

# UBDentist

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO SCHOOL OF DENTAL MEDICINE

WINTER 2024



## A **BOLD** VISION FOR THE FUTURE:

DENTAL SCHOOL LAUNCHES

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PLAN

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FROM  
THE  
ALUMNI  
ASSOCIATION  
**PRESIDENT**

**I invite you to take an active role in our association, whether by attending events, mentoring students or simply reconnecting with fellow alumni.**

**Dear Members of the University at Buffalo Dental Alumni Association,**

It is my privilege to welcome you to our vibrant community of dental professionals. As president of the UB Dental Alumni Association, I am honored to lead an organization committed to fostering a strong connection between our alma mater, our students and our alumni.

Our mission is threefold: to support the University at Buffalo School of Dental Medicine, to empower our current students and to build lasting bonds among our alumni. Together, we strive to advance the excellence and innovation that have long been hallmarks of our dental school.

Supporting the dental school is at the core of what we do. Through collaboration and advocacy, we aim to ensure that UB continues to lead in education, research and clinical practice. By providing resources and championing new initiatives, we help the school remain a leader in shaping the future of dentistry.

Equally important is our dedication to today's students. We are committed to helping them thrive by offering mentorship, scholarships and opportunities for professional growth. As alumni, we understand the challenges of dental education and we take pride in guiding and supporting the next generation of dental professionals.

Finally, our association serves as a vital link for alumni, connecting a diverse community that spans generations and geographic boundaries. Through events, networking opportunities, and shared experiences, we aim to strengthen the bonds that unite us and celebrate the lifelong relationships that began at UB.

I invite you to take an active role in our association, whether by attending events, mentoring students or simply reconnecting with fellow alumni. Your involvement is essential to fulfilling our mission and ensuring that our community remains strong, engaged and impactful.

Thank you for your dedication to UB and for your continued contributions to the field of dentistry. Together, we can build on our proud legacy and shape a bright future for our school, our students and our profession.

Warm regards,

Joe DeLuca, DDS '07  
President, University at Buffalo Dental Alumni Association

ON THE COVER:

Baird Point, North Campus  
Photo by Douglas Levere

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## UBDentist

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### SDM EDITORIAL GROUP

Dave Donati/Green Soup Design  
Art Director and Designer

Laurie Kaiser  
Contributing Writer

Cass McAllister  
Photographer

Edward J. Morrison  
Assistant Dean  
& Chief Marketing Officer

Grove Potter  
Features Writer

Sarah Smykowski  
Editorial Director

Sherry Szarowski  
Senior Director of Alumni and  
Professional Engagement

Office of the Dean  
325 Squire Hall  
Buffalo NY 14214-8006  
716-829-2836

[dental.buffalo.edu](http://dental.buffalo.edu)

UB Dental Alumni Association  
337 Squire Hall  
Buffalo NY 14214-8006  
716-829-2061  
Fax: 716-829-3609  
[ss287@buffalo.edu](mailto:ss287@buffalo.edu)

[dental.buffalo.edu/alumni](http://dental.buffalo.edu/alumni)

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Publication of *UB Dentist* is made possible by the generous support  
of the University at Buffalo Dental Alumni Association.

# 1 UB dental school gives veterans a reason to smile

BY SARAH SMYKOWSKI

More than 150 veterans received free dental care from UB's School of Dental Medicine and community-based providers during the ninth annual Dentistry Smiles on Veterans program. It was held at the UB Dental clinics on the South Campus on Saturday, Nov. 2.

Volunteers, who included 240 students and numerous UB faculty members, community-based dental providers, hygienists, dental assistants and staff members, provided comprehensive care to treat a range of oral health needs. They performed 74 cleanings and 54 direct restorations, completed 36 extractions and fabricated one temporary partial denture. The services were valued at approximately \$61,000 in private dental practice fees.

"In the last nine years, we have done close to \$700,000 worth of work and have treated close to 2,000 people," said event organizer Brendan Dowd, DDS '86, clinical assistant professor in the Department of Restorative Dentistry. "But the most important result is helping many veterans find a dental home."

During this year's event, more than 40 veterans who attended signed up for follow-up appointments.

Dentistry Smiles on Veterans aims to improve oral health and overall health among veterans, many of whom lack dental insurance or do not qualify for treatment through the Veterans Health Administration.

