorship, Holly Zimmerman found her dream job at UNMC.

Q. What sparked your interest in genetics/genetics counseling?

A. I have always loved math and science. I discovered genetics in college, and it just made sense. My professor said I could explore a career in research or consider the field of genetic counseling.

Q. You were once the only genetic counselor in the state of Mississippi. How does Nebraska compare?

A. As the only genetic counselor in Mississippi for four years, it was an exciting time to define the field through interprofessional collaborations and patient care. I recognized my love for building programs and teaching. Nebraska has been fantastic in that the number of genetic counseling colleagues immediately doubled

(In 2017, I went from four genetic counselors in Mississippi to eight at UNMC). Today, there are 24 at UNMC (and growing) and three more in Lincoln. I also find the people similar in that Nebraskans are kind and work hard.

Q. Genetic counseling is a fast-growing field. Why?

A. We better understand how genetics can impact health. Our field started in pediatrics; now, we are in prenatal, cancer, adult as well as specialty clinics like neurology, ophthalmology and cardiology. Beyond the clinic, genetic counselors work in education, public policy, research, insurance and genetic testing companies.

Q. UNMC launched the state's first and only accredited

genetic education program in 2019. How do you measure the program's success?

A. We celebrate milestones along the way – our initial accreditation application acceptance, our first match day, our first orientation, our first graduating class, and our first site visit. Housed in the UNMC College of Allied Health Professions and in partnership with the Munroe-Meyer Institute, the program will graduate its fifth class in May and top 38 alumni – how incredible!

Q. Like doctors, genetic counselors may have to deliver life-changing or devastating news to people. How do you prepare future genetic counselors to handle these situations?

A. I previously worked in pediatrics, and it can be incredibly difficult to give unexpected news to a parent or guardian. I teach students to provide the information in a clear and kind way while supporting the family as they process the information. We talk through how to deliver the information and how the family may respond. We self-reflect after practicing these skills and consider what went well and where we want to grow. Overall, we support our patients.

Q. What should people know about genetic testing?

A. Not all genetic testing is created equal, and there may not be a genetic test to offer. If there is something in your medical or family history, make sure you are getting the right information to answer the question you have.

Q. Do you have a saying that students repeat back?

A. "Stay flexible and curious." I say it to encourage students to not only be prepared, but also to be okay with not knowing everything. ♥



“Every health care worker, from nurses to ultrasound technicians, should have foundational knowledge of developmental disabilities.”

Karoly Mirnics, MD, PhD, dean and director of the UNMC Munroe-Meyer Institute and one of 30 individuals worldwide who sit on the Board of Directors of Special Olympics International.

I never thought I’d be giving echos to gorillas.

Walker Thomas, assistant professor and cardiac sonographer with the UNMC Department of Anesthesiology, after performing an echocardiogram on Kijito, a 29-year-old, 383-pound, male western lowland gorilla at the Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium in Omaha.

“I enjoy the ability to go through experiments and say, ‘Aha, that means something different than what we thought. Let’s figure out how it works.’”

Hamid Band, MD, PhD, UNMC researcher who studies molecular pathways and their signaling in relation to cancer.

“What is it about Nebraska?”

A public health official’s remark heard by UNMC health security expert Jocelyn Herstein, PhD, during a training exercise in Germany. The comment validates the work NETEC and the Global Center for Health Security have done to become world experts on issues involving infectious disease preparedness and response.

“You gave me my life back.”

Rick Sacra, MD, speaking in Omaha on the 10th anniversary of being the first Ebola patient treated in the Nebraska Biocontainment Unit at UNMC. The Massachusetts-based family practice physician, who also provides care in Liberia, West Africa, spent three weeks in the NBU in 2014.

“The feeling from helping people who are in medical need is a wonderful reward.”

William Northwall, MD, Nebraska native and former Kearney radiologist, upon creating a full cost-of-attendance scholarship for a Nebraska student who studies medicine at the UNMC College of Medicine in Kearney.

‘Team, you are amazing’

by Paul Baltes, Nebraska Medicine



Rick Sacra, MD, got right to the point, “You gave me my life back. I will never forget that as long as I live. You have my undying gratitude.”

The Massachusetts-based family practice physician was the first Ebola patient treated in the Nebraska Biocontainment Unit (NBU). Last fall, he shared those heartfelt words with a roomful of people, many of whom were involved in curing his Ebola exactly 10 years earlier.

The September 2024 event was a reunion of sorts, bringing together Dr. Sacra, current and former colleagues from the biocontainment unit and the man who founded and led the unit to international prominence: retired infectious diseases physician Phil Smith, MD.

Dr. Smith reflected on the call he received a decade ago while walking with Angela Hewlett, MD,

who would go on to become the current NBU medical director. The federal official told Dr. Smith, “We think of you so highly, we’d like to send you a patient,” he recalled.

Dr. Smith told the gathering: “I’ve never worked with a more capable or courageous group of people in my life. I just want to say, team, thank you. You are amazing.”

After Dr. Sacra arrived by ambulance in September 2014, his care team went to work doing what they had spent nine years training to do.

Shelly Schwedhelm, associate director of the UNMC Global Center for Health Security, immediately felt the weight of responsibility and leadership.

“Dr. Smith and I, along with the rest of the leadership team, never lost sight of what we signed our team up for that day,” she recalled. “The culture of the NBU is like no other — everyone was accountable.

↑ Rick Sacra, MD, left, visits with Phil Smith, MD, who founded and led the Nebraska Biocontainment Unit.

We all knew we had to speak up.”

Throughout the course of treating three Ebola patients in 2014, the team developed processes that became a national and global standard and still are in use today.

University of Nebraska System President Jeffrey P. Gold, MD, who had been installed as UNMC chancellor just before the 2014 Ebola activation, shared his lasting pride and admiration for the team and recognized how their care a decade ago paved the way for UNMC and Nebraska Medicine to lead the world.

“Your work is in textbooks and literature, and in print and broadcast media,” he said. “When the moment came, you stepped up, stepped forward and simply went to work doing what Nebraskans do all the time: take care of others.” ♥

PHOTO BY TAYLOR WILSON, NEBRASKA MEDICINE

Global outreach

The Global Center for Health Security’s international reach extends to over 20 countries and its collaboration with the U.S. Air Force Infectious Disease C-STARS program continues to grow in scope and scale. Last fall, UNMC infectious disease specialists traveled to Rwanda to assist with the east African nation’s response to an outbreak of Marburg viral disease, a type of hemorrhagic fever.

UNMC fast facts

30,741

Students enrolled for the 2024-25 school year, which marks the 24th consecutive year that UNMC has admitted a record class.

30

Acres that make up EDGE District, a UNMC development hub for health-focused scientific discovery, entrepreneurship and commercialization located directly west of UNMC's Omaha campus.

500
MILES

UNMC's reach with campuses in Scottsbluff, Kearney, Lincoln, Norfolk and Omaha.

700

Approximate number of enrolled students on UNMC's regional campus in Kearney by 2030.

2x

Now available:
Twice-a-year admission for Bachelor of Science in Nursing programs at UNMC's College of Nursing divisions in Kearney and Lincoln.

R1

DESIGNATION

The Carnegie designation that places UNMC among the top research and doctoral-degree universities in the country.

6,502

Employed by UNMC as of February 2025.

\$1.024
BILLION

UNMC's operating budget for FY 2024-25
(16.6% STATE-SUPPORTED)

MY NORTH STAR

Tragedy blazes trail for
career fighting cancer

by Karen Burbach

Joann Sweasy, PhD, was 9 when she decided to cure cancer.

Before that, she and her younger cousin spent hours dancing and playing games in Bristol, Pennsylvania. “She was like a sister to me.”

That carefree childhood changed when her cousin — almost 5 — was diagnosed with leukemia. Treatment options were limited in 1968, and Denise died three weeks later.

“It was a terrible and sad situation,” said Dr. Sweasy, who is an only child. “As a kid, I decided I wanted to cure cancer and that got me through a lot.”

To this day, she keeps a framed image of a soft smiling Denise, hands clasped, in a white blouse, ruby red skirt and knee highs, prominently displayed in her office. It’s her North Star.

So, too, is walking through the doors of the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center on the UNMC and Nebraska Medicine campus each day with patients. “That’s why we’re here.”

Before joining the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center, she served as director of the University of Arizona Cancer Center.





To learn more or to become an advocate for prevention, care and research, contact the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center's Office of Community Outreach and Engagement via email at coe@unmc.edu.

During her tenure, she led the center to renewal of its National Cancer Institute (NCI) comprehensive designation – the highest honor a cancer center can achieve.

The opportunity to lead the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center resonated with her aspirations to contribute in transformative ways, she said. “The search firm contacted me, and close friends also encouraged me to explore this role more closely,” she said. She was sold on her first visit. “The people I met were solution-focused, passionate about making a difference, and genuinely supportive.” She was moved by their dedication and the generosity of Nebraska’s philanthropic community. Visionaries like Pamela Buffett, whose commitment to advancing cancer care is woven into the very fabric of the center that bears her name and that of her late husband, Fred, left a lasting impression.

“We want Nebraskans to know we’re here for everyone in the state who’s been impacted by cancer.”

—Joann Sweasy, PhD

Joining UNMC in November 2023 was more than a relocation. It was a chance to advance cancer care, research and community collaboration, while building on the solid foundation of the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center.

The strategic foundation, laid by the former cancer center director, Ken Cowan, MD, PhD, who died in December 2024, continues to guide and inspire the center’s mission.

“He was a great adviser,” she said of Dr. Cowan, who led UNMC’s NCI-designated cancer center for more than two decades. “There’s about three conversations I’d like to have had with him this week alone.”

After applauding UNMC’s cancer center staff, clinicians and researchers, Dr. Sweasy acknowledged the individuals who have guided her. “My entire life, I’ve been lucky to have mentors and smart people who treated me with care,” she said. “I’m grateful for that.”

That support and inspiration, she said, started with her sixth-grade science teacher, who sparked her love of DNA. Later, at Merck and Company, Dr. Sweasy was part of the team that developed Ivermectin, the drug farmers use to keep parasitic worms out of ruminant animals. She was especially impressed with how Merck’s then-CEO Roy Vagelos, MD, made the drug freely available to West Africans to eliminate river blindness.

That decision “made an impact on the world,” she said. “And making a larger impact through science is important to me.”

From Merck, she went to Rutgers University and worked with pioneering geneticist and Lasker Award recipient Evelyn Witkin, PhD, who discovered how DNA repairs itself. She then did a postdoctoral research fellowship at the University of Washington and worked alongside cancer researcher and genome scientist Lawrence Loeb, MD, PhD, known for determining the role mutations play in human cancer. And she’s worked at Yale University School of Medicine.

An internationally recognized expert in the genetics, cell biology and biochemistry of DNA repair, she’s now a mentor to others, even earning a postdoctoral mentoring prize while at Yale. For the past 25 years, National Institutes of

PROFILE

Health funding has enabled her to study the molecular basis of mutagenesis (the production of genetic mutations) and DNA repair. Most recently, her lab discovered that aberrant DNA repair leads to the development of lupus.

Administratively, she's determined to put UNMC on the road to achieving NCI comprehensive status, and more importantly serve the people of Nebraska. That short-term plan includes:

- Recruiting a leader to build population sciences in research, dissemination and implementation, including determining how best to provide Nebraskans access to treatment prevention.
- Developing and expanding community outreach and engagement through bidirectional research, a strong community advisory board and an understanding of the needs of all Nebraskans. "For comprehensive designation, we have to have impact in our catchment area and for us, that's the state of Nebraska."
- Building a cancer prevention and control research program, including recruiting up to 10 individuals focused on cancer prevention and survivorship research.
- Increasing the number of enrolled patients in interventional trials,

which help inform bench-to-bedside translation, as well as the development of new drugs and cancer treatments.

Achieving NCI Comprehensive Status means Nebraskans will have access to leading-edge treatments and care informed by world-class research close to home, Dr. Sweasy said. Beyond advanced treatment, it also brings programs focused on cause, early diagnosis, prevention, rehabilitation and survivorship support, ensuring a comprehensive approach to fighting cancer for the communities served.

Long-term, Dr. Sweasy is determined to decrease the cancer burden in Nebraska. "Over 40% of cancer is preventable," she said. "We want to reduce the cancer burden and inequities and build on our outstanding reputation for strong scientific collaboration and impact.

"We want Nebraskans to be proud of their cancer center and all that we can accomplish together."

And, while she knows Nebraska's cancer research needs are as distinct as its geography, she's confident that — in time — UNMC's team at the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center will realize comprehensive NCI status through stronger engagement with all Nebraskans 🍷

Cancer in Nebraska

- There were 10,300 cases of cancer and 3,490 deaths reported in Nebraska in 2021.
- Prostate, lung/bronchus and colon/rectum cancers were the most common cancers among Nebraska men. Among Nebraska women, breast, lung/bronchus and colon/rectum were the most common.
- After heart disease, cancer was Nebraska's second leading cause of death in 2021.

Source: U.S. Cancer Statistics, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and National Cancer Institute; 2021

What Nebraskans should know

- About 40% of cancer is preventable through early detection and lifestyle choices.
- Nebraska has lower screening rates than the U.S., on average, especially in colorectal and lung cancer. Nebraska also has an increased incidence of cancer overall compared to the United States, Dr. Sweasy said, and we're not sure why.
- Catching cancer early is critical; routinely ask your primary care provider about cancer screenings.
- Support UNMC cancer research through Cattlemen's Ball of Nebraska, a fundraising event hosted in a unique and different location each year.
- Opportunities will exist — through planned questionnaires and focus groups — to partner with the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center as it works to meet the needs of all Nebraskans.

Dr. Sweasy brings researchers and clinicians together to discuss cancer research and care.



PHOTOS BY KILEY CRUISE

MMI employee blossoms through Special Olympics

by Kelsey Kirk

Rachel Mulligan joined the track and field team in high school.

During her freshman year, she would get lapped during the 800-meter race.

By senior year, she had improved. Mulligan was no longer finishing last.

When she joined Special Olympics after high school graduation, she kept improving, and her confidence skyrocketed.

