

## MEET BLAIR WASHINGTON, MD '02, ALUMNI ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT

**What she wants alumni to know about how their association can support them.**

In 2022, the UW Medicine Alumni Association welcomed Blair Washington, MD '02, MHA '97, FACOG, FACS, as its new president, saying farewell to outgoing president Scott Stuart, MD '01, Res. '04, Chief Res. '05, after seven years of service.

Here, Washington shares a bit about herself, her plans as president and how the alumni association can serve its members.

Washington grew up in the Seattle area and says the University of Washington School of Medicine was a natural choice.

"We are a phenomenal school for primary care as well as subspecialty training, so I knew it would provide me access to that full range of learning," says Washington. "And I could have the support of my family and be in the backdrop of the beautiful Pacific Northwest."

*continued inside ...*

Blair B. Washington, MD  
Urogynecology

...continued from cover

Today, Washington is a clinical associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology at UW Medicine. In the Urogynecology Clinic at UW Medical Center – Northwest, she provides care for the range of pelvic floor disorders, including urinary incontinence, fecal incontinence, pelvic organ prolapse and gynecologic fistula.

Washington was honored with the 2022 Alumni Humanitarian Award from the UW School of Medicine Alumni Association. In part, the award recognized her volunteer work since 2011 on medical missions to Rwanda with the International Organization for Women and Development. On these missions, she performs surgeries for obstetric fistula, a serious health concern for hundreds of thousands of women in developing nations.

She's also passionate about encouraging students of color to pursue STEAM careers — by volunteering with student programs, by providing representation for Black

women in medicine and by supporting scholarships for underrepresented students.

“Through representation, mentorship and financial support, we can create opportunities for our next generation of physicians. There are so many exceptionally talented students, and I hope that I can provide a little inspiration and support along their journey,” says Washington.

Washington's first experience with the alumni association came from Stuart, who was an important friend and mentor during medical school and beyond. Through him, she learned about the work of the association and why all alumni should get involved.

As president, Washington wants to encourage alumni engagement and participation, especially among younger alumni who might not know about the resources available to them. The

alumni association can assist with professional networking, offer support for residents during the residency interview process, and help medical students find their specialty.

Washington looks forward to helping the alumni association connect with and support medical students and alumni in every stage of their careers. And she hopes to hear from alumni about what they'd like to see in their association, too. You can share your ideas and feedback with her at [medalum@uw.edu](mailto:medalum@uw.edu).

Whether it's as a physician, a mentor or as president of the alumni association, Washington is committed to bringing people together to lift each other up and help their communities thrive.

“With everything that I do, I want to leave the world a little bit better than I found it,” says Washington. ●

[Learn more about Washington at uwmedalumni.org/washington](https://uwmedalumni.org/washington)

## INTRODUCING PIPER REYNOLDS



### UW School of Medicine Director for Alumni Affairs

Hello, UW School of Medicine alumni community! I am honored to introduce myself as your new director of alumni affairs.

I grew up in Snohomish, Washington, and graduated from Western Washington University with a degree in community health, which launched my passion for the field of health and medicine. Previously, I was the director for healthcare provider engagement with the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. I have long dreamed of working at the UW, so this role is a dream come true for me.

As alumni of the UW School of Medicine, you are an integral part of our past, present and future, and we are grateful for your continued support and involvement. I am excited to work with all of you. I'm eager to hear what you'd like to see from your alumni association and your ideas on how to best support our alumni and student community.

Please reach out to me at any time!

**Piper Reynolds**  
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# FROM IMPOSSIBLE TO REALITY: VACCINES TO TREAT CANCER

**Dr. Nora Disis and the Cancer Vaccine Institute prove laser focus and teamwork can redefine what's possible.**

For her entire career, Nora Disis, MD, Fel. '93, has focused on developing vaccines capable of curing and preventing cancer. Many didn't believe it was possible. But now, we're on the cusp of new cancer vaccines being approved for widespread use, thanks to the work and perseverance of Disis and experts at the Cancer Vaccine Institute (CVI).