"I volunteer to work this event to give back to my fellow veterans," said Jeanette Dowrey Smith, urgent care coordinator for the School of Dental Medicine and a U.S. Navy veteran. "I know how hard it is to find someone who takes my insurance. If veterans need care, they may not have the money to cover it."

Smith received the 2024 Dentistry Smiles on Veterans Image of Excellence Award, which is given to an honored veteran in recognition of their service.

In addition to benefiting patients, Dentistry Smiles on Veterans is also a meaningful opportunity for students, who learned the importance of giving back to their community



DR. BRENDAN DOWD PRESENTED JEANNETTE DOWREY SMITH WITH THE IMAGE OF EXCELLENCE AWARD.

and the power of interprofessional collaboration and education. The schools of Public Health and Health Professions, Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences and Law provided veterans with additional support services.

"The volunteers are instrumental to the success of the event," Dowd said. "It is a wonderful feeling to help those who have kept our country safe and secure for all of us."

VOLUNTEERS AT THIS YEAR'S EVENT INCLUDED STUDENTS, UB FACULTY AND STAFF, AND COMMUNITY-BASED DENTAL PROVIDERS. PHOTOS BY CASS MCALLISTER



# 2 Dental school, UB Athletics collaborate on custom mouth guards for student-athletes

BY SARAH SMYKOWSKI

Ahead of the 2024 UB Football season, the Bulls focused on getting ready for game time. This year, the pre-season preparation included a collaboration with the School of Dental Medicine to provide UB's football players with custom mouth guards in a vibrant shade of UB Blue.

Approximately 55 student-athletes received custom mouth guards prepared by 13 students who volunteered their time before the start of the fall semester. The students traveled to UB Stadium with boxes of alginate, trays and all the supplies needed to take impressions for the team.

"This exciting collaboration connected both sides of the university—athletics and academics," says Brian Bratta, senior associate athletic director, sports medicine & wellness services. "Our student-athletes received custom care and dental students gained invaluable hands-on experience."

Under the supervision of Eugena Stephan, DMD, Pros. Cert. '92, PhD Oral Bio. '98, associate dean for clinical affairs, students honed their skills in mixing alginate, loading trays and perfectly positioning the trays for each player. The impressions were taken in the Bulls athletic training room, then brought back to Squire Hall so students could pour the casts. Once complete, the molds were returned to the athletic training room, which has a vacuum-forming machine to create mouth guards on site.

"Our students had the opportunity to practice their skills in a unique, real-world setting, which makes learning memorable and fun," Stephan said. "This event provided a different perspective on what they learn in the classroom, as well as opportunities to make connections with fellow UB students."

The partnership between the dental school and athletics department highlights the importance of hands-on learning and the outcomes that can be achieved when different parts of the university team up to benefit students.

FROM TAKING THE IMPRESSIONS TO POURING THE CASTS, UB DENTAL STUDENTS GAINED HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE IN CREATING CUSTOM MOUTH GUARDS WITH A LITTLE UB FLAIR! PHOTOS BY SARAH SMYKOWSKI



# 3 UB pediatric surgeon performs life-changing procedure on newborn

BY LAURIE KAISER

The newborn was struggling to breathe. Born in Tel Aviv, Israel, with Pierre Robin Sequence, a rare craniofacial condition that consists of upper airway obstruction, the three-day-old baby girl was in danger.

“They have a wonderful surgical team at Sheba, but they don’t do this procedure for children this young,” said Markiewicz. “When trying to help them find a surgeon, I learned that no hospital in Israel does.”

This enables the muscles associated with the lower jaw to come forward, opening the airway and relieving upper airway obstruction.

“In the majority of cases, we can get these patients to breathe on their own,” Markiewicz said. Fortunately, that was the case with this baby girl. “Just a few days after surgery, the breathing tube was removed and she began eating, drinking and breathing on her own.”

## PARENTS LOBBIED FOR PROCEDURE

When the hospital suggested the tracheostomy procedure, the baby’s parents pushed for the more progressive procedure. They spoke with the head of the hospital’s craniofacial surgery team, Tal Yoffe, DMD, MD, who connected with Markiewicz through UB colleague Laurie Sadler, MD, clinical associate professor of pediatrics in the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, a geneticist and co-director of the craniofacial team in Buffalo, who has relatives and friends in Tel Aviv.