In March, Mulligan, a UNMC Munroe-Meyer Institute employee, traveled to Italy for the 2025 Special Olympics World Games. She was the lone Nebraska athlete to earn an invite.

“It was shocking,” Mulligan said of receiving her invitation. “And there was a lot of joy.”

Mulligan has been participating in Special Olympics for about 14 years. She’s tried plenty of sports — basketball, bocce ball, bowling, floor hockey, swimming, soccer and softball.

But one of her favorite sports — and the one she competed in during the Italy games — is cross-country skiing.

Shortly after high school graduation, one of her coaches noticed that Mulligan liked getting outdoors. Cross-country skiing stuck.

This was the second time Mulligan has competed in the Winter Games. She received a silver medal in the 2017 games held in Austria. This March, she received three silver medals.

Mulligan’s ties to Special Olympics date back to her grandfather, who was a volunteer at the first Special Olympics World Games in Chicago.

In Italy, Mulligan was joined by her parents and extended family.

Her parents, Pam and Mike Mulligan, have seen their daughter open up since joining Special Olympics. She’s tried new sports and worked at MMI



MMI’s connection to Special Olympics

Rachel Mulligan isn’t the only Special Olympics tie at the UNMC Munroe-Meyer Institute. MMI has had an organized bocce ball team for two seasons through Special Olympics Nebraska. And MMI Dean and Director Karoly Mirnics, MD, PhD, sits on the board of directors of Special Olympics International. He also serves as chair of the organization’s Global Medical Advisory Committee.

for about three years. She spent two years greeting clients at the front desk before becoming a student peer mentor. In that role, which she’s held for about a year, she helps with MMI’s transition students. She’s also participated on MMI’s bocce ball team. The season ends with a tournament through Special Olympics Nebraska.

“She’s really blossomed,” Mike Mulligan said. “She’s way more outgoing. She takes on challenges. It’s really outside of the competition where you see her growth.”

And she’s made scores of friends — some who keep in touch via social media and others who routinely mail holiday cards.

To prep for Italy, Mulligan ramped up her training. She added in running, walking and weightlifting. A season pass to Mount Crescent, in Honey Creek, Iowa, and trips to Minnesota and Colorado gave her practice on the snow, where she focused on perfecting gliding downhill.

“It’s about doing your best,” Mike Mulligan said. “That’s what she does. It’s not about the medal; it’s about the race.”

Mulligan’s advice to other athletes: “Try it and find what sticks. I love Special Olympics. It’s really helped me find my voice. Give it a try until you find what you enjoy.” ❤️



NURS

A kaleidoscope of care

Nurses are the backbone of the health care system.

From bedside care to community outreach, nurses treat illnesses, promote healing and recovery, prevent complications, drive health care innovation and empower patients and their families. Involved in every stage of health care delivery, they are vital for maintaining access to high-quality care. And, they are in short supply; in Nebraska, more than 1,280 registered nurses will be needed by 2030.

It's never too late to become a nurse and – like infinite kaleidoscope patterns – opportunities abound across rural and urban clinics and hospitals, and in research labs, classrooms and more.

Here, you'll meet an array of individuals – from nurse scientists and political advocates to specialty and forensic nurses – who love the challenges, rewards and opportunities found in safeguarding public health.

Portraits by Kiley Cruse

Interviews have been edited and condensed for clarity.



ING

Marcia Shade, PhD

Assistant professor, UNMC College of Nursing Omaha Division

Founder and CEO of Voice-It Incorporated

📍 Native of Omaha, Nebraska

"I want to make an impact in health care, and nurses have a unique blend of knowledge in science, skills and holistic patient care. They see the entire person. Nurses also are researchers and innovators by nature. And when older adults told me it would be easier if they could just talk to an app about their pain, I got into research and, through Voice-It Incorporated, decided to create the PAINChat app.

"The lightbulb symbolizes an idea or innovation that stems from thinking and problem solving. My goal as a nurse innovator and entrepreneur is to develop, test and get practical ideas out to people who can really use them. Sure, I can publish in a journal or give a talk, but the people we serve need tangible and transformative impact.

"If I could change one thing, I want nurses to realize their importance and power. You are not 'just a nurse.' You are an integral part of a health care team."





Jed R. Hansen, PhD

Executive director

Nebraska Rural Health Association

📍 Native of Minden, Nebraska; now lives in Papillion, Nebraska

"Nursing was a second career for me. I had been interested in health care in high school and just needed the right motivation and timing to follow my passion. An aunt I was close with died of breast cancer. Seeing her experiences and watching her hospice nurse left a lasting impression on me. Shortly after her death, I left my corporate job in New York, moved back to Nebraska, and enrolled in an accelerated nursing program.

"I knew nursing was the right fit after my first clinical rotation. I was assigned an elderly patient in a skilled rehab facility. He was such a nice person, and I enjoyed getting to work with him and learning about his life. After clinicals finished for the semester, I visited him to make sure he was doing OK. The experience taught me how much I enjoyed making connections with others and the sense of pride I experienced in being able to help people along their health journey.

"I've pivoted within nursing several times – from the emergency department to informatics, management, academia, and now advocacy and advanced practice.

"My proudest moment academically? Receiving my PhD and being recognized as a top student across UNMC with my 7-year-old in the audience. I was a proud dad, and she was a proud daughter. In advocacy, it was securing a large federal appropriation to improve veteran access. It was a BIG win in which my work will have a significant impact on the health of thousands of people across the country.

"I wish nurses were more involved in advocacy efforts beyond the walls of their clinics and hospitals. We are incredible advocates for patients, but we need to harness that same energy to elevate our profession and improve health in the community. Nurses have the potential to be a powerful voice for change, and I hope more of us step up to be heard."



Wende Heckert, DNP

Family nurse practitioner, owner

Heckert Health Center LLC

📍 Raised in Neligh, Nebraska;
now in Norfolk, Nebraska

"My aunt Nancy was a nurse. At the time, she was the only medical professional in my family. She was cool, smart and reminded me to stand up for my patients no matter what. People needing care are at their most vulnerable; we need to be sure they have an advocate.

"I had the opportunity to start in a rural hospital at age 16 as a nursing assistant. We learned on the job how to take care of people, and I worked with a fantastic group of nurses. I 'just knew' this is what I wanted to do.

"One of the nursing supervisors I worked with in high school and college was in a new program at UNMC for nurse practitioners. She interviewed me for a paper she was writing. To say I was intrigued is an understatement. Two years later, I was accepted into UNMC's family nurse practitioner program at the Kearney Division.

"Nursing is one of the most rewarding, stressful and honorable professions. It is not for the faint of heart. You must be willing to immerse yourself in studying, reflecting and putting the needs of others above yours. And, it is not like it is on TV. Be prepared to work nights, weekends, holidays, call, short of staff, etc. That is the unglamorous part, but there is great personal satisfaction in helping someone come to a state of wellness, health, safety and security.

"Moments that stand out? When someone says, 'thank you,' 'you saved my life...' or 'I'm glad you are here.' And, of course, working for and obtaining four degrees. The best review I ever had from a student is still my favorite: 'She is tough but fair.'

"I tell others: Stay teachable. Think with your head and listen with your heart. Be an agent of change. Always help be part of the solution."

Molly Murphy

Army nurse (Rank: Captain), pediatric intensive care unit

Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Bethesda, Maryland

📍 Native of Lone Tree, Colorado

"I wanted to be a nurse for as long as I can remember, and I'm fortunate to have had a dream from a young age that has never changed. I knew it was the right fit the moment I stepped into the ICU as a nursing student. My patient coded on my first day and I stood in the corner terrified as I watched the organized chaos. In that moment, I knew this was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.

"In August 2015, my sorority sister brought me to an ROTC recruiter my first week of school and they asked me to do a physical fitness test the following day. I am competitive and enjoy working out and realized I could get paid to do both and get free tuition for nursing school. I signed up moments after finishing the two-mile run.

"There is a position for every type of person in nursing, from admin to clinic to critical care. It is a career

where you can continue to challenge yourself. I work in the PICU, but consistently float to the STICU (surgical trauma intensive care unit), MICU (medical intensive care unit), peds ward and even NICU (neonatal intensive care unit).

"If I weren't a nurse, I'd be a kindergarten teacher or try out for the Army Special Forces. These two sides of me are why Army nursing worked out so well.

"My proudest moment has been becoming the first female nurse to graduate Ranger School (2024). I am hoping it shows the Special Forces the capabilities of nurses."

Virtual nurses support bedside team, patients

Virtual nursing is the latest career move for Emily Barnes, a registered nurse at the Nebraska Medical Center. In January, Nebraska Medicine introduced virtual nursing – in limited capacity – at its Nebraska Medical Center campus to support the bedside team.

"Virtual nurses free up the bedside team's hands – literally – to provide hands-on care for their patients," Barnes said.

With the use of technology, Nebraska Medicine's virtual nurses perform administrative tasks without being physically present in the patient's room. Patients within the hospital's Innovation Design Unit see and talk with their assigned virtual nurse via a giant screen in their room, while the nurse completes patient admissions and discharges, safety checks and patient education.

Nebraska Medicine's virtual nurses are designated on-site nurses with at least three years of registered nursing experience in an acute care hospital, and a range of other qualifications. As the program evolves, Barnes said, virtual nursing duties might expand to include rapid response team and code documentation, rounding with the care team "in" the patient room and completing such tasks for the bedside nurse as pain reassessments and chart reviews.

"The possibilities are endless," Barnes said.

The virtual nursing project is part of the hospital's Innovation Design Unit, located on level six of University Tower and part of Project Health: Building the Healthiest Nebraska, designed to transform the health care system by meeting the evolving needs of patients and enhancing the experience for UNMC learners.

"It fills my bucket to be part of the patient's care team and know that my virtual nurse team is part of the solution for helping to retain bedside nurses," Barnes said.



Lepaine Sharp-McHenry, DNP

UNMC College of Nursing Dean

♦ Native of Magnolia, Arkansas

"I never planned to be in academic nursing. I loved being by the bedside...but I had mentors who saw something in me that I didn't recognize and encouraged me to pursue higher education.

"At the bedside, it brought me joy to hear 'thank you' from patients for providing them comfort, sitting and holding their hand, helping them transition from this life to the next. In academia, it brings me joy to invest in the development of faculty, staff and students. I am reminded on tough days that I have the privilege to make an impact on the lives of others. That's creating a legacy that will live long beyond me – supporting the development of the next generation of nurses.

"I have loved every moment of my life as a nurse! You impact people at their best and worst moments, and the career options are endless. Everyone will need a nurse at some point in their lives."

The dean is holding a paperweight globe, a gift symbolizing the universal impact of nurses worldwide.





Haley Hays, DNP

Interim assistant dean,
clinical assistant professor

**UNMC College of Nursing Western
Nebraska Division; nurse practitioner,
lead APP and partner,
Aligned Providers of Wyoming**

📍 Native of Torrington, Wyoming;
now in Scottsbluff, Nebraska

"In sixth grade, I discovered the role of advanced practice nursing, which sparked a lasting interest. Nursing provides a sense of purpose, fulfillment and self-worth. It allows me to witness the direct impact of my work on patients' lives, reinforcing my belief that I am contributing to something greater than myself. The ability to offer comfort, promote healing and advocate for patients affirmed that nursing was a calling that aligned with my values and desire to make a difference.

"My passion has always centered on small-town and rural medicine. I couldn't do this job without my colleagues, who have become like family. The camaraderie, support and shared sense of purpose make the most challenging days manageable.

"My favorite part is the ability to develop deep, personal connections with my patients and community. There also is a greater degree of autonomy and responsibility compared to an urban area. A day in the life of a rural health care provider can vary drastically and allows for broader utilization of clinical skills. It's an honor to provide patients with high-quality care in the communities they call home."



Katrina Brown

Forensic nurse examiner team lead,
registered nurse 4

Vanderbilt University Medical Center

📍 Native of Fort Collins, Colorado;
now in Nashville, Tennessee

"With nursing, the work didn't feel like 'work.' It felt like it was part of who I am and something I could be good at...it felt like a calling.

"I moved to Nashville and fell in love with the emergency department; I enjoyed being a jack-of-all-trades...As I gained experience, I was interested in complex patient scenarios where the legal system and health care overlapped, but didn't know that forensic nursing was a specialty. At the time, we didn't have a SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) or forensic nurse examiner program, so I went on to become a clinical staff leader and then, when the then-mayor of Nashville created an initiative to increase access to care for sexual assault victims, I jumped on board and completed SANE training. Eventually, I was gifted leadership of the program.

"In October 2024, I was awarded the American Nurses Credentialing Center's National Magnet Nurse of the Year Award for the Structural Empowerment Magnet component. I go to work every day and do a job I love, and to be recognized for that motivates me to keep going."



Kristine Benda

Clinical instructor, Graduate Pediatric
Acute Care and Primary Care Program

**UNMC College of Nursing West
Nebraska Division; UNMC faculty
practice/pediatric nurse practitioner,
Box Butte General Hospital in Alliance,
Nebraska**

📍 Native of Hemingford, Nebraska; now in Scottsbluff, Nebraska

"As a nurse, you are part of life-changing moments with patients and their families. Some are joyous; others are devastating. I feel humbled to be a part of my patients' life story. While I hope to touch many individuals' lives, I often find that my patients and families will forever impact mine.

"I was a pediatric nurse practitioner for 10 years before I took a faculty position at UNMC. When I hesitated to step away from practicing full time, my brother Jeff said, 'Kristine, think of how many patients' lives you can impact if you teach other students to become a nurse and PNP like you.' My brother has since passed away from aplastic anemia (I was his bone marrow donor), and his words will forever reside in my soul. It is an honor to teach future generations of nurses and PNP students. Plus, I still get to practice as a PNP one day a week.

"It's the humanistic, individualistic, spiritual and empathetic-based care that I am passionate about, but the hard days teach us the most. The meaning of fail is just the 'first attempt in learning.'

"I am excited to advance into the nurse scientist role with my PhD. I was honored and humbled to be selected as one of 63 PhD students nationwide as a Jonas Scholar. I am living my proudest moment."

Did you know...?

