

1990

Lauren Pibas of Cazenovia, NY, and husband **Elliot Rodriguez '93**, are proud to announce that their son, Alex Rodriguez, has graduated from Brown University and will be joining the Upstate Medical School class of 2028!

1991

John C. Brancato, of West Hartford, CT, has been division head of emergency medicine at Connecticut Children's in Hartford since January 2022. "I am looking forward to welcoming **Carl D'Andrea** to my neighborhood," he writes. "I am also looking forward to our 35th reunion in Syracuse in 2026."

1994 Reunion

September 20•21, 2024

Brian S. Foley, of Carmel, IN, enjoys teaching other physicians how to achieve financial freedom. In addition to workshops and presentations, he offers his website, WealthyDoc.org and his newly published book, *Wealthy Doc's Guide to Achieving Financial Freedom: Transform Your Physician Salary Into Wealth*.



1999 Reunion

September 20•21, 2024

Iris Kerin Orbuch, of Los Angeles, CA, was featured in and helped create the *Below the Belt* documentary, which raises awareness of her specialty and passion, endometriosis. Executive producers are Hillary Clinton, Mitt Romney, Elizabeth Warren, Corinne Foxx, Mae Whitman, and Rosario Dawson. It has been shown across the world since its premiere in 2022. Currently its available for viewing on PBS Passport.

2004 Reunion

September 20•21, 2024

David Spirer, of Buffalo Grove, IL, was recently awarded the prestigious distinction of being named a 1/350 NIOSH certified B reader. He is also in the process of getting an Israeli medical license.

2009 Reunion

September 20•21, 2024

2012

Ryan LaFollette, of Cincinnati, OH, was elected to the board of directors for the Society of Academic Emergency Medicine.

2013

Nikolai V. Kolotiniuk, of Fresno, CA, received advice from a wise attending during residency: "one marriage, one mortgage, save 15 percent, and be nice to nurses," he writes. "I've been checking all the boxes so far as a cardiothoracic anesthesiologist in Fresno and have a 17-year wedding anniversary coming up!"

2014 Reunion

September 20•21, 2024

2016

Rachel A. Kopicki, of Seattle, WA, and husband Clayton welcomed a healthy baby boy, Luca, to the family in early January. "We are overjoyed," she writes.

KAREN CYNDARI, MD/PHD '19

Forging Her Own Path

As a child who loved to read and draw, Karen Cyndari, MD/PhD '19, spent her adolescence creating her own worlds within comic books, refining her drawing style over time.

As she approached college, Cyndari was at a crossroad. She was serious about art. But she also loved science and considered a career in medicine. Ultimately, she followed advice from her mother: "You can study to be a doctor and still be an artist, but you can't study to be an artist and still be a doctor."

Today, Cyndari is a physician-scientist who practices emergency medicine and just launched her own research lab at the University of Iowa. She's also an award-winning graphic novelist, honored by the Small Press Alternative Press Expo for the Best Graphic Novel of 2023.

"I have no regrets about the path I chose," she says. "I think my love of art and written communication has really helped me communicate my ideas in a very essential way."

Cyndari studied biology at SUNY Brockport, graduating summa cum laude. But when she applied to medical school, she didn't receive a single interview. "With no doctors in my family, I didn't know that you needed more than just good grades."

Instead, she went to Roswell Park Cancer Institute/University at Buffalo to earn a master's specializing in immunology. Sitting in class one day, she was struck by the way another student was answering their professor's questions. "These were mechanistic basic science questions, but she answered in such a way that was brilliantly intertwined with clinical experience and clinical practice," says Cyndari. "I found out that she was an MD/PhD student, and that basically changed my entire trajectory. It was my Scully Effect moment."

One of the most important things Cyndari learned during her master's was the importance of having the right mentor. "In my opinion, the project that you're working on as you complete your degrees is less important than who you're going to be working with and how they are going to mentor you," she says.

Accepted into Upstate's MD/PhD program, Cyndari found the right mentors in Kenneth Mann, PhD, and Megan Oest, PhD, in the Department of Orthopedic Surgery. Her research focused on mechanisms of aseptic



Dr. Cyndari (center) with staff in her new lab at the University of Iowa, and below, with a poster advertising her award-winning graphic novel.

loosening of human total knee replacements. “It was very different than anything I’d ever worked on, and I was excited to try something new and different,” she says.

Doctoral students are steered to pick a clinical specialty that aligns with their research. Orthopedics would have been the natural choice, but Cyndari wasn’t interested in long days in the operating room. She also wasn’t interested in rheumatology, another suggestion.

“I thought being an MD/PhD should give me more choices, not fewer,” she says. And what she wanted was emergency medicine and the wide range of medical care it encompasses, a field not typically associated with research.

Undeterred, Cyndari landed at the University of Iowa, where she became the first EM resident accepted to the Physician Scientist Training Pathway program (a position they created specifically for her).

The PSTP includes a three-year clinical residency followed by an optional two-year clinical fellowship. After graduating as chief resident, Cyndari began her research fellowship in the Peterson Lab, using her experience in immunology, emergency medicine, and the human knee to examine mechanisms of Lyme arthritis.

Her research focuses on the unique immune regulation of the joint space as maintained by the synovial resident macrophage and other synovial cells. “The brain and the eyes are two immune privileged areas that house critical functions for our body,” she says. “There are many parallels with the joint space, but the difference is we have one brain and we have two eyes but we have more than 200 articulating joints. I don’t think we understand how those joints are immune regulated at all.”

The Joint Space Immune Regulation Lab at the University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine opened July

1 with Cyndari as principal investigator. “I have a research associate and will be mentoring medical students and undergraduate students,” she says.

Although her schedule is skewed toward research—she practices clinically one week a month—she continues to believe her dual roles are symbiotic. “I’m constantly asking my colleagues to consider whether something could be a tick-borne illness and there are definitely cases I have caught,” she says.

In her down time, Cyndari finds balance through her art and writing. She is currently reading a novel, *The War of Winds*, for publication.

“I’m very blessed to have the work-life balance that I have,” she says.

Cyndari’s biggest piece of advice to students is to find their joy and follow it. “I’m very glad that I did not listen to a lot of well-meaning advice and chose a path that was new and different,” she says. “It was scary, but I found a place that was willing to support me in my goals.”

—Renée Gearhart Levy