“Colleagues said that mandibular distraction is not the standard of care for children this young with Robin Sequence, but they would like to learn how to perform it on a very young patient,” Markiewicz said. “They were receptive to collaborating.”

They asked Markiewicz if he would fly to Tel Aviv and lead the

“THE COLLABORATION WAS A WONDERFUL EXPERIENCE.”

— MICHAEL MARKIEWICZ

procedure. He requested that his fellow and clinical assistant professor of oral and maxillofacial surgery, Jessica Li, DDS, accompany him to assist. Markiewicz and Li arrived in Tel Aviv on July 25 and headed into surgery the following day.

“The surgeons, anesthesiologists and nursing team there were excellent and very welcoming. The collaboration was a wonderful experience.”

## POWERFUL PROCEDURE

Markiewicz has performed dozens of mandibular distractions, as well as written and lectured on the topic.

“It’s a very powerful procedure,” he said. “My hope is that the success of this surgery changes the paradigm in Israel, and they’ll start doing mandibular distraction on young infants just like we do in the U.S.”

Overall, Markiewicz said it was an incredibly rewarding experience.

“At a time when the world is going through a lot of change and turmoil,” he said, “it was a special experience to go over there and work with a team with the collective goal of making the baby better.”



PHOTO BY MICHAEL MARKIEWICZ.

The hospital treating her, Sheba Medical Center, is ranked as a top medical facility in the world. However, the standard of care in Israel is to perform a tracheostomy and then mandibular distraction, or lengthening of the jaw, later in life. This contrasts to the U.S., where mandibular distraction is often offered in the first few weeks of life with the goal of avoiding a tracheostomy.

At the urging of the baby’s parents, the medical center connected with Michael Markiewicz, DDS ’08, MD, MPH, professor and Feagans Endowed Chair of the Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, who is a leading expert in mandibular distraction.

A specialist in pediatric cranio-maxillofacial surgery who also serves as the clinical co-director of the Laurence C. Wright Craniofacial Center at John R. Oishei Children’s Hospital in Buffalo, and as an attending surgeon in the Department of Head and Neck/Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center, Markiewicz has performed the procedure numerous times locally and elsewhere.

The mandibular distraction procedure involves small cuts to the lower jaw and insertion of a device that lengthens the jaw up to three centimeters.

## 4 Grace De Souza named chair of restorative dentistry

BY SARAH SMYKOWSKI

**Grace De Souza, DDS, PhD**, has been named chair of the Department of Restorative Dentistry. She began in her role on Jan. 2, 2025. In addition to becoming the chair, she will also teach courses as a professor of comprehensive dentistry.



GRACE DE SOUZA, DDS, PHD

De Souza joins the UBSDM from the University of Louisville (UL) School of Dentistry, where she was a professor in the Department of Comprehensive Dentistry.

At UL, De Souza began as an associate professor in 2022 and was promoted to full professor in July 2024. Prior to her time at UL, she held various faculty positions spanning 11 years in the University of Toronto's Department of Clinical Sciences, Restorative Dentistry.

She earned a DDS, master's and PhD in comprehensive care/restorative dentistry from the State University of Campinas, Brazil. From 2004–05, she was a visiting scholar in NYU College of Dentistry's Department of Biomaterials and Biomimetics.

De Souza began her career in academic dentistry after several years of private practice and research. As a researcher, she focused on understanding the degradation process of biomaterials to improve patients' quality of care. Her current biomaterials research includes studies on the stability of 3D-printed dentures and the crystalline stability of zirconia.

She has also developed an interest in factors related to equity in dental education, academic dentistry and health care. She is the principal investigator of a federal grant focused on recruitment and retention of pediatric and primary care dental faculty to treat diverse and underserved populations in Kentucky.

As chair, De Souza will be responsible for the department's overall administration, financial stewardship, academic oversight and faculty development.

"We are thrilled to welcome Dr. De Souza to UB," said Marcelo Araujo, DDS, MS '99, PhD '03, dean of the dental school. "With her strong record of leadership, service and scholarly activity, I am confident she will drive the department's strategic priorities and work closely with me and other school administrators to pursue innovative academic, patient care and research programs. Her extensive experience coordinating courses related to all varieties of direct and indirect restorative procedures will be an asset in continuing the department's tradition of providing students and residents with excellent educational experiences."