The UNMC College of Nursing offers twice-a-year admissions to its Bachelor of Science in Nursing program at both the Lincoln and Kearney campuses; creating opportunities for more trained nurses to meet the workforce needs across Nebraska.



Karen Tejcka

Retired chief operating officer/chief nurse executive

Kaiser Permanente

📍 Native of Lincoln, Nebraska; now in Carlsbad, California

"There is no higher honor than to care for others. Look for the opportunities that ground you and make your heart sing. Take advantage of training programs offered by your employer and pursue advanced degrees. Nursing is in high demand and often cited by research organizations as being the most trusted profession.

"As a registered nurse, I was fortunate to progress my career in health care leadership and happy to prove wrong those who said, 'Once a nurse, always a nurse.' I knew having a nursing background was an advantage in creating health care systems responsive to population needs.

"Giving professionals need to replenish their joy and seeing how we make a difference every day does this for me. Remember: One nurse can make an immense difference."



Traci Haglund

Administrator

Wakefield Health Care Center and Assisted Living

📍 Native of Wakefield, Nebraska

"During college, I worked at Good Samaritan Hospital in Kearney, Nebraska, as a dietary aide and later as a phlebotomist. I loved connecting with people, and nursing seemed like a natural career choice due to the interactions.

"I have worked in many different settings from long-term care to critical access hospital to home health; each sector brought different challenges and helped me develop as an individual, teacher and leader. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I was on the board for my community's nursing home when we needed to make an administrative change. I offered to become the interim administrator for 30 days because I had my MSN in nurse lead/executive specialty from UNMC. I also had knowledge of trauma and emergency preparedness and employees and a board who believed I would be a positive leader. Long story short, I made a big difference in a short time and chose to stay.

"Nursing has so many opportunities; there is bound to be something that connects with you."



Shelly Cannon Stansbury

Part-time nurse/preceptor, post-anesthesia care unit

Lutheran Hospital (Intermountain Health) in Wheat Ridge, Colorado

📍 Native of Scottsbluff, Nebraska; now in Evergreen, Colorado

"My mother (Mary Lou "Lou" Keating Cannon) was a nurse, graduating with her BSN in 1955 from UNMC. She was proud of her college degree, as it was rare for that time. She instilled in me a sense of pride, honor and purpose in our profession. Both her daughters went on to become nurses. Now, my daughter (Savannah Stansbury) carries on that proud tradition graduating in 2015 from UNMC's Lincoln Division – 33 years after my graduation in 1982 with a BSN!

"When you combine the science of nursing with being able to care for people – what's not to love? It is the best profession ever! You can do so many things with one degree. I have nursing friends who worked on the Mercy Ships, at Club Med in Turks & Caicos and as flight nurses. They've also served as missionaries in Africa, and in school nursing, prison nursing, hospitals and community health. There are so many opportunities.

"I love when my patients want to hug me because I made an impact on their stay. I love the team aspect because you can't do it alone. I love the intellectual stimulation. From the time my daughters were in school, they stopped asking, 'What did you do today, mommy?' and began asking, 'Who did you help today?' Pretty special."

Did you know...?

The UNMC College of Nursing Northern Division in Norfolk and West Nebraska Division in Scottsbluff have been approved as instructional sites by the Student Exchange Visitor Program to accept international students into the Bachelor of Science in Nursing programs, beginning with the fall 2025 semester.

Right: One of Dr. Michele Balas' most cherished keepsakes is a childhood portrait, lovingly painted by her mother on a day when she was home sick. The painting is a mainstay in her office at UNMC.

Michele Balas, PhD

Associate dean of research,
Dorothy Hodges Olson Distinguished
Professor of Nursing

**UNMC College of Nursing Omaha
Division**

• Native of Plymouth, Pennsylvania

"My passion for research was fueled by my experiences in everyday clinical care, where I witnessed firsthand the devastating effects of delirium on patient outcomes. People with delirium experience a sudden and severe disturbance in their mental abilities, leading to confusion and reduced awareness of their environment. The symptoms people experience with delirium fluctuate throughout the day and are distressing.

"The way we previously treated delirium often made things far worse for the patients (e.g. sedation, restraints, bedrest). Collectively, delirium and its treatment led to many preventable adverse events and poor patient outcomes. I decided to develop more effective ways of stopping delirium and improving patient outcomes.

"The NIH study our team is running tests the effects of two different ways of increasing evidence-based practices in the intensive care unit. It will enroll thousands of patients and ICU providers and randomly assign ICUs to receive a real-time audit and feedback dashboard, or an extra RN added to normal daytime staffing levels. We'll see if either intervention improves ABCDEF bundle adoption (an evidence-based guide for clinicians to use to optimize ICU patient recovery and outcomes) or improves important patient outcomes.

"I'm motivated every day knowing the work I do is important and matters."





Tara Stull

Registered nurse
(transitioning into the ICU)

♥ Native of Bridgeport, Nebraska;
now in Spearfish, South Dakota

"Growing up, I had an acquaintance who worked in the newborn nursery as a registered nurse. That really interested me. I knew I wanted to get my Bachelor of Science in Nursing and UNMC had a campus close to me.

"Knowing I could work in numerous areas of nursing, wherever I lived, appealed to me; I learned something valuable from each area – med/surg, surgery, ED, OB, flight nursing, and everything in between.

"The love of flight nursing, the challenges, and the never-ending learning remind me why I love being a nurse.

"My proudest moment? It's a combination of interactions with patients and their family members. It's a feeling of pride and responsibility when a person entrusts you to save the life of their loved one. It's holding the hand of a scared child during transport to another facility. It's hearing the praise of a receiving physician of a job well done caring for a critical patient."



Douglass Haas, DNP

Clinical assistant professor

UNMC College of Nursing
Kearney Division

♥ Native of Oshkosh, Nebraska;
now lives in Kearney

"I began my nursing career in high school as a certified nursing assistant in a nursing home run by Garden County Health Services.

"Each clinical rotation in nursing school reinforced that this was an essential and rewarding profession. Helping patients heal or understand their disease processes, even when treatments failed, felt profoundly fulfilling.

"The critical thinking and problem-solving required are intense, but seeing patients progress toward recovery or a dignified end-of-life is worth it.

"The anxiety I feel when my car requires maintenance or something in my home needs technical assessment is alleviated by turning to and trusting experts in their fields. This is what my patients expect when they enter the health care system. They often are frightened and confused and rely on me to guide them safely through the process.

"My proudest moment was witnessing the nursing response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a former president of the Nebraska Nurses Association, I saw nurses tackle unprecedented challenges with resilience and adaptability. I feel immense pride in the daily contributions of nurses."

Tiffany Moore, PhD

Associate professor and student affairs administrator

UNMC College of Nursing
Omaha Division

♥ Native of Omaha, Nebraska

"Everyone's path is different, but I followed my passions. I started my career working with children in the NICU and then became a transport/flight nurse. After that, I pursued the BSN-PhD program and realized I enjoyed research, asking questions and understanding phenomena. Now, I am in academia as an educator and nurse scientist. After about five years, I missed "being" a nurse, so I also take PRN (pro re nata) calls as a forensic nurse examiner and see patients who have been involved in intimate partner violence and/or sexual assault.

"The possibilities of what you can do and where you can work with a nursing degree are endless, and you will never regret the knowledge and wisdom you learn from your nursing career.

"As a new nurse, I remember a mother sobbing after she'd lost her baby. I stepped outside the unit, wiped a tear and asked a more senior nurse if it ever gets easier. "The moment it doesn't affect you is the moment you need to leave the profession," she said.



Above: A poignant collection of notes and snapshots from grateful NICU families.

Right: An "Angel of Healing" gifted by her mom on Dr. Moore's graduation from nursing school. Together, they serve as reminders of the profound impact of nursing.

Did you know...?

UNMC teamed with both Scottsbluff Public Schools and Western Nebraska Community College to provide eligible students with guaranteed admission to the UNMC College of Nursing West Nebraska Division. The UNMC College of Nursing's agreement with Scottsbluff Public Schools is its first with a Nebraska high school.



**Mary Moller,
PhD(h), DNP**

Director of psychiatric services

**Northwest Integrated Health,
Tacoma, Washington**

📍 Native of Blair, Nebraska

"I originally pursued nursing because flight attendants had to be registered nurses, and I knew I wanted to travel. Then the requirement changed, but all the women in my family are nurses so I decided it was right for me as well!"

"The biggest impact on my career was unfortunately one that necessitated leaving Nebraska. That was hard to do. I felt called to move to eastern Washington and establish the first independent, advanced practice rural psychiatric clinic in the United States, 14 miles northwest of Spokane. At the time, only the states of Washington, Oregon and Arkansas had full practice authority, and it was my opportunity to create a treatment model that involved wellness promotion for psychiatry, something that didn't take off nationally for decades!"

"My proudest moments include being named Professional of the Year by the National Alliance on Mental Illness, being elected president of the American Psychiatric Nurses Association, and having the textbook I co-authored awarded the American Journal of Nursing Book of the Year in psychiatric nursing."

"To those interested in nursing: Determine what intrigues you about the profession. Ask yourself: What aspect of caregiving feels like it would be rewarding? Is there a specific patient population that interests you? And, then job-shadow a variety of nurses and see what the day-to-day health care world is like." 🍷

NU CONNECTS

The University of Nebraska, more than any other entity in the state, connects all Nebraskans. And, thanks to NU's programs and people, UNK, UNL, UNO and UNMC are economic engines for the entire state. Imagine Nebraska's 93 counties without a robust university presence...

My community organization benefits from NU student and NU employee **VOLUNTEER TIME & DONATIONS**

NU **RESEARCHERS** are **STUDYING** a disease that has **DIRECTLY IMPACTED** myself and my family

I am a **VETERAN** and the university has bettered my future (VETSmile Clinic, VA partnership, etc)

My business is **SUPPORTED BY NU** (i.e., contracts, events, construction projects)

I have received health care from UNMC's primary clinical partner, Nebraska Medicine, or from a **DOCTOR, DENTIST, NURSE, PHARMACIST** or other health care professional who was trained at the University of Nebraska

NU provided the **TRAINING** for my **WORKFORCE AND/OR MY WORK STAFF** consists of NU alumni

I collaborate with the university on **RESEARCH PROJECTS** and/or benefit from their work

I have enhanced my **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT** skills and knowledge thanks to NU's non-degree certificate **PROGRAMS, ENDORSEMENTS, DIGITAL BADGES AND INDUSTRY CERTIFICATIONS**

JUST THE FACTS

NU educates over **40%** of Nebraska's teachers

\$38.1 million is donated to local charitable organizations by staff, employees and students

\$76.8 million in value of volunteer time provided to area communities by staff, employees and students

UNMC trains **more health professionals** than any other institution in the state.

Learn more: nebraska.edu/economic-impact

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at ***nufoundation.org***

I am a current
NU STUDENT
or **GRADUATE**

I am an
EMPLOYEE of
the University
of Nebraska

I utilize resources
available only through
the university (space,
educational info,
TECHNOLOGY, core
research facilities, etc.)

My family has engaged
with and/or benefited
from NU's **EXTENSION
PROGRAM** (i.e., 4-H,
Next Chapter Nebraska,
Master Gardner Volunteer
Program and more)

I have donated
to NU because
I believe in its
MISSION and
values

My farm/ranch/ag business
has benefited from NU's
focus on **AGRIBUSINESS,
ANIMAL SCIENCE,
TECHNOLOGY AND/OR
PRECISION AGRICULTURE**

I have (or my
business has)
benefited from
KNOWLEDGE
shared by **NU
PROGRAMS AND
EXPERTS**

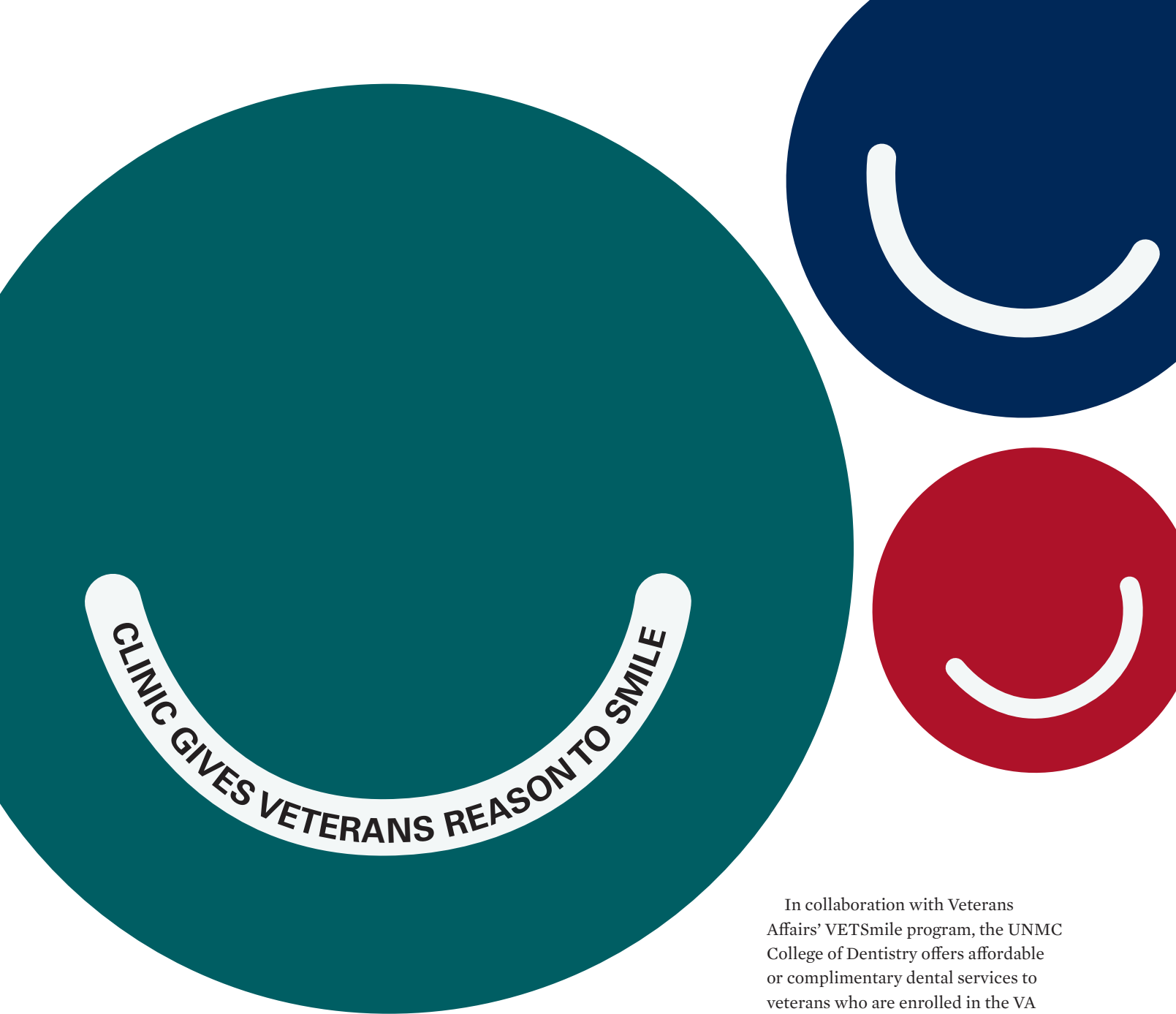
My family attends
NU-related **ACTIVITIES**
(athletics, music, fine and
performing arts, lectures,
OLLI courses/events, etc.)
that **ENHANCE MY/OUR
QUALITY OF LIFE**

My **CUSTOMERS**
are **CONNECTED TO
THE UNIVERSITY
SYSTEM** and
are critical to my
livelihood

My child is being
taught by a **K-12
TEACHER** who was
educated at the
University of Nebraska

I do **BUSINESS**
with the
University of
Nebraska and its
faculty, staff and
students





by John Keenan

Ronald Catt has been coming to the UNMC College of Dentistry's student clinic for decades.

