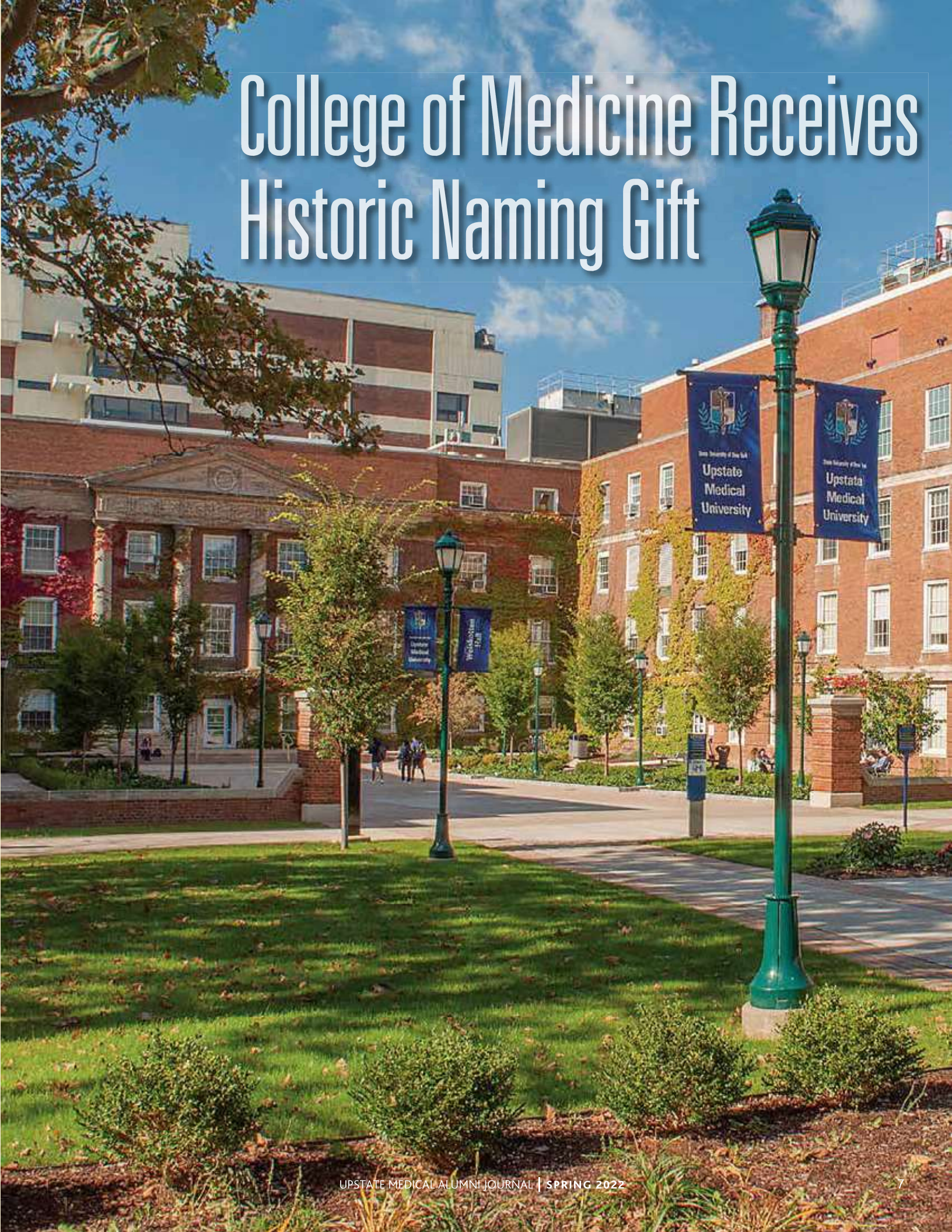


College of Medicine Receives Historic Naming Gift



We Are Now Known as the Alan and Marlene Norton College of Medicine

AT UPSTATE MEDICAL UNIVERSITY

When Alan Norton, MD '66, was a medical student at Upstate in the 1960s, he was singularly focused on becoming an ophthalmologist. His medical education and research experience led to prestigious post-graduate training opportunities, which in turn led to a successful and fulfilling 25-year career as a retinal specialist in Los Angeles.

Dr. Norton was always mindful that it was his experience at Upstate and in Syracuse that provided the launching pad for that career and the life it provided he and his wife, Marlene.