De Souza is the immediate past president of the Women in Science Network of the International Association for Dental Research (WISN-IADR) and a member-at-large of the organization's Dental Materials Group. She was elected a fellow of the Academy of Dental Materials (ADM) in 2020 and a fellow of the American Association for Dental, Oral and Craniofacial Research (AADOCR) in 2023.

De Souza participated in the American Dental Education Association's (ADEA) Leadership Institute as part of the 2023–24 cohort. She sits on the editorial board of the Journal of Dental Research and is an associate editor of the Australian Dental Journal.

The Department of Restorative Dentistry is the largest of the dental school's seven academic departments. Latifa Bairam, BDS, Pros. Cert. '81, MS Oral Sci. '84, clinical associate professor, served as interim chair beginning in April 2024.

"We extend our deepest gratitude to Dr. Bairam for her leadership and service to the department," Araujo said. "She guided the department expertly during her interim position, and I know that it's in good hands going forward."

## 5 Implant center receives prestigious international recognition

BY LAURIE KAISER

**The Buhite-DiMino Center for Implant Dentistry and Advanced Dental Education** has been named an International Team for Implantology (ITI) international scholarship center. UB was selected as the ninth ITI scholarship center in the U.S. and the 35th globally.

Universities are chosen for their ability to provide insight into various aspects of implant treatment, encompassing evidence-based treatment approaches and a sense of responsibility and care toward patients. Each center hosts an ITI scholar who is an early-career dental practitioner and ITI member. UB will welcome its first scholar for the 2025–26 academic year.

Scholars will assist with treatment planning and supporting pre- and postdoctoral students in preparation for implant surgeries. They also will participate in lectures and treatment planning seminars and contribute to research in areas such as artificial intelligence and digital implant dentistry.

"This recognition...positions UB among the most distinguished international institutions in implant dentistry," said Ahmet Orgev, DDS, MSc, MSD, FACP, the implant center's clinical director and clinical associate professor. "Becoming a scholarship center will increase our international research collaboration opportunities, as well as opportunities to receive research grants." *Read the full story at [dental.buffalo.edu](https://dental.buffalo.edu).*



By Grove Potter

FROM LEFT: SCHOOL OF DENTAL MEDICINE DEAN MARCELO ARAUJO, DR. MIRDZA NEIDERS, AND UB PRESIDENT SATISH K. TRIPATHI. PHOTO BY HEATHER BELLINI, BELLINI STUDIOS.

## CELEBRATING A LEGACY:

# Dr. Mirdza Neiders receives Distinguished Alumni Award

Dr. Neiders maintained a deep commitment to training outstanding dental practitioners with a very special focus on opportunities for historically underrepresented groups.

**O**n Oct. 17, the university hosted the Alumni Achievement Awards Ceremony to honor 20 outstanding UB alumni. Mirdza Neiders, DDS, Perio Cert. '74, received the Distinguished Alumni Award for the School of Dental Medicine. Over her almost 60-year career at UB, Dr. Neiders left an indelible mark on thousands of students, faculty, staff and patients.

Neiders was born in Riga, Latvia, during World War II, when Latvia was occupied first by the Soviet Union and then by Nazi Germany. To escape the second occupation of the Soviet Union at the end of the war, Neiders and her family moved to the west and spent six years in the American occupation zone in Germany as a refugee in displaced person camps before emigrating to the U.S. in 1950.

After pre-dental training at Ohio State University, Neiders obtained a Doctor of Dental Surgery degree from the University of Michigan's dental school, when women were only 1–2% of the dental profession. She continued to the University of Chicago School of Medicine to earn a master's degree in experimental pathology.

Neiders moved to Buffalo to teach oral pathology at the UB School of Dental Medicine and became a diplomate of the American Board of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology. She also obtained a certificate in periodontics from UB. Neiders' research included a variety of topics including immunity, immunofluorescence, tissue response to implanted materials, cell adhesion and microbiology as related to periodontology. Her research has been supported by the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research and has resulted in close to 100 publications.

Neiders taught undergraduate dental students and was extensively involved in the certificate programs in oral and maxillofacial pathology as an administrator and as a course director. Neiders also served as a thesis supervisor for committee members for graduate and doctorate programs. She received numerous teaching awards, including being named a SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor in 2002. Over her career, she maintained a deep commitment to training outstanding dental practitioners with a very special focus on opportunities for historically underrepresented groups, women and international students.