"Close to 40 years," the 78-year-old said.

In that time, he's gotten cleanings, fillings and other routine dental work done.

But in 2024, he was faced with the need for a procedure — a partial denture that would require extractions and other work — that, even with the student clinic's reduced fees, was a financial impossibility for the Navy veteran who served in Vietnam.

"They told me it would be \$3,600 to repair," he said. "I said, 'Nope, can't do it.'"

About a week later, the clinic called back. Catt could now have the procedure — at no cost — as part of the UNMC College of Dentistry's new VETSmile Dental Clinic.

In collaboration with Veterans Affairs' VETSmile program, the UNMC College of Dentistry offers affordable or complimentary dental services to veterans who are enrolled in the VA health care system but are not eligible for dental benefits.

Open since July 2024, the donor-funded UNMC VETSmile Dental Clinic already has served more than 100 veterans. Patients receive care from UNMC dental students and faculty volunteers and establish a dental home for ongoing care and preventive services.

Only 15% of veterans enrolled in health care through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs are eligible for dental benefits. The statistic hits home for UNMC College of Dentistry Dean Gerard "Gerry" Kugel, DMD, whose father died of injuries related to his military service when Dr. Kugel was only 3.

UNMC's College of Dentistry serves eligible Nebraska veterans through donor-funded program

“Dental schools provided my dental care throughout my childhood — and I had VA benefits,” he said. “I went to dental schools because I didn’t get dental benefits. People in Nebraska may not realize veterans don’t get dental care — only if they’re fully disabled.”

When Dr. Kugel came to Nebraska in 2023 from Tufts University School of Dental Medicine in Boston, he found himself in what he describes as a “veteran heavy” state where he saw a big need.

“There are approximately 115,000 veterans in Nebraska not getting dental care, not being eligible,” Dr. Kugel said. “Of those vets, according to the Veterans Administration, about 60% say it’s due to the cost.”

He pointed to a VA survey that said dental care is the biggest health concern for Nebraska vets, ahead of both mental health care and medical care.

“The other staggering statistic? Close to 45% of vets in Nebraska experience dental pain in any given year. If they can’t get to a dentist or afford a dentist, we want to be their home.”

Greg Bennett, DMD, interim chair of the UNMC Department of Adult Restorative Dentistry, said college faculty and students were aware of the need within the state, in part because of the annual Veterans Mission of Mercy Dental Clinic, an intensive, two-day event to provide dental services to as many veterans as possible.

“Many of us volunteer for Mission of Mercy every year,” said Dr. Bennett, himself a veteran of the Navy. “But what do we do with patients in the meantime? A lot of them will have multiple teeth extracted,

and they’ll get a denture. But those need adjusting, they need aftercare, and there’s nowhere to go.”

The answer, Drs. Kugel and Bennett decided, was a true, accessible dental home for the state’s underserved veterans. Patients now get referred from the Lincoln VA Medical Center, and all their dental needs are covered. Currently, the VETSmile Clinics are held every Friday afternoon.

Initial efforts are being funded by an anonymous donor, and other funding



For nearly four decades, Navy veteran Ronald Catt has received dental care at the UNMC College of Dentistry.



sources are being explored. Currently, the VA is referring Lincoln-area veterans only to the clinic.

“They told us if they opened it statewide, we would be flooded, and they were right,” Dr. Bennett said. “We already have a two-year list of patients. But we do need to expand.”

Phone calls have come in from other areas of Nebraska that Dr. Bennett called “heartbreaking,” seeking help that the clinic currently does not have the funds or capacity to provide.

They have tried other events. On Veterans Day in 2024, the college’s clinic was open for all Nebraska veterans at no cost, again covered by donor funds.

But the need remains.

“Outside of New York University, we’re doing more than any school,” Dr. Kugel said. “For dental schools, this is becoming a popular topic, but we’re way ahead of the game.”

Credit Dr. Kugel, who has been working with veterans since his time

in Boston, teaming with a dental hygienist to hold low- or no-cost dental screening events in Boston homeless shelters and a low-income housing complex for veterans in Brighton, Massachusetts. His efforts caught the attention of one of his patients — Ashton Carter, the United States’ 25th secretary of defense.

The result was a program called Service with a Smile, where dentists treated veterans in private practice. Once a month, Dr. Kugel’s office provided free comprehensive dental care to homeless veterans.

Drs. Kugel and Bennett lauded their student and faculty volunteers, many of whom — like Dr. Bennett — are former military.

“We’ve got some of the best students I’ve ever worked with,” Dr. Kugel said. “I’m going to venture they are some of the best in the country — you could walk into their dental chair today and get the equivalent of what you’d get from a dentist who’s been practicing for years.

“They’re an incredibly dedicated group of students, and they participate in the clinic because they want to be the best. They want experience. The other day, a group of students were recontouring a bony ridge (on the jaw), two of the best students I’ve ever dealt with in my life. The patient had extractions, and the bone was rough, and they’re recontouring bone.

“One student put in a bone graft. Another prepped four teeth, then scanned and milled four crowns. All for veterans. We don’t force our students to do this. They just show up.”

Dr. Bennett agreed.

“Donors are voluntarily funding it, students are voluntarily working on patients, faculty are voluntarily showing up for this clinic. It’s a nice experience. Quite a few students end up teary-eyed just hearing the stories of patients and seeing the patients’ level of appreciation. It’s showing them the impact they can have on someone’s life — a lot of times, they’re giving people their life back.”

Fourth-year dental student Nick Stolze is one of those volunteers. He joined the team, he said, when he realized the shortage of dental care for veterans in Nebraska made the VETSmile Clinic the only option for some of them.

“It’s a great way to give back for everything they’ve given to our country,” he said.

Working with the veterans, Stolze said, he realized there’s more to dentistry than fixing a tooth or restoring a smile.

“This opportunity is giving them a new outlook on life, which some have wanted and deserved for

Nick Stolze, a fourth-year dental student, calls the VETSmile Clinic a “win” for all involved.



so long,” he said. “The opportunity to restore that for them has been very rewarding.”

With the student volunteers getting a range of clinical experience, and the veterans getting free care, Stolze called the clinic a win-win for both groups.

“This has been a huge blessing,” he said, noting the pride he has in seeing dental and dental hygiene students volunteering their time and skill to take part in the effort. “I know it’s an experience a lot of my classmates will carry forward.”

Catt visited the VETSmile Clinic on his 51st wedding anniversary and said the program has changed his life.

“For Catt, we ended up doing multiple fillings, several crowns, and then partial dentures,” Dr. Bennett said.

An unexpected reaction? Catt originally had a gap between his front teeth — what dentists call a diastema. And, he told his care team, his wife didn’t like his smile without it.

“He kept saying he always had that space,” Dr. Bennett said. “So, yes, it’s a beautiful, perfect smile — but it’s not him.”

So, they sent a new partial to the lab, with a space added. And when it came back, Dr. Bennett said, Catt couldn’t have been happier.

“That’s an important part of it,” Dr. Bennett said. “Let’s do what’s right. And you see how much you can change someone’s life.”

Catt, who has been receiving services at the dental school for nearly four decades, said he has never had a bad experience working with a dental student or student hygienist.

“These kids take their time,” he said. “They call afterward to see how I’m doing. That kind of sincerity has got nothing to do with money; they care about the patient.

“These kids — and I can’t tell you how many students I’ve had treat me — when they have a job to do, they strive with pride. Between the students and instructors, they don’t fall short on anything.

“They are all very professional and caring — they worry about the patient hurting — because pain is my biggest fear, as with everyone else.

“I can’t say enough about the college, this program and the students,” he said.

The challenge for the clinic, Dr. Kugel said, is sustainability. VETSmile is a national liaison between dental schools, such as UNMC and NYU, and local medical centers. But it is a pilot program, only authorized by Congress through 2026.

“It is intended to demonstrate that there is a mechanism for doing this successfully to then try to get federal funding,” Dr. Bennett said.

And since the goal is to tackle bigger problems than simple

cleanings or cavities, work sometimes takes several appointments, effecting how many people the clinic can take on as patients and creating a growing waitlist.

Still, Dr. Kugel is eyeing not only funding the clinic past 2026 but expanding it to Omaha, and the college is exploring support possibilities.

For Dr. Kugel, Dr. Bennett and their faculty and students, this is not only a labor of love. It is fulfilling UNMC’s mission to improve the lives of the people of Nebraska.

“We have a lot of dental need in Nebraska, and we are short on dentists,” Dr. Kugel said. “It’s not like the vet can go a block or a mile away and find a dentist. If you’re in the western part of the state, it’s hard to find a dentist if you’ve got money. It’s almost impossible if you don’t have money.

“As a state, this is the problem we are facing. And as the state’s dental college, we are committed to being part of the solution.” ♥

Erin Wirth and the UNMC College of Dentistry contributed to this story.



Where history meets vision, innovation

Collaboration. Scientific discovery. Economic development.

These are the forces being harnessed at Catalyst, a building that has emerged from the shell of an early 20th century steel mill in midtown Omaha as an innovation hub for advances that will impact the 21st century and beyond.





LOCATION: On the historic Omaha Steel Works site near 46th and Farnam Streets, Catalyst is a development led by GreenSlate and Koelbel & Co. on UNMC ground.

STATS: The \$65 million, 170,000-square-foot mixed-use innovation hub — which opened for occupancy this spring — provides co-working and leased space for bio- and medtech startups, health care professionals, academics and entrepreneurs.

FEATURES: Plans include a brewery, coffee shop and event space (open to the public) plus a highly amenitized office environment.

From its origins as Omaha Steel Works to its current iteration as Catalyst, this historic industrial building celebrates ingenuity — first, the imagination that drove heavy industry in Omaha's early 20th century and now the vision that fuels health care exploration today.↓



More about the EDGE District

Beyond a nod to the western edge of the UNMC campus in Omaha, EDGE stands for:

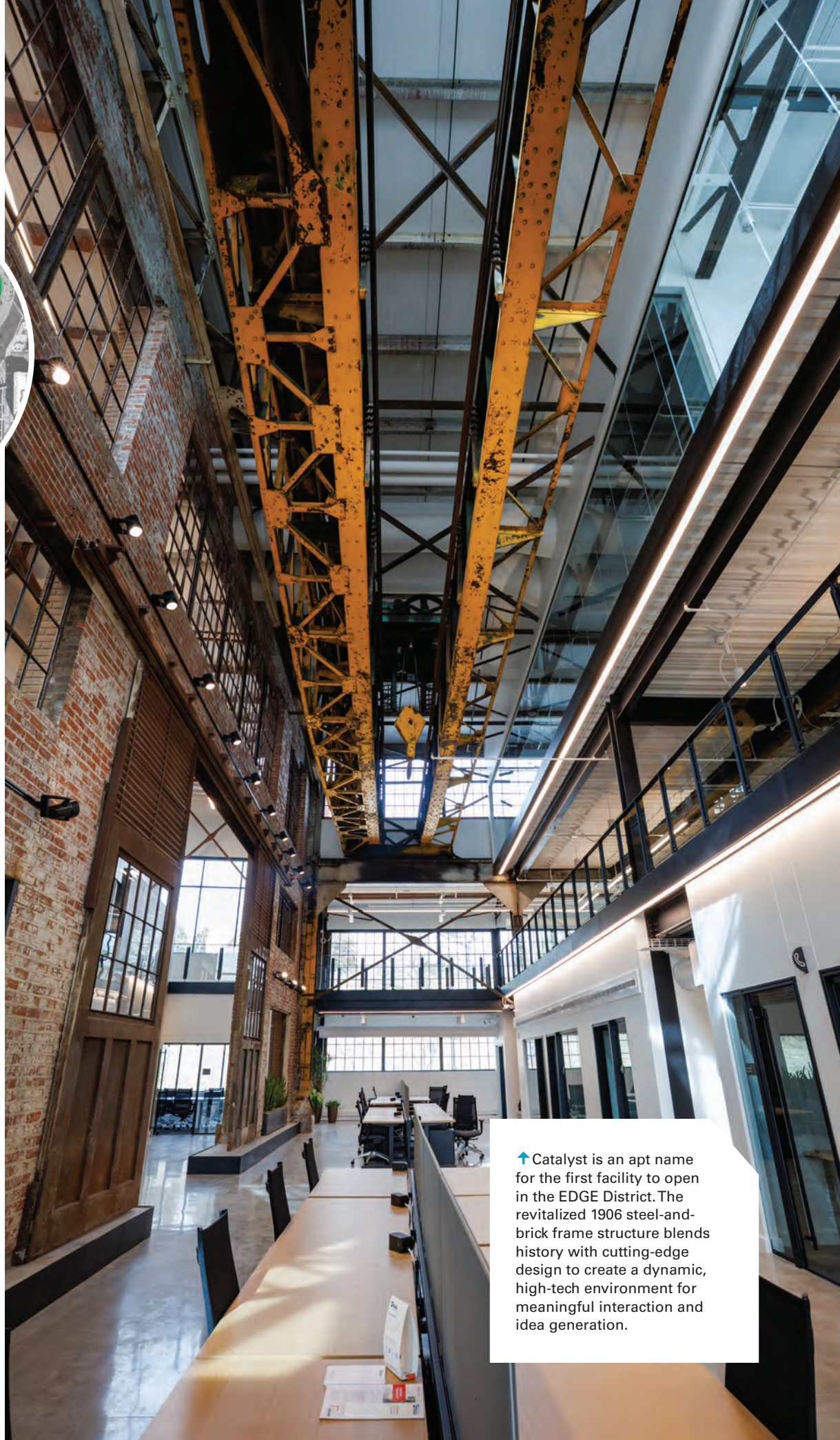
EXPLORE: Encourages curiosity and the pursuit of new ideas. Provides a platform for professionals to explore cutting-edge technology and methodologies.