Thirty years ago, Disis took a fellowship in oncology at UW Medicine. "I was drawn to the University of Washington because it was one of the few places in the United States that

had a strong focus on tumor immunology with a transplant program," says Disis.

She stayed at UW Medicine to conduct translational research in breast cancer and discovered that her breast cancer patients were having an immune response to their cancers, opening the door to a possible vaccine. However, she knew it would take a full team to successfully turn discoveries like these into effective vaccines for breast, ovarian, lung and other solid-tumor cancers. So she launched the CVI.

Today, the CVI is the largest academic group in the U.S. dedicated to the development of cancer vaccines, and there are numerous clinical trials underway — with impressive results. In one trial for patients with advanced stage ovarian

cancer, more than half of the participants who received a vaccine are still alive today, more than eight years later, compared to the median survival rate of only 18 months. "We are really at a tipping point for cancer vaccines," says Disis. "After being in this field for 30 years, we're finally at a point where we will see cancer vaccines approved for clinical use in the near future."

Disis and her colleagues aren't moving slowly. They know this research is profoundly impacting public health and saving lives — and they hope the increased attention on the promise of cancer vaccines inspires others to get involved. ●

**Read more about the work on cancer vaccines at [uwmedalumni.org/disis](http://uwmedalumni.org/disis)**

# STUDENT-ALUMNI INFORMATIONAL DISCUSSIONS SERVE UP FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Alums like Dr. Jane Lester provide a unique opportunity for UW School of Medicine students to learn from their future colleagues.

Each fall, UW School of Medicine medical students with curious minds and a hunger for connection gather in-person or online for Student-Alumni Informational Discussions (SAID). The program matches alumni with a small group of two to six students for lively conversations about professional practice, residency, work-life balance and more.

Some students are simply eager to hear about the journey of a more experienced physician in a casual, low-pressure setting. Others are hoping to glean insights on how to troubleshoot problems in the operating room or narrow down a specialty. Students are invited to bring anything and everything to the table.

Jane Lester, MD '86, Res. '90, has taken part in nearly every SAID event offered in the past 20 years. She enjoys offering hospitality to busy students who may not have eaten a home-cooked meal in months.

"I first got involved because it seemed like a fabulous way to interact with students again," she says. "I love the energy of young people and the questions they ask."

When students arrive at her house for dinner, she sets them

at ease by reminding them that she is not their professor or supervisor. Then, she shares her story.

"This was an excellent opportunity to collect pearls of wisdom I would not otherwise encounter in a clinical setting," says Tarun Gandhi, a second-year medical student who recently attended a SAID dinner hosted by Lester.

Lester is quick to point out the benefits of hosting from an alumni perspective.

"I recommend SAID to any fellow alum who wants to connect with interesting, passionate young people in their field," she says. "It's so energizing to hear about what matters to the next generation and leverage your experience to help someone else."

**Want to get involved?** For both students and alumni, SAID is a great opportunity to connect and learn from each other. You can host an event in your home, at a restaurant or virtually via Zoom. If you'd like to learn more about hosting a SAID event in fall 2023, visit [uwmedalumni.org/said](http://uwmedalumni.org/said). ●



Top: Tarun Gandhi (left) and other students at Dr. Lester's SAID dinner. Center, bottom: Dr. Lester enjoys offering hospitality to busy students.

Read more about Dr. Lester and SAID at [uwmedalumni.org/lester](http://uwmedalumni.org/lester)

# CLASS NOTES

Here are just a few of the wonderful Class Notes we've received from you and your classmates! Read more and submit yours at [uwmedalumni.org/classnotes](http://uwmedalumni.org/classnotes).

## MD

**Lorin L. Lee, MD '68**, writes, "Hello, Class of 1968. Hope you are well. Been retired from OB/GYN for 11 years. My time now is spent with family. We now have three children and nine grandchildren, including a set of 6-year-old triplets. My wife and I are busy also trying to improve our golf skills."