She retired in 2021 and is now professor emeritus in the Department of Oral Diagnostic Sciences. As an alumna, she established the Dr. Mitzi Neiders Educational Fund in the departments of Periodontics and Endodontics and Oral Diagnostic Sciences to support training and research opportunities for women faculty members. Faculty who have received the funds have described it as a pivotal moment in their career and a transformational experience that has deepened their love for learning and teaching. [UBD](#)

To continue Dr. Neiders' legacy, consider making a gift to the **Dr. Mitzi Neiders Educational Fund**.







# SCHOLARSHIPS AND AWARDS PRESENTED TO 97 STUDENTS

ALL SMILES FOR SCHOLARSHIPS!  
THIS YEAR'S RECIPIENTS GATHER  
FOR A GROUP PHOTO AT THE ANNUAL  
AWARDS AND SCHOLARSHIP RECEPTION.  
PHOTO BY CASS MCALLISTER

BY GROVE POTTER

The generosity of donors and their desire to help current dental students was on display at the annual awards and scholarship reception on August 22. Ninety-seven students received a total of \$431,000 from 39 scholarships. The average award was \$4,443.

"It all helps," said Mary Bush, DDS '99, AEGD Cert. '00, associate dean for student affairs and associate professor in the Department of Restorative Dentistry. "Being a dental student is a full-time job. It's very hard for our students to work outside of school, so they are relying on family help or financial aid."

Recipients, who were from every class year, had to apply for each specific scholarship, which included writing essays. The winners were recognized for their academic performance, commitment to public service and involvement in the school.

Although the UB School of Dental Medicine is an exceptional value, particularly when compared with private institutions, students can still graduate with an average debt of \$390,000, said Matt Blum, senior director of student services. With that in mind, the importance of the scholarships becomes even clearer, he said.

Neil Dengler, senior director of advancement, said many of the scholarship funds are established in honor of graduates, professors or former students. Oftentimes a family member will establish a fund in the name of a family member in the dental profession.

"Some of the funds go back a long way," he said. "Others are more recent."

For example, the Rosenthal Family Fund Scholarship, created by 1963 graduate Murray Rosenthal, is given to a second-, third- and fourth-year dental student who ranks in the top half of the class and who exhibits a positive attitude, strong work ethic toward dental school education, and commitment to public health initiatives. Rosenthal, who has been funding the award for 25 years, has left money in his will to establish the scholarship in perpetuity.

Another fund was set up in the name of former student Tedman McMahon who passed away six years ago while in school. A classmate, Amir Karimi, DDS '19, established the fund and continues to seek contributions from classmates.

"There are stories behind every scholarship," Dengler said.

Due to the costs associated with setting up a scholarship fund, the school has set a minimum of \$100,000 to start one. With a fund earning about 4% a year, that would yield a \$4,000 annual award. "And it grows over time," Dengler said.

Regardless of the scholarship size, each one is vitally important to every student recipient. **UBD**

## INTERESTED IN ESTABLISHING A SCHOLARSHIP?

Anyone considering setting up a scholarship at the dental school can contact Neil Dengler, senior director of advancement, by calling 716-881-7486 or via email at [ndengler@buffalo.edu](mailto:ndengler@buffalo.edu).

# A BOLD VISION FOR THE FUTURE:

*Dental School Launches Five-Year Strategic Plan*

BY EDWARD MORRISON & SARAH SMYKOWSKI

PHOTOS BY DOUGLAS LEVERE & CASS MCALLISTER

**T**HE UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO SCHOOL OF DENTAL MEDICINE IS CHARTING AN AMBITIOUS PATH FORWARD with a five-year strategic plan that promises to redefine excellence in oral health education, research and clinical care. This transformative plan results from a 12-month collaborative effort that engaged a broad spectrum of stakeholders, from faculty and staff to students and alumni, to shape a shared vision for the school's future.

Guided by four strategic imperatives—people, innovation, education and community—the plan reflects a dynamic and inclusive approach to achieving a lasting impact and advancing the school.

“This strategic plan is more than a roadmap. It’s our commitment to shaping the future,” says **Dean Marcelo Araujo, DDS, MS '99, PhD '03**, “It aligns with President Tripathi’s vision for the

university and ensures we remain at the forefront of oral health care research and education.”