DEVELOP: Facilitates the development of groundbreaking solutions. Connects researchers, entrepreneurs and industry leaders to foster innovation.

GROW: Supports the growth of businesses and individuals. Offers resources, mentorship and opportunities for scaling up.

ENGAGE: Promotes active participation and collaboration. Provides a space for meaningful interaction and shared learning experiences.

Learn more at
catalystoma.com
edgeomaha.com



↑ Catalyst is an apt name for the first facility to open in the EDGE District. The revitalized 1906 steel-and-brick frame structure blends history with cutting-edge design to create a dynamic, high-tech environment for meaningful interaction and idea generation.

uBEATS enhances STEM education

by Jeff Robb

UNMC's uBEATS program continues to mature as a respected online science and health science resource for middle and high school teachers and students across the U.S.

Now in its fifth year, the free uBEATS (the UNMC and University of Nebraska at Omaha Building Excellence in Academics Through STEM) program is being used in all 50 states.

Nationally, the program is endorsed by, and a member of, the National Consortium for Health Science Education. The NCHSE's stamp of approval – along with alignment to national health science standards – offers validation for uBEATS modules, as well as strong national promotion.

In Nebraska, UNMC's uBEATS team has increased its collaboration with the Nebraska Department of Education to align the program's offerings with Nebraska educational standards in the areas of health science, science and family and consumer science. It's a key reason uBEATS has become a preferred resource and partner throughout the state.

The significant growth underscores the demand and responsiveness for high-quality resources for teachers and students in health sciences and STEM (science, technology, engineering and math), said Peggy Moore, director of the UNMC Office of Interactive E-Learning, which oversees the program.

Since the launch of uBEATS in 2020, the program has reached a high of 100,000 lifetime student enrollments – proof that uBEATS is working, Moore said. “uBEATS addresses the breadth of needs and early exploration that is critical to our future health careers workforce,” she said.

Today, the free digital content – designed for grades six through 12 – spans such areas as cancer, genetics, microbiology and pathology,



PHOTO BY KILEY CRUSE

UNMC's digital content engages middle- and high-school students in health sciences and health-related careers. Robyn Jernigan, above, uses the uBEATS model in her health academy classroom at Omaha's Benson High School.

Support STEM education

uBEATS relies on donations to keep the educational program accessible to students and teachers. To make a gift, visit nufoundation.org, the University of Nebraska Foundation website (uBEATS Excellence Fund). Learn more about uBEATS at unmc.edu/elearning/ubeats

pharmacology and public health; recent additions include behavioral health, medical terminology and expansion of health careers content.

Robyn Jernigan uses uBEATS in her Omaha, Nebraska, classroom and highly supports the program. Lead teacher for Benson High School's Health Professions Academy, Jernigan called uBEATS' offerings “highly effective, amazing modules that support the science and health science classrooms.”

She employs the modules as “bell

work” to start class, as assignments to introduce a new chapter or as an “exit ticket” to check students' understanding.

Students find the modules interactive and engaging, she said. “It really speaks to them, and it keeps them focused and on track.”

Plus, she said, when teaching such topics as infection control and infectious diseases through the uBEATS material, “there's a complete trust that comes from material that's coming from UNMC.”

UNMC's Interim Chancellor H. Dele Davies, MD, envisioned and spearheaded uBEATS while serving as UNMC's senior vice chancellor for academic affairs. Today, he said, “uBEATS is impacting thousands of students across Nebraska and the nation. With the short supply of science-trained middle and high school teachers, and the need for high-quality, vetted health-related STEM teaching materials, uBEATS is helping to fill a major void.” ♥

DRIPS

THROUGH

PAIN

Kaleb Michaud, PhD, professor of rheumatology, had given a lot of talks, but never one in which he cried or cursed.

Never one in which he put up cute pictures of himself as a kid and discussed the worst days of that kid's life.

Never one in which he would go beyond the science of his specialty, rheumatic diseases, and disclose things even people who've known him well for years didn't know. That he is living with juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA). That he was diagnosed in 1977, at age 3, with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis (JRA). That JIA, JRA and/or RA have been affecting him his entire life.

Never one in which he told a roomful of experts what it's *really* like to live with these conditions that they study and treat.

It was a momentous decision to do so. Like stepping off a ledge.

But it was time.

Dr. Michaud had achieved the rank of full professor, tenure. His childhood doctor, who eventually became his research mentor, had just died, and he was asked to give the American College of Rheumatology's Distinguished Lecture. That isn't a regular lecture. It's a speech in which the speaker is encouraged to talk about anything they want.

If you want to believe in signs, they were flashing like the Vegas strip.

So, he stepped to the podium at the 2023 ACR Convergence, took a deep breath and told his truth, a truth he'd kept quiet — that in addition to being one of the world's most respected rheumatology researchers, he's also a patient. He's lived these very conditions.



He kept quiet because he recognized — when he arrived at his first conference decades ago — that his peers would look at him as a patient, not a scientist, a condition, not a colleague. Instead of hearing his insights, they'd silently be diagnosing the way he held his hands.

Now, he was ready to tell the assembled audience the truth. The whole truth.

In front of national experts, Dr. Michaud told his story chronologically. He started with that cute photo. The little boy in it looked happy. It was his birthday party. There was ice cream.

It was in a hospital.

Dr. Michaud was 3 when he first complained of leg and foot pain. "I had a hard time walking. I remember the pain coming out of that knee. I remember the attention I got."

They gave him so much aspirin for the pain, he hallucinated. "It was the dark ages," Dr. Michaud said.

His parents were beside themselves. They took him to doctors. Traveled to Dallas to see the closest (only?) pediatric rheumatologist they could find.

He was given gold compound injections. Oh, how it hurt.

"I thought I was increasing my value," the adult Dr. Michaud joked.

Through it all, pain so bad it remains vivid, to this day.

But beyond the physical, there also was the pain of the unknown. Why was this happening? Was there anything that could be done? Would it ever get better?

And the growing realization that the adults in his life, including the doctors, didn't have answers.

He wondered if he'd done something bad, and God was punishing him.

It also was clear that these adults believed he'd eventually spend his life in a wheelchair, a life that would not last much beyond age 26. That number stayed with him. It loomed over him.

When he was 10, he saved money and bought a dog. That helped so much, he said. “Knowing someone else depends on you has a huge impact,” he said.

Young Kaleb was whip-smart, curious, interested in everything. But school also meant stairs.

“I identified greatly with the Tin Man from the Wizard of Oz,” Dr. Michaud said.

Eventually, he would identify with Professor X, from the superhero X-Men comic books. Professor X was in a wheelchair, but he was a genius scientist and leader. The great Patrick Stewart portrayed him in the movies.

Now, he had a role model and a goal.

Dr. Michaud knew he could live a fulfilling and impactful life as Professor X.

Still, that was a long way away.

Everyday life meant everyday pain. He learned a kid’s form of self-hypnosis to deal with it. He would think of a favorite cartoon to distract himself. As he imagined it, it would take him away.

His dog. The cartoon. Eventually board games.

As his earliest medical note said, he was best able to deal with his pain when distracted by play.

By 10, the medical record also officially said he had long-term arthritis.

“Psychosocially, he is doing very well,” it said.

Except he wasn’t.

“When I was 12, I was not fun. Why? Because I learned to complain,” Dr. Michaud said. Friends grew tired of it. So did he. He told his mom he thought he might be manic depressive. “Oh, Kaleb,” she said. He wasn’t manic depressive. He was normal. Who wouldn’t feel depressed, she pointed out, with what he was facing?

“I did try to commit suicide,” he said. A shrug. “Obviously, I failed.

“I did try to run away. I don’t say it to get sympathy but ... you don’t know what to do. You are looking for an escape.”

Junior high. “Puberty sucks,” Dr. Michaud said.

Moreso when it includes surgeries; joints often awkwardly fused, then later painfully unfused. The interventions — and pain — continued through the years.

Decades later, he inhaled deeply, remembering. “You think about those moments,” he said. “Because they stick with you.”

And, there were so many. He remembers his dad, so big and strong, having to step forward to help a doctor yank metal out of his fused toes.

As he described the moment, all these years later, Dr. Michaud couldn’t hold back a sob. A dad now himself, it hit him how crushing that must have been for his father, too. Pulling as his son screamed.

They kept testing new medicines. Each one came with hope ... and side effects.

Increasingly, it fell upon him, the patient, to find the line, the dosage that helped keep him functional without wrecking his gut (it still did).

College. He was elected student president in a landslide. He was a supernova.

“I had lived my life thinking I wasn’t going to live past 26,” he said. “I thought I was being punished ... I was trying to live a life to make up for that.”

Another new medicine. He should try it, they said, “but you could die.”

It seemed to work. (With side effects.)

On to grad school at Stanford, to become Professor X.

He impressed people on the West Coast, he said, and could have gotten in on the ground floor at Google. He’d have been employee No. 27, surely a billionaire today. He still thinks about that when writing grants.

The startup offered him a job three times, he said. But no, he kept on the academic track. He needed to become Professor X.

He couldn’t risk not having health insurance.

But at Stanford the brick walls he hit began to knock him over. More surgeries. One bad fit for a mentor, then another. Brilliant men who could win the Nobel Prize (one of them did) but unable to grasp why Kaleb couldn’t keep up.

At last, a difficult conversation: “A leave of absence.”

He returned home and checked in on Fred Wolfe, MD, the man who’d first diagnosed him with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. Dr. Wolfe wasn’t just any physician; he’d founded the Wichita Arthritis Center, the Arthritis Research Center Foundation and the National Databank for Rheumatic Diseases. He was a pioneer in helping define fibromyalgia. His papers have been cited more than 125,000 times.

Dr. Michaud had helped Dr. Wolfe before, as a teenager, pecking on a Gateway 2000. Would he be interested in working for him again?

He was. “I got serious about what I was going to do,” Dr. Michaud said. “I was going to make a difference. I was going to help people.”

He tagged along to the first rheumatology scientific conference, then another. He immersed himself in the research. He became Dr. Wolfe’s right-hand man. They started calling him Dr. Wolfe Jr. Then they started calling him “Dr.” Michaud.

He realized he’d found his life’s calling.

“I learned I wanted to get those extra letters after my name,” he said.

All the adults, including the doctors, who didn’t have answers? He would help find them. All of the kids like him who were living in pain? He would give them tools.

“When I first went into rheumatology research, I was so angry (there hadn’t been any answers) I wanted to make up for it. I’m not angry anymore.”



The Game of Life

As a young boy, Dr. Michaud played board games. Distraction by play, he discovered, helped him deal with the symptoms of juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. It also became a passion and led to his owning nearly 10,000 games. And to founding Spielbound, a local nonprofit combination café/board game library where every game imaginable is available. Dr. Michaud donated about 1,000 of his own games in 2014 to help kick off its founding. Located at 33rd and Harney Streets in Omaha, Spielbound now boasts more than 3,600 titles. Described in *Rheumatologist*, the official publication of the American College of Rheumatology, as “a cross between Starbucks and Toys R Us,” the comparison is spot-on. Above all, Spielbound is a place to laugh, bond and escape the worries of everyday life. A place where, even as adults, it is possible to become distracted by play.

The years have helped him see that everyone did the best they could.

Through his research, he is looking for those tools. With this talk, he is telling the experts things they couldn’t possibly know.

He advanced in his research and in his career. He came to UNMC in 2007.

In 2016, two months before his firstborn arrived, he asked for his wrist to be fused, “so I could hold her.

“That seemed like something that would never happen.”

Two decades beyond 26, Dr. Michaud, winner of UNMC Research Leadership and Distinguished Scientist honors, is married with children and a good career.

He’s not in a wheelchair.

He takes 10 pills a day (16 on Tuesdays), keeps his caffeine intake just right, gives himself biological

injections, makes sure to pet his cat (it’s good for both of them). Oh, and board games, because he still feels better when he is distracted by play.

He’s had to give up his favorite drink (Coke Zero), keep up on physical therapy. A change in weather or even trying a new food can send him reeling. The pharmacy called saying one of his regular drugs won’t be covered by the insurance company and he and his doctors need to find a new one.

He had an ER scare two weeks before his big speech, another flashing sign it was time to say what he had to say.

“It made it that much more emotional, like just how real this disease is,” he said. “You don’t know when something could completely disable you or take you away.”

And how was it received? How did the clinicians and researchers react to an

undercover patient in their midst?

“There was resounding positive response with people coming up to me a day later, grabbing my hands and, in tears, thanking me,” Dr. Michaud said.

“It was much more than I expected or anticipated.”

Turns out, it needed to be heard, just as it needed to be said.

Today, life continues. A life far beyond what he’d once dared imagine.

A life, he said, he still expects to end “sooner than normal.”

That may sound harsh to those of us who let our guard down enough to savor this story’s happy ending. But Dr. Michaud is the one who has walked this journey, on fused bones.