**Peter A. Hashisaki, MD '75**, writes, "Still working part-time doing infectious diseases and hospital epidemiology/infection control in Bellevue, Washington. I've been going to Malawi since 2011 and just spent a month there during the cholera outbreak. I've done tropical medicine in the Amazon and Northern Thailand as well, but I get skinny in those places. Otherwise, life is good, and I'd love to hear from any classmates."

**Suzanne U. Spencer, MD '76**, writes, "Retired 2008, continued locums until 2016 in family medicine. Daughter also in family medicine, UCSD. Son working for UW. Travel with husband, now 50-year marriage. Live in Bellevue area. Hike in summer, play golf badly all seasons, cross-country ski in winters. Plan on trip with classmates Berdi Safford and John Hruby to a week-long hike in Alps in September. Participated in mRNA vaccine study as phase 1 volunteer. Wish I could still practice medicine, miss it so."

**Jennifer A. McDonald, MD '77**, writes, "Still working as a primary care internist, though with more days off and more travel. Will probably finish up completely in 14 months. I am doing the work in converting a tiny van into a camper van for long road trips

after I retire. Got lots of National Parks and other sites to see."

**Jack E. Hickel, MD '78, Res. '91** (family medicine), writes, "After spending 15 years doing medicine in Eswatini (Swaziland), Africa, I co-founded the Alaska Sudan Medical Project in 2008 (now the Alaska Health Project South Sudan). We are working in the Fangak region of South Sudan, Africa. The disease burden is huge, so we built a medical/surgical clinic and a TB clinic. Please visit [ahpss.org](http://ahpss.org) to learn more."

**Charles M. Weatherby, MD '78**, writes, "I retired after 41 years of family practice in Tacoma, effective March 31, 2022. My wife

retired the following week as an ARNP, so we spent the first few months of retirement traveling the country visiting our three children and six grandchildren."

**Priscilla H. Valentine, MD '88**, writes, "After 29.5 years practicing as a full-spectrum family physician with OB at Valley Medical Care, a 10-physician and four-nurse practitioner group in Juneau, Alaska, I retired in April 2022. My husband, Wilson, and I remain in Juneau, enjoying the retired life, starting with a three-week vacation to Puerto Penasco, Mexico, on the beaches of the Sea of Cortez."

**Nicholas A. Daniels, MD '94**, writes, "My memoir was released in

## MEDEX SPOTLIGHT

**Thomas A. Barale, PA-C** (Seattle Class 21), writes, "I'm the sole medical provider at a gold mine in a remote area in Alaska. Took time off this summer to go to Ukraine to train Ukrainian soldiers in TCCC (Tactical Combat Casualty Care). I instructed about 500 soldiers during my time there. Incredible experience, so rewarding that after a while the incoming Russian artillery became only a minor distraction."



*Thomas Barale (kneeling) training Ukrainian soldiers in casualty care.*



**Hector Camacho, PA-C** (Seattle Class 33), writes, "My physician experience in both my home and birth countries has given me the great joy of biculturalism. Interestingly, in my home country, most of my patients are North Americans, and while practicing medicine in the USA, I took care mostly of underserved Mexican and Central Americans. Thank you, MEDEX NW. So proud of being a UW graduate."



From the top: Julian Cecilio Perez, MD '04 (and family). Allison M. Kelliher, MD '05. Margaret N. Towolawi, MD '10, with her second book.

December 2022. In Outbreaks and Pandemics: The Life of a Disease Detective, we learn about the life of a disease detective and explore the important role that disease detectives play in controlling outbreaks and pandemics."

**Lisa L. Sferra, MD '97, Res. '99** (internal medicine), writes, "Caitlin and I hosted an impromptu E-93 class reunion at my house last summer. We had pretty good turnout! I toured the attendees through our new event barn that my son built, and everyone decided we should plan ahead and go big next time.... so put it in the back of your mind now. We want to see you live and in person!"