The planning process began with the development of a new mission, vision, and core values that proudly embody the school’s purpose and aspirations. These foundational elements served as the compass for every aspect of the plan, ensuring it remains rooted in the principles of belonging, respect, mentorship, discovery, inclusion and excellence.

## **Building on Strengths, Driven by PEOPLE**

People are at the heart of the strategic plan—a recognition that the strength of the school lies in its community of faculty, staff, students and community partners.

“Everything we do begins with people,” Araujo emphasizes. “From recruiting and retaining exceptional talent to fostering a patient-centered

DEAN MARCELO ARAUJO





— MISSION & VISION —

THE UB SCHOOL OF DENTAL MEDICINE'S **VISION** IS TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF ORAL HEALTH THROUGH **RESEARCH, EDUCATION** AND **CLINICAL CARE**, WHILE REMAINING DEEPLY COMMITTED TO OUR **MISSION** TO CREATE AN **INCLUSIVE AND DIVERSE ENVIRONMENT**, FOSTERING RESEARCH AND CLINICAL TRAINING TO **IMPROVE ORAL HEALTH IN OUR OWN COMMUNITY AND THE WORLD.**



Our plan, inspired by an iconic symbol of the university, prioritizes four strategic imperatives, each with aspirational goals that measure success.

“Bringing innovation into teaching and research will advance how we educate students and treat the communities we serve.”

Dean Marcelo Araujo

environment, our focus is on creating an inclusive and supportive culture where everyone thrives.”

“Since 2023, we’ve hired 33 faculty, between full- and part-time, both in tenure and clinical-track positions, with more anticipated to join us in the coming months. We have also increased the number of well-trained clinical and operations staff. These individuals bring new expertise and knowledge that directly contribute to the school’s academic goals.”

This strategic imperative aims to enhance professional development opportunities, foster transparency, and build a culture of collaboration and accountability. By prioritizing the well-being and growth of its community, the school ensures better patient care, professional development, recruitment and retention, and enriched educational experiences.

### Driving Discovery and INNOVATION

A central tenet of the strategic plan is innovation, positioning UB as a leader in cutting-edge research, teaching and clinical practices.

“Bringing innovation into teaching and research will advance how we educate students and treat the communities we serve,” says Araujo.

Key initiatives include integrating artificial intelligence and digital dentistry into clinical and educational settings and adopting advanced assessment models like the Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE). Additionally, the school’s focus on clinical translational research

ensures discoveries lead to real-world benefits for practitioners, patients and the broader profession.

These efforts align with the university’s ambition to rank among the Top 25 public research institutions and build upon the dental school’s reputation for excellence.

### Reimagining EDUCATION

Education remains at the center of the dental school’s mission, with the strategic plan emphasizing the need to adapt to the changing landscape of oral health education and clinical care.

“We are committed to equipping our graduates with the skills and knowledge they need to excel as professionals,” Araujo explains.

The plan includes achieving successful accreditation in 2025, then revising the curriculum to reflect evolving CODA standards and innovations in oral health education. By doing so, the school ensures its graduates are future-ready and prepared for impactful careers.

### A COMMUNITY-Centered Vision

Extending its mission beyond the campus, the dental school is committed to improving oral health within its own community and the world.

“We are here for the communities we serve,” Dean Araujo asserts. “Everything we do is about giving back, whether to patients, students or the wider community.”

The goals within this strategic imperative



VALUES

RESPECT &  
INTEGRITY  
BELONGING  
MENTORSHIP  
EXCELLENCE  
DISCOVERY & INNOVATION



A BOLD VISION FOR THE FUTURE

include delivering exceptional patient care, addressing health inequities through outreach initiatives, and fostering stronger relationships with alumni and community partners to create lasting impact.

### Turning Vision into ACTION

The strategic plan is not just aspirational; it's actionable. Each goal is tied to measurable tasks and metrics, ensuring accountability and progress.

“Transparency and communication are critical to driving change,” Araujo notes. “When people understand the vision and their role in it, they feel empowered to be part of something greater.”

### A Future Full of PROMISE

With the plan now launched, the school celebrates its progress and looks to the future with optimism. The focus on people, innovation, education, and community ensures UB's School of Dental Medicine will continue to lead globally in dental education and oral health care.