Fifty-five years after his medical school graduation, Dr. and Mrs. Norton have made a \$25-million estate gift to benefit Upstate Medical University's College of Medicine. In recognition, the college will now be known as the Alan and Marlene Norton College of Medicine at Upstate Medical University.

"I am grateful for the quality education that I received from the SUNY Upstate Medical University," says Norton. "Our estate gift to the Upstate College of Medicine is to demonstrate our appreciation and help the college to continue its excellence in teaching and innovation."



First-year medical students Vanessa Chicas '25 and Mark Lutz '25 celebrate the naming of the Norton College of Medicine.

The Norton's gift is the largest in the history of the College of Medicine and has the potential to transform the institution, nearly doubling the current endowment. "The Norton's gift will elevate the college's stature and set us on a solid future of sustained excellence for years to come," says Upstate President Mantosh Dewan, MD. "We are extremely grateful for the Norton's generosity. This remarkable gift will help us retain and develop outstanding faculty and teaching to benefit our students."

To receive a \$25 million gift would be a dream for any state medical school, where gifts of this size are rare. For Lawrence Chin, MD, dean of the Alan and Marlene Norton College of Medicine, the funds will make long-term goals a reality.

"A gift of this size is unprecedented, and we have no shortage of needs," says Dr. Chin.

Nonetheless, the top priority and focus for the new funding will be faculty expansion and development. "We have a relatively large student class—175 each year—with a relatively small teaching faculty," says Chin.

Demand for medical education is at a high and there is tremendous need for physicians throughout the state, particularly in Central New York. At this time, faculty size is a limiting factor to considering class expansion.

Regardless of expansion, Chin is focused on recruiting more faculty and enticing existing faculty to devote more time to teaching. "Many of our faculty members are also providing patient care and are already overtaxed in terms of being able to see patients in a timely manner. Asking them to spend more time teaching students is an additional demand on their time and we need to incentivize that, either through compensating them adequately or providing access to Upstate research facilities," he says. "We want to entice our most esteemed physicians to share their knowledge and experience with our students."

A major curricular change in the works is the incorporation of clinical experiences

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—ALAN NORTON, MD '66

beginning in the first year of study. "We want students learning from working physicians and interacting with real patients right from the start," says Chin. "We want to give students the understanding of what it means to be a physician, to start learning some skills—interviewing patients, doing exams, learning how to talk to families and have difficult conversations. These are things you can't learn from a book and are hard to learn from a simulation. You have to be in a real clinical environment."

Doing that will necessitate an expansion of Upstate's network of clinical faculty, and that's another piece that will be supported by the Norton gift. "We want to train our clinical faculty members

College of Medicine
Dean Larry Chin talks
with medical students
outside Weiskotten Hall.



to be great educators,” says Chin. “Knowing how to teach a student clinical skills, for instance, or to offer constructive feedback, those are not things that you’re taught in medical school or residency. We learn everything about being a good doctor, but we don’t learn about being good teachers.”

Another area for faculty development is diversity and inclusion. “Working effectively with diverse patients is a skill that not all physicians have,” says Chin. “At the Norton College of Medicine, a core value is to train our physicians to understand diversity, be sensitive to unconscious bias, and learn about health inequity in our community. That kind of education and training is important not only for students, but also for the faculty, so we have to devote resources to that.”

Chin says that in addition to funding faculty initiatives, the Norton gift helps elevate the school as a whole. “Receiving a naming gift from an alumnus who has had a distinguished medical career demonstrates the benefit and the impact that an Upstate education can have,” he says. “To have a former student give back in this manner is very validating that our students and alumni really make a difference in the world. I’m very excited and proud to be the first dean associated with the Norton College of Medicine.”

Alan Norton remembers his interview at Upstate Medical University clearly. As an undergraduate at the University of Chicago, he’d done research in optics, which prompted his desire to attend medical school to become an ophthalmologist.

While visiting Upstate, Norton met a biochemist named Myron Brin, PhD, who agreed to take Norton on as a research assistant. “That was the main reason I chose Upstate,” he recalls.

But as luck would have it, by the time Norton arrived on campus as a first-year medical student, Brin had left for a position at another university. Undaunted, Norton connected with Alex Bartoff, PhD, a physiologist who was conducting research on electrophysiology of the retina in animals, who became his mentor.

In addition to his medical studies, Norton spent long hours doing fundamental research on particular cells in the retina. “There are 10 layers of cells in the retina, and we could pick out certain cells that we would find by putting very fine electrodes, called micro pipettes, into a single cell and then we could test the response of that cell to different stimuli,” he says.