JIA, JRA, RA, whatever you call it.

“It’s still there every day,” he said. ♥

Medical students inspired to make a difference

by Connie White

Ryan Chapman wants to help others, so he hopes someday to be an internal medicine physician or study infectious diseases.

Heather Richard feels drawn to pediatric hematology and oncology because she loves working with children.

Nour Elrokhsi is exploring a career as a primary care physician because she has personally witnessed how health care can change lives.

Chapman, Richard and Elrokhsi, all from the Omaha area, are medical students at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. All three say their interest in health care stems from a desire to make a difference in the world. And all three credit the Scott Scholars Program with providing mentorship and support to encourage their career paths.

Last year, the Suzanne & Walter Scott Foundation pledged \$23 million to sustain and grow the prestigious Scott Scholars Program at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, where it was established by the late Omaha philanthropist Walter Scott Jr. as an effort to keep high-achieving STEM students in Nebraska. The gift commitment also supported an expansion of the program to UNMC, where 12 Scott Scholars began their first year of medical school in fall 2023.



Ryan Chapman, Heather Richard and Nour Elrokhsi, all from the Omaha area, are medical students at UNMC and alums of the inaugural class of the UNO Scott Scholars Program.

Chapman, Richard and Elrokhsi are all graduates of the UNO Scott Scholars Program and members of the inaugural class of Scott Scholars at UNMC.

Here are their stories.

Ryan Chapman

Ryan Chapman, who graduated from Skutt Catholic High School, initially planned to become a computer programmer, but the idea of making a more personal impact switched his focus.

“I decided I wanted a job where I’m able to directly work with and help other people,” he said. “I think the Scott Scholars Program helped me to think about it.”

Chapman said his path to medical school was a direct result of leadership classes he took in the Scott Scholars Program, along with the mentorship of Harnoor Dhaliwal,

PHOTO COURTESY OF NOUR ELROKHSI



“Medical school is challenging and full of new experiences, and the Scott Scholars Program not only made this a little bit easier but pushed me to grow even further.”

—Heather Richard

Heather Richard

Heather Richard, who graduated from Bellevue West High School, has always been interested in science and the human body.

“I have a profound desire to make an impact on patients’ lives,” she said.

Growing up, Richard said, she was shy and introverted. The Scott Scholars Program helped her step out of her shell, develop communication skills and grow her confidence. She also learned there are different kinds of leaders.

“You can be a leader even if you’re more quiet and more introverted,” she said.

At UNMC, Richard said, the Scott Scholars Program has provided her with access to enriching experiences. She has attended dinners with UNMC and Nebraska Medicine leadership; participated in Aspen Ideas, a thought leaders’ discussion and roundtable in Aspen, Colorado; and conducted research in Boston.

“The Scott Scholars Program cultivated a fruitful first-year experience for me,” she said. “Medical school is challenging and full of new experiences, and the Scott Scholars Program not only made this a little bit easier but pushed me to grow even further.”

After she finishes her training, Richard said she’d like to practice medicine in Nebraska.

“My family is here,” she said. “I want to be involved in this community and serve Nebraska.”

Nour Elrokhsi

Nour Elrokhsi, who graduated from Millard North High School, always knew she wanted to work in health care. Her parents are physicians, so she learned early on the power of health care to change lives.

Through the Scott Scholars Program, Elrokhsi worked with UNMC’s Munroe-Meyer Institute to propose design ideas for its dental clinic. Collaborating with a team of students that included fellow Scott Scholar Heather Richard, the group offered ideas to make neurodivergent patients more comfortable, including adjustments to lighting, images on the projector screens, and even the texture of the exam chairs.

Elrokhsi said she is incredibly grateful for the scholarship assistance she received through the Scott Scholars Program and the mentorship and support.

“They believe in you more than you believe in yourself,” she said of the program’s leaders.

While attending Aspen Ideas, Elrokhsi said she met nationally renowned gastroenterologists who inspired her to explore the field.

“This experience, along with others, has encouraged me to expand my career aspirations and deepen my interest in medicine,” she said. “The Scott Scholars Program has truly been a catalyst for my growth, offering unique and exciting opportunities that have significantly enriched my medical school journey.” ♥

PhD, and Wayne Watkins, the program’s leaders.

“Medical school has been an incredible challenge, rapidly learning vast amounts of information,” he said. “However, being able to better understand medical discussions and ask more relevant questions is rewarding. It makes me excited to be closer to caring for patients.”

Chapman called the UNMC Scott Scholars Program an incredible resource, connecting him with mentors, research and friends.

“The Scott Scholars Program challenged me to think beyond what I imagined for myself and encouraged me to find a career where I can impact the lives of others,” he said. “I know UNMC will train me to be a great physician.”

AWARDS AND CLASS NOTES



NEWS

The Impact of UNMC's Innovation Funds

Gifts to the UNMC Innovation Funds are a vital source of support for student engagement opportunities, the people and programs of the Alumni Association, upgrades to technology, white coat professionalism ceremonies, and more. Each college has its own Innovation Fund that directly impacts its students with customized programs and activities to enhance their success.



Scan the QR code to see the impact of the Innovation Funds or to provide a gift of support.

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AWARDS

The UNMC Alumni Association and its alumni councils recognized the following award recipients for their outstanding accomplishments this past year. These honorees have made a difference in their profession, communities and for the university, and we are proud of their far-reaching accomplishments. Current students stand on the shoulders of these alums and friends who have blazed trails for them and generations of health care professionals to come.

GRADUATE STUDIES PROGRAM

Kathy Kay Hartford Svoboda, BS, MS'79, PhD'82, Regents Professor, F(AAA), F(ARVO), F(AAAS)

Distinguished
Alumnus Award

Elizabeth Beam, PhD'14, RN
Mid-Career
Achievement Award

Chun-Kai Huang, PhD'15, MS, PT
Early Career
Achievement Award

COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

Thomas Kirsch, MD'84
Distinguished
Alumnus Award

Robert Wergin, MD'79
Dedication to Student
Excellence Award

David O'Dell, MD'84
Dedication to Student
Excellence Award

Brady Beecham, MD'11
Early Career
Achievement Award

Andre Kalil, MD, MPH'11
Honorary Alumnus Award

COLLEGE OF NURSING

Ann Berger, PhD'96, MSN'84
Distinguished
Alumnus Award

Trudie Owens, BSN '01, MSN'13
Dorothy Patach Spirit
of Service Award

Dilorom Sass, PhD'20, MSN'22, BSN'13
Nursing Excellence Award

Nancy Bergstrom, PhD
Honorary Alumnus Award

COLLEGE OF PHARMACY

Christopher A. Zaleski, PharmD '17
Early Career
Achievement Award

Jacob H. Dering '60
Distinguished
Alumnus Award

COLLEGE OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Sarena Dacus, MPH'13
Distinguished
Alumnus Award

Amber I. Bobbitt, MPH'22
Early Career
Achievement Award

Echohawk Lefthand, MPH'19
The Empowerment Award

COLLEGE OF DENTISTRY

Thomas F. Alexander, DDS '10
Alumni Achievement Award

Brett S. Thomsen, DDS '92
Distinguished Service Award

Paul A. Hansen, DDS '75
Outstanding
Educator Award

Jessica A. Meeske, DDS
Honorary Life
Membership Award

UPCOMING EVENTS



SEPTEMBER

12-13

Colleges of Medicine, Nursing and Pharmacy Alumni Reunion Weekend
Omaha, Nebraska
Honor years: class years ending in "0" and "5"

OCTOBER

3-4

College of Dentistry Alumni Reunion Weekend
Lincoln, Nebraska
Honor years: class years ending in "0" and "5"

Events are subject to change.
Find the latest information at unmc.edu/alumni/events.

NEWS

Join UNMC's Online Community

As a member of UNMC Connections, you can be a pivotal resource for current students as they learn the ropes of their professions. Whether you answer questions on the discussion board, share articles in your profession's group or meet with students one-on-one, the opportunities to help are endless.



Empower the next generation of health science professionals at connections.unmc.edu or scan the QR code.



We'd love to hear from you!

Send us your news through this online form: go.unmc.edu/unmcaupdate

Don't see your submission here? It may not have reached us in time for our print deadline. Check out our Special Edition of Class Notes at go.unmc.edu/classnotes24 or watch for our next digital edition this fall.

2020s

Jessica Davies PH'20, '21 Hemingford, Neb., was named health director for the Panhandle Public Health District in fall 2024. She previously served as assistant director and brings more than 20 years of experience to the role.

Alyssa Emodi M'20 Lincoln, Neb., joined Nebraska Medicine in internal medicine in the division of geriatrics in 2024.

Danica Peterson, Family Medicine '20 Holdrege, Neb., joined Kearney Regional Medical Center and Platte Valley Medical Clinic in fall 2024.



Dr. Cloonan
co-chairing
international
conference.

Tori Wadman M'20 Omaha, Neb., joined UNMC in 2024, as an instructor in the department of emergency medicine. She also sees patients in the emergency department at Nebraska Medicine.

Lindsey Area N'21 Pensacola, Fla., and her husband moved to Florida in September 2024.

← **Madeline Cloonan M'21 Council Bluffs, Iowa**, is one of five resident co-chairs of the 2025 International Conference on Residency Education, to be held this fall in Quebec City, Canada. She is in her general surgery residency at UNMC and is the first UNMC resident to be named to this position.



**ALUMNI
CODES**

BS Bachelor of Science **CLS** Clinical Laboratory Science **CP** Clinical Perfusion **Cyto** Cytotechnology **D** Dentistry **DH** Dental Hygiene **GC** Genetic Counseling **GS** Graduate Studies **HPTT** Health Professions Teaching and Technology **M** Medicine **MHA** Master of Health Administration **MLS** Medical Laboratory Science **MN** Medical Nutrition **MS** Master of Science **MT** Medical Technology **N** Nursing **P** Pharmacy **PA** Physician Assistant **PH** Public Health **PT** Physical Therapy **RST** Radiation Science Technology **RT** Radiation Therapy

John Derr M'21 *Omaha, Neb.*, joined UNMC in fall 2024, as an instructor in the department of emergency medicine and also sees patients in the emergency department at Nebraska Medicine.

Remy Grace Sass M'21 *Omaha, Neb.*, is chief resident in the UNMC Department of Internal Medicine and was awarded the American College of Physicians' Herbert S. Waxman Chief Resident Teaching Scholarship. She is one of only six chief residents nationwide to be recognized with this scholarship. The scholarship also provides an opportunity to assist in teaching popular clinical skills workshops under the guidance and mentorship of expert faculty in the Clinical Skills Center, as a part of ACP's Internal Medicine Meeting in spring 2025. ➔

Bailey Neville D'22, '24 *York, Neb.*, opened Countryside Pediatric Dentistry in York in October 2024.

Blake Bertrand GS'23 *Bossier City, La.*, serves as a laboratory leadership fellow for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the Georgia State Public Health Lab.

Devi Dwarabandam PH'23 *Hastings, Neb.*, is the health surveillance coordinator and disease investigator at the South Heartland District Health Department. He focuses on infectious disease surveillance, community health improvement and data-driven public health interventions. He is expanding his skillset in machine learning and advanced outbreak analytics to better contribute to innovative public health solutions. ➔

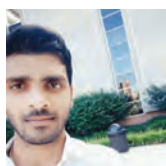
Renee Sullivan GS'24 *Omaha, Neb.*, received her Doctor of Nursing Practice degree in May 2024 and is a clinical assistant professor at the UNMC College of Nursing Omaha Division.

2010s

Katrina Brown N'10 *Burns, Tenn.*, was awarded the 2024 Magnet Nurse of the Year – Structural Empowerment Award at the American Nurses Credentialing Center Magnet Pathways Conference.



Dr. Sass receives prized teaching scholarship.



Dwarabandam expands data analysis skills.

Dustin Randall N'12 *Freeman, S.D.*, joined Freeman Regional Health Services on a part time basis as a certified nurse practitioner in 2024.

Grace McMullin N'13 *Omaha, Neb.*, was recognized by the Nebraska Nurses Association in October 2024, with a 40 Under 40 Award. She serves as an ambulatory supervisor in the Nebraska Medicine Durham Outpatient Center Family Medicine Clinic.

Giana Boyle PA'14 *Omaha, Neb.*, joined Nebraska Medicine in family medicine in 2024.

Mat Burton N'14, '21, GS'24 *Gering, Neb.*, received his Doctor of Nursing Practice degree in May 2024 and serves as a clinical instructor in the UNMC College of Nursing West Nebraska Division in Scottsbluff.



Jill Cohen, right, and Kerri Hensler, conference co-presenters.

➔ **Jill Cohen N'14** *Flushing, N.Y.*, presented alongside her colleague, Kerri Hensler, DNP, at the 2024 American Nurses Credentialing Center National Magnet Conference in New Orleans. The framework for their presentation, titled "Culture Club: A Framework for a Respectful Workplace," was implemented in the Milstein Operating Room at New York Presbyterian Columbia Irving Medical Center, where Cohen serves as patient care director.

Haley Hays N'14, '21 *Scottsbluff, Neb.*, became interim assistant dean of the UNMC College of Nursing West Nebraska Division in 2024. She has served as a clinical assistant professor with UNMC since 2021. She also serves as a lead advanced practice professional, nurse practitioner and partner for Aligned Providers of Wyoming, primarily practicing in rural Nebraska. She currently leads the development of an emergency nurse practitioner program at UNMC.

Melanie Menning M'15, Family Medicine '18, PH'19 *Omaha, Neb.*, an associate professor in the UNMC Department of Family Medicine and a family medicine physician with OneWorld Community Health Center, was honored as the 2024 Community Collaborator of the Year by the Great Plains IDEa-CTR. She serves as a Spanish-speaking provider at OneWorld and Nebraska Medicine, in addition to serving as associate residency program director for the Family Medicine Community Health Center Track.

Jocelyn Herstein PH'16, '17, GS'18 *Zug, Switzerland*, received a New Investigator Award from UNMC in 2024. She is an assistant professor in the department of environmental, agricultural and occupational health in the UNMC College of Public Health.