**Julian Cecilio Perez, MD '04**, writes, "Entering my 15th year working for SeaMar CHC in Seattle area. Short hiatus for a sports medicine fellowship in 2016 and now clinical director of MSK services. Married to my wife, Antoinette, for 15 years with a 10-year-old daughter, Solea. Have a

Spanish weekly radio show on 1360 AM El Rey on COVID-19 and fallout from pandemic. As a family, we keep traveling, hiking, lake swimming and serving the community."

**Allison M. Kelliher, MD '05**, writes, "I am a family and integrative physician, and my experience includes training and providing services as an Alaska Native traditional healer. I have been working to develop curriculum including Indigenizing and decolonizing concepts. I teach at the University of Washington and University of North Dakota, and I will be affiliated with Johns Hopkins University."

**Margaret N. Towolawi, MD '10, Res. '13** (family medicine), writes, "I am a lifestyle medicine physician based in the Seattle area. Ayomide and Seyi's Kitchen, my second children's book, inspires young children to develop a love for diverse plant foods by taking them on a whirlwind alphabet tour. Families are encouraged to get creative in

# Your UW School of Medicine Reunion Weekend — *in person!*

**Friday, June 2, and Saturday, June 3, 2023**

**[uwsomreunion.org](http://uwsomreunion.org)**

- Celebrating the classes of 1953 (E-49) • 1958 (E-54) • 1963 (E-59) • 1968 (E-64) • 1973 (E-69) • 1978 (E-74) • 1983 (E-79) • 1988 (E-84) • 1993 (E-89) • 1998 (E-94) • 2003 (E-99) • 2008 (E-04) • 2013 (E-09) • 2018 (E-14) and the 50-year association (all alumni of 50+ years).



the kitchen together. Learn more at [margarettowolawimd.com](http://margarettowolawimd.com)."

## Residency / Fellowship

**David E. Wisner, MD, Res. '80** (internal medicine), Fel. '80 (rheumatology), writes, "I completed my fellowship in rheumatology in 1981 and began a solo practice till 2016, when I retired. My practice was in Bellingham, Washington. Before residency and fellowship at the University of Washington, I spent three years in the Indian Health Service on the Navajo and Alaska reservations. Skiing was my main passion until two years ago, along with tennis and gardening. It was a good time to be in medicine."

**Richard D. Gibbs, MD, Res. '90** (family medicine), writes, "We hope the past three decades have been happy and productive for everyone that we had the fortune to train with in UW family medicine! Tricia and I are in our 30th year of doctoring and administering the San Francisco Free Clinic. In our non-free clinic time, Tricia is a director for San Francisco's Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival, and I continue as the supervising physician for the San Francisco Ballet. We fondly think of you all and send our very best wishes!"

## MSTP / PhD

**Lianna F. Wood, MD '17, PhD '15** (pathobiology), writes, "I am finishing up my first year in Boston as a pediatric GI fellow at Boston Children's after completing pediatric residency at Montefiore in the Bronx. Very excited to be returning to the lab this summer to continue my work on immunological implications of pediatric malnutrition."

## BS

**Lyle M. Najita, PhD, BS '82** (microbiology and chemistry), writes, "In



**ALUMNI NIGHT  
AT THE SOUNDERS**

**July 15  
Lumen Field**

Enjoy a private suite, mingle with your fellow alumni and watch the Seattle Sounders take on FC Dallas!

Learn more and register at [uwmedalumni.org/sounders](http://uwmedalumni.org/sounders)

2017, I earned my EMT certification. I attended the paramedic program at CSU, Sacramento and completed that program in 2020. In 2020, I moved back to Hawaii to take care of an elderly parent. In 2021, I got hired as a paramedic in a mental health clinic administering medication for depression/anxiety/PTSD."

**Christopher F. Hovorka, PhD, BS '91** (prosthetics and orthotics), writes, "A new opportunity in academia has taken me to Arizona. I now serve as director of a developing orthotics and prosthetics program at Midwestern University, a small medical and health sciences institution located in Glendale. I'm also enjoying the

plentiful trekking and biking options in wider open spaces and the taller, more rugged mountains."