The work had to be conducted in the dark because any light would stimulate the retinas of his animal subjects. “I spent a lot of hours in the dark,” he recalls.

It served him well. Norton applied to the top ophthalmology residency programs at the time, the Wilmer Institute at Johns Hopkins and Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary at Harvard. Norton had already been offered a position at Harvard when he was invited to interview and give a talk at the Wilmer Institute.

It was a memorable trip. First, his plane from Washington, DC, to Baltimore caught on fire and had to return to the airport. Norton summoned the courage to get on another plane and made it on time to give his talk. His audience included the department chair, faculty, and a famous scientist visiting from England who was considered a Nobel Prize candidate. “And here I was a fourth-year medical student giving them a lecture on electrophysiology of the retina,” he says. “Apparently it went well because I was offered a position.”

Prior to residency, Norton applied to the NIH and was awarded a research position at the National Institute for Stroke and Eye, where he spent two years continuing research on the electrophysiology of the retina and published more than a dozen research articles in peer review journals.

Norton’s medical school mentor, Alex Bartoff (left), with his research team in the 1970s





Norton then completed his ophthalmology residency at the Wilmer Eye Institute of Johns Hopkins University and a fellowship at Harvard University’s Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary.

A Los Angeles native, Norton returned to California after training to work as a retina specialist in private practice. It was in his first office that he met Marlene, a nurse who specialized in assisting with ophthalmological surgeries, who would become his wife.

Norton enjoyed a long career in private practice, served as a consultant to three area hospitals, and also taught at UCLA’s Stein Eye Institute. He retired in 1997.

When considering his estate plans, Norton says Upstate rose to the top for a variety of reasons. “First, it was really Upstate that gave me the opportunity to become a physician and for any success I may have enjoyed,” he says. “I felt I owed something for the excellent education I received.”

Second, he wanted to give back to the people of Syracuse. “It may sound strange, but I’ve lived in cities across the country, and I found the people in the Syracuse area to be the nicest, friendliest, most helpful, honest people that I’ve ever been involved with,” he says. “I really had an attachment to them.”

And finally, Norton says he was most impressed with Upstate President Mantosh Dewan and his efforts to elevate the institution despite limited state support. “He’s a very intelligent man who has

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great plans, even with the odds against him,” says Norton. “My goal is to help him make the College of Medicine the best school possible.”

Those efforts are well underway. The Norton College of Medicine is in the midst of implementing a number of exciting programmatic changes, beginning with the addition of an optional three-year medical school curriculum for students who choose to stay at Upstate for residency, a program that received LCME approval in March. “Student debt is at an all-time high,” says Chin. “Currently, students interview for residency programs and take away-rotations and electives in their fourth year but don’t have many requirements otherwise,” he says. “By offering a three-year curriculum, we can give students the option to expedite their training

“The Norton’s gift will forever have a positive influence on the future success of our College of Medicine. I personally add my sincerest thanks to Alan and Marlene for choosing Upstate for this significant gift.”

—PAUL NORCROSS, MEDICAL ALUMNI FOUNDATION

and save a year of tuition expense. At the same time, we hope to increase the pipeline of physicians into Central New York because people often stay to practice in communities where they train.”

Another initiative is increasing the number of dual degree programs beyond the current MD/MPH and MD/PhD options. The school is currently recruiting for a new MD/MBA program, which will be run jointly with the Whitman School of Management at Syracuse University. The five-year program will begin with a dedicated year of business school at Whitman, followed by four years of medical school at Upstate, which will include internships related to their business education. “A student might do an administrative internship at University Hospital, for example,” says Chin, who hopes additional joint degree programs will follow.

All of these new programs will require administrative and staff support. “The Norton gift is incredibly generous and will help us achieve our

goals at the faculty level, but that’s really just the start,” says Chin. “It would be a mistake for alumni to think that we don’t need their additional support. There’s plenty of need across the board, and never enough to meet the financial needs of students.”

The Upstate Medical Alumni Foundation is in the midst of the Generation to Generation/Excellence in Medicine Campaign to raise \$15 million for student scholarships. Executive director Paul Norcross hopes the Norton gift serves as an impetus for others to do what they can.

“Alumni can take pride in knowing that their medical college will have the resources to continue to grow in stature, quality, and reputation,” he says. “We continue to seek additional support to ease the burden for individual students as they pursue their career goals and simultaneously ease the physician shortage nationwide.” ■