Taylor Majerus PT'16 *Clovis, N.M.*, instructed at the U.S. Air Force's two-week Physical Therapy Advanced Course in Colorado Springs in November 2024. As a fellowship trained DPT, he led courses for 80 military physical therapists on acute care injury management, battlefield medical response, joint manipulations and mass casualty triage decision making. Major Majerus serves as a physical therapist embedded in a special forces unit at Canon Air Force Base, New Mexico. Also in attendance was **Maj. Liz Buss PT'17**, who is stationed at F.E. Warren Air Force Base, Wyoming.

Jill Wagoner M'16, Internal Medicine '19 *Omaha, Neb.*, joined Nebraska Medicine in internal medicine in the division of diabetes, endocrinology and metabolism in 2024. ➔





Kassidy Horst N'17, '20, GS'24 *Wisner, Neb.*, received her Doctor of Nursing Practice degree in May 2024 and serves as a clinical assistant professor at the UNMC College of Nursing Northern Division in Norfolk.

Bethany Lowndes PH'17 *Omaha, Neb.*, received a New Investigator Award from UNMC in 2024. She is an associate professor in the department of neurological sciences in the UNMC College of Medicine.

James Watson M'17, Family Medicine '20 *Papillion, Neb.*, joined UNMC in 2024, as an assistant professor in the department of family medicine and sees patients at Nebraska Medicine.

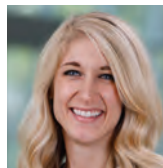
← **Alexander Caniglia M'18** *Scottsdale, Ariz.*, joined his father **Ronald Caniglia M'87**, in practice as a plastic surgeon at Caniglia Facial Plastic Surgery in fall 2024.

Jen Luedders M'18 *Omaha, Neb.*, joined UNMC in 2024, as an assistant professor in the division of allergy and immunology, in the UNMC Department of Internal Medicine in the College of Medicine. She also sees patients at Nebraska Medicine. →

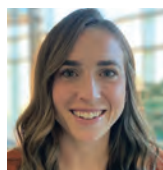
Chad Himmelberg N'19 *Omaha, Neb.*, was honored with the DAISY Nurse Leader Award from Nebraska Medicine in 2024. He serves as nurse manager in the surgical ICU.

Rachel Lietka MN'19 *Kearney, Neb.*, joined the UNMC College of Allied Health Professions in 2024, as an assistant professor in the medical nutrition program in Kearney. →

Daniel Regier M'19 *Junction City, Kan.*, joined Stormont Vail Health's Flint Hills Campus General Surgery Department in fall 2024.



Dr. Luedders divides time teaching, seeing patients.



Lietka now teaching medical nutrition.

Corinne Van Osdel D'19, '20 *Omaha, Neb.*, was named a Fellow of the International College of Dentists, the preeminent Global Dental Honor Society. Fellowship in the International College of Dentists is by invitation only, and fewer than 3% of dentists in the United States receive this honor. She is an assistant professor in the UNMC College of Dentistry and teaches dental and dental hygiene students at the college's Omaha clinics. She also provides didactic seminars and serves as a clinical supervisor for dental residents in the general practice and advanced dentistry education programs. As director of the Caring for Champions Dental Clinic at the UNMC Munroe-Meyer Institute, she provides care for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and trains others to treat this patient population.

2000s


Renee Sullivan N'01, '04, '24 *Omaha, Neb.*, received her Doctor of Nursing Practice degree from UNMC in May 2024.

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Amy Duhachek-Stapelman M'02, Anesthesiology '06 *Bennington, Neb.*, was named vice president of education for Nebraska Medicine in 2024, where she has served as a cardiac anesthesiologist since 2006. She previously served as vice chair of education in the UNMC Department of Anesthesiology. She will continue teaching and caring for patients. Last year, she earned a Master of Education in Health Professions from Johns Hopkins University. ➔

Rachael Burger PA'03 *Kearney, Neb.*, joined the Kearney Regional Medical Center Cardiology Cath Lab team in fall 2024. She and her husband have four children – ranging from middle through high school – and have called Kearney home for over 20 years. She enjoys running, reading and attending her children's activities.

Melissa Florell N'03 *Kearney, Neb.*, assumed the role of interim assistant dean at the UNMC College of Nursing Lincoln Division in January 2025. She joined the Kearney Division as an instructor in 2018 and transitioned to assistant professor in 2023.

Jennifer Cera N'04, '17 *Omaha, Neb.*, was promoted from clinical assistant professor to clinical associate professor in the UNMC College of Nursing Omaha Division in July 2024. ➔

Nathan Reyelts PA'04 *Fairmont, Minn.*, is co-owner of Cornerstone Clinic, a family practice/integrative medicine clinic in Fairmont, where he has lived for the past 20 years. The clinic, which opened in March 2024, has four mid-level providers. ➔

Brenda Rhembrandt N'04 *Chadron, Neb.*, was promoted in 2024 to chief nursing officer and vice president of patient care services at Chadron Community Hospital & Health Services, where she has been for 23 years. Her leadership contributed to the hospital receiving the Five-Star Award from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services in 2024. She co-founded Circle of Light, a local organization that supports cancer patients through grants from Susan G. Komen and community contributions. In recognition of her dedication, she was named the 2023 Caring Kind Employee.



Dr. Duhachek-Stapelman adds VP of education to resume.



Dr. Kreiling gains associate dean duties.



Dr. Cera rises in teaching rank at UNMC.



Dr. Anderson accepts board appointment.



Reyelts establishes private clinic.

Kristen Cook P'05 *Omaha, Neb.*, clinical associate professor of pharmacy practice and science, was named the UNMC College of Pharmacy's Distinguished Teacher of the Year in 2024. She teaches pharmacotherapy courses and precepts at the UNMC Midtown Clinic. She also helps coordinate a teaching certificate program for pharmacy practice residents.

➔ **Jodi Kreiling GS'05** *Omaha, Neb.*, is an associate professor of chemistry (since 2005) and associate dean of natural science, mathematics and research (since 2024) at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. In 2023, she received the Mid-Career Achievement Award from UNMC's Graduate Studies Alumni Council. She is married with six children.

Greg Schardt P'09 *Papillion, Neb.*, was promoted to director, healthcare market, at Genentech in 2024. He has been with the company for four years; in his new role, he focuses on collaborating with health care providers around patient access to therapies and health equity.

Patience Smith N'09, '22 *Bellevue, Neb.*, joined Nebraska Medicine in family medicine in the internal care clinic as an advanced practice registered nurse in 2024.

1990s

➔ **Jim Anderson M'90, Internal Medicine '91, GS'02** *Portland, Ore.*, a past president of UNMC Student Senate, has been with Oregon Health & Science University since 2001. He served as radiology residency program director (2006-2019) and neuroradiology section chief (2006-2020), before becoming vice chair of education for radiology. Nationally, he was a member of the Radiology Residency Review Committee at the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (2012-2022), serving as chair for five years. He holds several key roles: assistant dean of graduate medical education at OHSU, president of the board of directors for the Association of Program Directors in Radiology, vice chair for the surgical/hospital-based review committee for ACGME-International and recently was appointed to the American Board of Radiology Board of Governors. He and his wife, Kerstin, have two daughters: Greta (San Francisco) and Annika (Chicago).

Rob Messbarger M'90, Family Medicine '93 *Kearney, Neb.*, was named the inaugural associate dean for the UNMC College of Medicine's regional medical school campus in Kearney in 2024. He previously served as the college's associate program director for the Kearney-based family medicine residency program.

Shelly Schwedhelm N'91 *Fort Calhoun, Neb.*, was inducted into the Nebraska Nurses Hall of Fame in 2024. She serves as the UNMC Global Center for Health Security's associate director of emergency management and clinical operations.

Geraldine Tookey N'91, '11 *Arbor Vitae, Wisc.*, does locums assignments in pediatric, adolescent and young adult psychiatry.

Lissa Woodruff M'93, Internal Medicine '96 *Kearney, Neb.*, was named vice president of medical operations at CHI Health Good Samaritan in October 2024. She has led the hospitalist program since 2011.

Cory Roberts M'94, Pathology '99 *Dallas, Texas*, was named CEO of Sonic Healthcare, USA, which has more than 7,500 employees — including 400-plus physicians — and is the third-largest laboratory medicine and pathology provider in the U.S.

Tanya Custer RT'95, GS'24 *Gretna, Neb.*, serves as director of distance education in the UNMC College of Allied Health Professions Department of Allied Health Education, Research and Practice. In January 2025, she was named director of UNMC's Interprofessional Academy of Educators, which includes more than 250 educators across all five UNMC campuses and six colleges, plus the University of Nebraska's Graduate College. Partners include Nebraska Medicine, Children's Nebraska and the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She has been an active member in the academy since her induction in 2016. ➔



Ted Mikuls M'95, Internal Medicine '99 Omaha, Neb., received the 2024 Excellence in Investigative Mentoring Award from the American College of Rheumatology in November 2024. He serves as the Stokes-Shackelford Professor of Rheumatology in the UNMC Division of Rheumatology and Immunology.

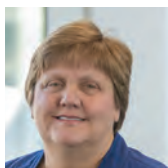
Jill Reed N'95, '00, GS'14, '18 Holdrege, Neb., was promoted from assistant professor to associate professor in the UNMC College of Nursing Kearney Division in July 2024. →

Amy Cannella M'97, Internal Medicine '00, MS'13 Omaha, Neb., received the 2024 Distinguished Fellowship Program Director Award from the American College of Rheumatology in November 2024. She serves as the Gerald F. Moore Professor of Rheumatology in the UNMC Division of Rheumatology and Immunology.

Alissa Evans N'98, '21 Neligh, Neb., joined Nebraska Medicine in cardiovascular surgery as an advanced practice registered nurse in 2024.



Dr. Reed earns associate professorship.



Dr. Schuelke rises on tenure track.

Todd Stuckey M'98, Family Medicine '01 McCool Junction, Neb., joined Syracuse Area Health in 2024 on a part-time basis and went full time in January 2025. He previously practiced at the York Medical Clinic.

Courtney Loecker N'99, 14, GS'24 Lincoln, Neb., received her Doctor of Philosophy degree in August 2024 and is an assistant professor at the UNMC College of Nursing Lincoln Division.

1980s

Myra Schmaderer N'81, '90, '94, GS'15 Lincoln, Neb., retired from the UNMC College of Nursing Lincoln Division in January 2025.

← **Sue Schuelke N'81, '83, '88, GS'16** Waverly, Neb., was promoted from assistant professor to associate professor in the UNMC College of Nursing Lincoln Division in July 2024.

Kim Leighton N'82 Columbus, Neb., retired from a career in emergency department nursing, followed by more than 20 years of educating health care providers and students using simulation modalities (manikins, virtual reality, cadavers, etc). Specializing in the development and psychometric testing of evaluation tools, her career took her around the world, culminating in the development of one of the world's largest simulation centers in Doha, Qatar. She's currently living the life of a nomad in Europe, with eventual plans to return to Nebraska where her family lives.

Susan Tishendorf N'84 Papillion, Neb., was honored with the DAISY Nurse Leader Award from Nebraska Medicine in 2024. She serves as swoop nurse for Nursing Administrative Resources at the Nebraska Medicine Bellevue Medical Center.

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Ever wonder how to leave a lasting impact? Your planned gift to UNMC becomes a vibrant legacy. Regan Mazour, a second-year allied health student and grateful scholarship recipient, thrives thanks to the generosity of Dr. Mark and Catherine Houser, who established the Ryan Houser Memorial Scholarship to honor their late son, a 2017 UNMC graduate.

Regan expresses profound gratitude for the investment in her future and is determined to help carry on Ryan's legacy. "I am so honored to be the inaugural recipient of the Ryan Houser Memorial Scholarship," she says. "As a student in the UNMC physician assistant program, this support amplifies my dedication to excellence."

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Regan Mazour

Marjorie Heier M'86, Family Medicine '89 *Sioux Falls, S.D.*, received the American Academy of Family Physicians' Humanitarian Award in 2024, for her work as the director and only physician at Chifundo Rural Health Center in Zambia, where she helped to integrate the clinic into the local health care system, providing full-spectrum medical care in a limited-resource area. She is an associate professor at the University of South Dakota's Sioux Falls Family Medicine Residency Program and annually returns to the Zambia clinic with residents from the program.

Lynn Juracek M'86 *Scottsdale, Ariz.*, retired as president of All Dermatology and now holds a part-time position. He still does Mohs and cosmetic surgeries, but only Monday through Wednesday. He remains active internationally, mostly in the International Society of Dermatologic Surgery, and does international bartending and night club management.

Linda Sobeski P'86, '92 *Omaha, Neb.*, was named the inaugural dean of the UNMC College of Pharmacy's regional pharmacy school in Kearney, Nebraska. She has been with the college since 2005 and is a clinician-educator and board-certified pharmacotherapy specialist with a clinical practice.

Mathew Yetter M'86, Otolaryngology '91 *Asheville, N.C.*, retired this year!

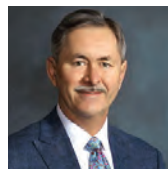
Tom Gross M'88, GS'88, Pediatrics '91 *Sun City West, Ariz.*, was honored as a distinguished alumni of Cambridge Public Schools in 2024.

Bill Lydiatt M'88, Otolaryngology '93 *Omaha, Neb.*, was elected president of the American Head and Neck Society. He also chairs the American Joint Committee on cancer staging of head and neck core group and is responsible for improving the staging of head and neck cancers across the world. He has been serving as president of Clarkson Regional Health Services and took over as CEO in January 2025.

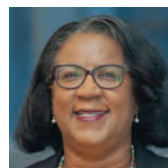
Kristie Hayes M'89, Pediatrics '92 *Omaha, Neb.*, was named to the 25th class of the Omaha Central High School Hall of Fame in 2024. She is an associate professor emerita of dermatology at UNMC. ➔



Dr. Bailey brings 36-year career to close.



Dr. Ross maintains a full schedule at research institute.



Dr. Hayes is a new Hall of Famer.

1970s

LeMoyne Johnson M'70, Surgery '75 *Bradenton, Fla.*, was impacted by multiple hurricanes that hit the Tampa Bay area in 2024. He and his wife sustained only cosmetic damage to their home but were without power for four days and lost large trees on their property. They were not able to evacuate, as they would have needed to do so at least five days prior. They are glad to be safe and have their camera store back open.