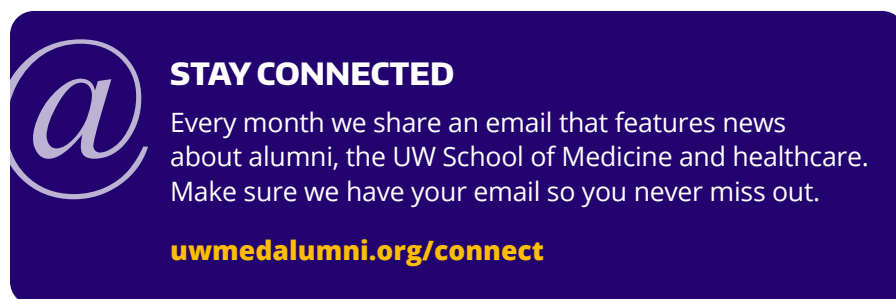
## MS

**Bryan H. Santos, MS '15** (microbiology), writes, "I've been working for the Marine Microbiology lab in the City of San Diego since 2019 and have had the great opportunity to work with other agencies throughout southern California to hone the EPA's relatively new method for coliphage quantification in marine waters."

## Rehab Medicine

**Roger Isamu Ideishi, JD, BS '84** (occupational therapy), writes, "In 2022, I was named one of the 'Next 50' people by the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts in Washington, DC, for making a significant social impact through the arts. I guide arts organizations and advocates for accessibility and inclusion with people with disabilities at a programmatic, institutional and policy level across the country and the globe, including in Japan, China, UK, Ireland, Romania and Russia."

**Marsha M. Novak, BS '85** (physical therapy), writes, "About two years ago, I retired my physical therapist license. In 2003, I became a Guild Certified Feldenkrais practitioner. I continue with a small private practice doing that work as well as mentoring newer Feldenkrais practitioners. I live and practice on Bainbridge Island, where I live with my husband and two fur babies of the feline persuasion." ●



**STAY CONNECTED**

Every month we share an email that features news about alumni, the UW School of Medicine and healthcare. Make sure we have your email so you never miss out.

[uwmedalumni.org/connect](http://uwmedalumni.org/connect)

# RETURNING TO MY COMMUNITY

Wyatt Bowles, a third-year student at the UW School of Medicine, shares how scholarships put him on the path to becoming a trusted small-town doctor for his hometown.

I grew up on a dairy farm in southern Idaho. It's not common to leave our small town, but when I began to think about becoming a doctor, I knew I needed to leave to gain more education and skills. So far, medical school has been quite a journey.

In the WWAMI (Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana and Idaho) program, while it's been hard to move to a different place every six weeks, the learning opportunities have been tremendous.

I've worked alongside a surgeon in Caldwell, Idaho, and in a pediatric clinic and neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) in Pocatello, Idaho. I'm currently getting experience in family practice at Joint Base

Lewis-McChord in Tacoma, Washington.

I'm considering going into family practice or becoming a pediatrician, and I always hoped I'd be able to come back home to care for my community. Scholarship support allows me to pick my future path without basing my decisions on money. After all, my family still runs our dairy farm, and they still need my help from time to time.

No matter what kind of doctor I become, I intend to bring all the education and experiences I've gained to provide care that my community can rely on. ●

Read more of Wyatt's story at [uwmedalumni.org/bowles](https://uwmedalumni.org/bowles)

Scholarships created an opportunity for Wyatt to practice in his hometown.

PHOTO BY TARA BROWN



## SUPPORT THE FUTURE OF MEDICINE

You know firsthand the importance of an excellent education for future physicians — to them and to the communities they will serve. Scholarships give students like Wyatt the freedom to pursue a medical career they're passionate about. With your gift to MD scholarships, you can help future healthcare leaders and their communities.



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