➔ **Desi Bailey MT'71, M'75** *Redmond, Wash.*, retired in 2014 after 36 years as a clinical anesthesiologist at Group Health in Seattle. For the past 18 years, she also served as hospital chief of staff for the Group Health Hospital System. She now spends her time between Redmond and Indian Wells, California.

Sally Johnson N'72 *Spokane, Wash.*, has been an RN for 52 years and currently works as a detox nurse. She spent most of her career in dialysis where she was quality director for five states.

➔ **Dennis Ross M'73** *Wichita, Kan.*, is focused on research at the Kansas Nephrology Research Institute and conducting pharmaceutical trials in nephrology, general internal medicine and cardiology. He and his wife, Ann Ross N'71, support charitable initiatives in their church, the arts and the medical institutions where they received their training. He currently serves as CEO of the Wichita Grand Opera. They enjoy vacationing in Los Cabos, and his hobbies include playing the saxophone and piano, and singing in the church choir.

Constance Ryan MT'74 *Valley, Neb.*, was inducted into the 2024 Greater Omaha Chamber's Business Hall of Fame. She is the CEO of Streck.

Christopher Crotty M'75 *Denver, Colo.*, is now retired after nearly 40 years of private practice in dermatology.

Jerry Weber PT'76 *Lincoln, Neb.*, retired from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in July 2024, after 47 years in the athletic department's athletic medicine division, where he was head athletic trainer/physical therapist. He was recognized, with his family, on the field during the 2024 Nebraska vs. Illinois football game.



➔ **Terry Fitzgerald M'77** *Baltimore, Md.*, has worked in an inner-city ER and spent the past 24 years working in addiction medicine. He continues to research the treatment of pre-release inmates with a history of opioid addiction. In addition, he is treasurer of the Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility.

Anne Hubbard M'77 *Omaha, Neb.*, received the 2024 Sower Award from Humanities Nebraska in September 2024. The award recognizes her significant contribution to public understanding of the humanities and her philanthropic support of Native American projects, the National Willa Cather Center, Omaha Public Library, KANEKO, Joslyn Art Museum and other humanities-related entities that have made an impact on cultural and educational life in Nebraska.

Thomas Choquette P'78 *Hastings, Neb.*, received the Nebraska Pharmacists Association's prestigious 2024 Bowl of Hygieia Award for outstanding community service.

Joel Ernst M'78 *San Francisco, Calif.*, has joined the University of California San Francisco as chief of the division of experimental medicine. He leads studies of immunity to infectious diseases with the goal of informing development of vaccines against tuberculosis and other major global infectious diseases. For the past 15 years, he was director of infectious diseases and immunology and director of the graduate studies program in immunology and inflammation at New York University Langone Medical Center. He credits some of the inspiration for his work to a patient with tuberculosis that he and Dr. Irving Kass treated in medical school at UNMC.

1960s

Darroll Loschen M'63 *Elkhorn, Neb.*, recently moved into an independent living community.

In Memoriam

Alys Gately N'45, '46
Syracuse, Neb.
Oct. 20, 2024

Virginia Stuermer M'48
Branford, Conn.
May 23, 2024

Barbara Seng N'50
Bridgeport, Neb.
March 9, 2024

Russell Brauer M'51
Lincoln, Neb.
Nov. 1, 2024

William Mannschreck M'51
Lewiston, Idaho
May 31, 2024

Dwight Larson M'53
North Platte, Neb.
Aug. 2, 2024

Janet Lindley N'54, '55
Omaha, Neb.
Feb. 24, 2024

Donald McKenzie P'55
Summerville, S.C.
Feb. 23, 2024

Charles Curtiss M'56
Fremont, Neb.
Jan. 8, 2024

Jack Davis P'56
Lincoln, Neb.
May 14, 2024

Lois Temme N'56
Ames, Iowa
June 14, 2024

Barbara Winfield N'56
Papillion, Neb.
Sept. 2, 2024

Robert Allen D'57
Centennial, Colo.
July 24, 2024

Lyle Nilson M'57
Omaha, Neb.
May 25, 2024

Harold Rosenau D'57
Lincoln, Neb.
March 4, 2024

Michael Sorrell M'57, '59
Omaha, Neb.
May 25, 2024

Ronald Stuhmer P'57
Lincoln, Neb.
March 25, 2024

Irving Weston M'57
Scottsdale, Ariz.
Nov. 2, 2024

Beverly Arnold N'58
Kearney, Neb.
April 13, 2024

Thomas Calvert M'58
Lincoln, Neb.
June 19, 2024

George Reichenbach D'58
Lincoln, Neb.
Aug. 25, 2024

John Denker M'59
Valley, Neb.
June 29, 2024

Jerome Spitzer M'59
Hutchinson, Kan.
Aug. 29, 2024

Eugene Gosch P'60
Kearney, Neb.
Sept. 12, 2024

Benjamin Martin M'60
Lincoln, Neb.
March 30, 2024

Donald McKibbin P'60
Seward, Neb.
Nov. 16, 2024

Marlene Mersch N'60
Aurora, Neb.
April 18, 2024

Doyle Beavers D'61
Arvada, Colo.
Aug. 10, 2024

Sharon Lazzaretti N'61
Dallas, Texas
Aug. 26, 2024

Martin Lohff M'61
Los Angeles, Calif.
Sept. 17, 2024

Joseph Lytle D'61
Rapid City, S.D.
Oct. 24, 2024

Lynn Ringer MT'61
Boulder, Colo.
April 30, 2024

Milton Stastny M'61
Glendale, Ariz.
June 22, 2024

Bernard Turkel D'61
Omaha, Neb.
Feb. 4, 2024

Keith Shuey M'62, '64
Tecumseh, Neb.
April 3, 2024

Marcia Weber MT'62
New Brighton, Minn.
Dec. 6, 2024

Walter Baker P'63
Lincoln, Neb.
Nov. 7, 2024

Donald Waltemath M'63
Lincoln, Neb.
Feb. 9, 2024

Patricia Hoyer MT'64
Loveland, Colo.
July 2, 2024

Alan Patterson M'64
Ames, Iowa
April 17, 2024

George Young M'64
Omaha, Neb.
Sept. 22, 2024

Colleen Dilley M'65
Fremont, Neb.
Oct. 30, 2024

Beatrice Kalisch N'65
Ann Arbor, Mich.
July 19, 2024

Jack Watkins MA'65
Wisconsin Rapids, Wisc.
Nov. 24, 2024

Patrick Clare M'66
Lincoln, Neb.
Sept. 30, 2024

Roger Friedman M'66, '68
Encino, Calif.
Feb. 22, 2024

Roger Gausman D'66, '70, '95, '07
Carlisle, Iowa
Feb. 29, 2024

Klemens Gustafson M'66
Dallas, Texas
May 9, 2024

Duane Koenig, M'66
Plymouth, Neb.
Nov. 4, 2024

William Sangster RT'66
Omaha, Neb.
Dec. 12, 2024

Duane Krause M'67
Fremont, Neb.
Jan. 29, 2024

Marilyn Licking P'67
Lacey, Wash.
March 29, 2024

Roger Miller P'67
Lincoln, Neb.
July 30, 2024

Shirley Pflug M'67
Lincoln, Neb.
Sept. 25, 2024

William Willis D'67
Edmond, Okla.
Oct. 21, 2024

Bernard Gadwood M'68
Lafayette, Calif.
Feb. 15, 2024

Louis Burgher M'70, GS'78
Bennington, Neb.
July 19, 2024

Fred Diedrichsen D'70
Holdrege, Neb.
July 2, 2024

Allen Hohensee M'70
Lincoln, Neb.
May 24, 2024

Jerry Hansen P'71
Holstein, Neb.
Jan. 28, 2024

Ann Lott M'71
Estes Park, Colo.
Dec. 20, 2024

Cynthia Spiels N'71
Omaha, Neb.
Nov. 28, 2024

Terry Packer D'72
Omaha, Neb.
Aug. 11, 2024

Harold Thaut M'72
Beatrice, Neb.
March 19, 2024

Robert Barney RT'73
Renton, Wash.
Dec. 6, 2024

Steven Gallagher D'73, '78
Omaha, Neb.
Aug. 14, 2024

Stephen Grenier M'73
Leesburg, Fla.
July 22, 2024

Robert Hanlon M'73
Omaha, Neb.
Aug. 7, 2024

Richard Jones M'73
Tulsa, Okla.
Jan. 3, 2024

Andrew Rasmussen M'73
Omaha, Neb.
Jan. 12, 2024

William Shiffermiller M'75
Omaha, Neb.
Sept. 27, 2024

Michael Sullivan M'75
Fairfield, Penn.
Nov. 2, 2024

Frederic Fischer D'76
Clive, Iowa
March 5, 2024

Timothy Lieske M'76
Lincoln, Neb.
Oct. 14, 2024

Daniel Schafer M'76
Omaha, Neb.
Nov. 13, 2024

Roberta Chilcoat N'78, '80
Seward, Neb.
Nov. 25, 2024

Michael Grabowski P'78
Kansas City, Mo.
Nov. 10, 2024

Ruth Vyhldal N'78, '08
Fremont, Neb.
March 20, 2024

Patricia Wellman N'78
Lincoln, Neb.
April 1, 2024

These are the alumni we are aware of who passed away in 2024.

If you know of someone who should be listed, please email alumni@unmc.edu or call 402-559-4385.

James Dubé P'79
Omaha, Neb.
July 24, 2024

Bonnie Priel N'79
Hickman, Neb.
Sept. 29, 2024

John Zimmer M'79
Denver, Colo.
March 23, 2024

Louis Dubs D'80
Billings, Mont.
Aug. 6, 2024

Daniel Lysne D'80, '95
Mandan, N.D.
Aug. 8, 2024

William Peterson D'80
Valentine, Neb.
Oct. 22, 2024

Virginia Robeck, N'80
Omaha, Neb.
Nov. 9, 2024

Nancy Sloan P'80
Lincoln, Neb.
June 20, 2024

Joel Richert RT'83
Omaha, Neb.
April 22, 2024

Lisa Williams N'83, '98
Seward, Neb.
Feb. 2, 2024

Judith Armbruster N'84
Norfolk, Neb.
Oct. 11, 2024

Patricia Whitlock N'84
Alliance, Neb.
Jan. 18, 2024

Marjorie Gell N'85
Omaha, Neb.
Feb. 26, 2024

Jerome Holbrook D'86
Tucson, Ariz.
May 11, 2024

Cynthia Nash P'86
Royse City, Texas
Feb. 29, 2024

Jami Sousa Driscoll DH'86
Council Bluffs, Iowa
Sept. 29, 2024

Karen Stevens N'86, '89
Beatrice, Neb.
June 9, 2024

Lambert Stiers PA'86
Scottsbluff, Neb.
March 22, 2024

Jeffrey Creal PT'88
Lincoln, Neb.
Nov. 8, 2024

Thomas Fritsch D'89
Wahoo, Neb.
April 27, 2024

Zolana Baumel MT'92
Omaha, Neb.
July 9, 2024

Cheryl Gilg N'92
Urbandale, Iowa
Feb. 18, 2024

Janet Hansen PT'92
Minneapolis, Minn.
Aug. 24, 2024

John Klein M'03
Omaha, Neb.
Nov. 24, 2024

Angela Matthews N'03
Elkhorn, Neb.
Feb. 3, 2024

Shellie Scott PA'04
Houston, Texas
Sept. 7, 2024

Timothy Spitzenberger GS'04
Moorestown, N.J.
Sept. 11, 2024

Jennifer Klanecky N'07
Saint Paul, Neb.
Nov. 26, 2024

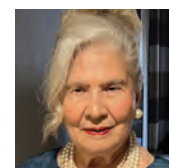
Ryan Davis PA'11, '12
Lubbock, Texas
Oct. 22, 2024

Elisabeth Tracey M'17 Surgery '22
Omaha, Neb.
Oct. 25, 2024

Jerry Margolin M'63 *Largo, Fla.*, is retired and working on his certification in medical marijuana.

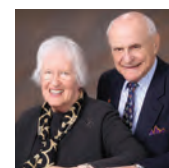
Richard Ohme M'64 *Gig Harbor, Wash.*, has been retired since 1999.

Adeline Yerkes N'64 *Edmond, Okla.*, closed her community and women's health consulting business in 2023 and retired after 59 years of nursing practice. For the past five years, she has volunteered with the Oklahoma Commission on the Status of Women on a stop human trafficking effort. She and her husband travel, garden and spend time with their son and his family. ➔



Dr. Yerkes
making most
of retirement.

James Newland M'65 *Omaha, Neb.*, and his wife, **Myrna Newland M'64**, are happily retired and report that their three grown children are doing well. ➔



The Newlands,
happily retired.

Robert Newton P'66 *West Des Moines, Iowa*, retired after practicing pharmacy for 57 years, with the past 37 in service at Broadlawns Pharmacy in Des Moines.

William Hoevet M'67 *Worthington, Minn.*, has been married for over 60 years and still lives in the town where he practiced for about 30 years. Their two children live in the Twin Cities with their families. Following medical school, he completed an internship at Kansas City General Hospital and his ophthalmology residency at UNMC. He had a three-year commitment to the U.S. Army, which was spent in Nuremberg, Germany. In 1974, they returned to the states, settling in Worthington, where they've spent the past 50 years.

James Bauer BS'68, M'70 *Peoria, Ill.*, retired in December 2024 and has enjoyed an extensive amount of travel. He and his wife have three daughters, nine grandchildren and three great-grandchildren, and like to winter in Florida. After working with medical students and residents his entire career, he now enjoys fishing, reading and most sports.

Wayne Kaldahl D'68 *Lincoln, Neb.*, received the 2024 Outstanding Periodontal Educator Award from the American Academy of Periodontology in fall 2024. He serves as a professor in the UNMC College of Dentistry. ➔



Dr. Kaldahl
honored for
his teaching
expertise.

Keith McReynolds M'69 *Buda, Texas*, published his second novel, "The President's Father," in May 2024. ♥

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