“Our plan is ambitious, but so is our vision,” says Araujo. “Together, we are building a legacy of excellence that will shape oral health care for generations to come.” **UBD**

# 5-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN



PEOPLE



INNOVATION



EDUCATION



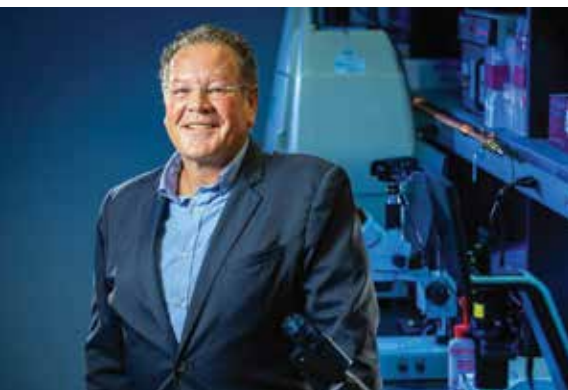
COMMUNITY

The focus on people, innovation, education, and community ensures UB's School of Dental Medicine will continue to lead globally in dental education and oral health care.

## researchinfocus

### Dental school receives \$7.38 million NIH grant to develop germ-free microbiome research facility

Center will provide for groundbreaking work open to researchers across disciplines



DR. KEITH KIRKWOOD IS THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR OVERSEEING THE DEVELOPMENT AND RENOVATION OF UB'S NEW MICROBIOME RESEARCH FACILITY. PHOTO BY DOUGLAS LEVERE

BY LAURIE KAISER

**T**HE SCHOOL OF DENTAL MEDICINE has received a \$7.38 million grant from the Office of Research Infrastructure Programs (ORIP) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to create a new microbiome research facility.

Called the UB Microbiome Center Gnotobiotic Animal Research Facility, it will train scientists in how to use gnotobiotic (germ-free) mice for research and provide a safe and effective space for ongoing research into the oral microbiome. By studying the oral microbiome in depth, researchers can better understand systemic diseases.

"The human mouth hosts a vast number of microorganisms—more than 700 different species. The effects of the oral microbiome on human health and pathology have become increasingly clear over the past two decades," said Keith Kirkwood, DDS, Perio. Cert. '95, PhD Oral Biology '97, senior associate dean for research and Centennial Endowed Professor in the Department of Oral Biology,

who is the principal investigator overseeing the renovation of the facility.

"The oral microbiome has been associated with systemic diseases ranging from inflammatory bowel disease and colon cancer to osteoporosis and heart disease," Kirkwood explained. "Studying mice in a germ-free environment will enable us to understand how to more effectively treat and, hopefully, move closer to cures for these often-intractable diseases."

#### SERVING AS A REGIONAL FACILITY

The NIH research grant marks one of only a handful of this type and amount awarded to a U.S. dental school. Operational within five years, the facility will serve as the only one of its kind in the region and will be accessible to research teams throughout UB, including the School of Dental Medicine, the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, all other basic sciences and health sciences units at UB, along with Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center and other regional universities.

"Receiving an NIH grant of this magnitude speaks to UB's reputation as one of the top research universities in the country and also to the dental school's commitment to cutting-edge research," said Marcelo Araujo, DDS, MS '99, PhD '03, dean of the dental school. "It will enable us to work closely with other disciplines across the university, as well as our community partners and other universities."

#### HONORING 'FATHER OF ORAL SCIENCE'

The UB facility will build upon the capacities of the current Microbiome Center, which was established in 2012 by Robert J. Genco, SUNY Distinguished Professor of Oral Biology, Periodontics and Microbiology, who passed away in March 2019.

Lauded as the "father of oral science," Genco was widely considered the world's leading periodontal disease researcher and a pioneer in advancing the understanding of oral health's impact on overall health, Kirkwood noted. This new center will serve as a tribute to him.

Since 2020, the Microbiome Center has been directed by Patricia Diaz, DDS, MS, PhD, SUNY Empire Innovation Professor in

the dental school and the Sunstar Robert J. Genco Endowed Chair. She and her team of researchers have been investigating the interactions between the oral microbiome and systemic disease. Currently, the center has three research focuses: oral-systemic diseases, bacterial pathogenesis and microbial-associated cancer biology.

#### IMPORTANCE OF A GERM-FREE FACILITY

The new facility will be a self-contained space with no bacteria or viruses. To study these microbes effectively, researchers prefer to use gnotobiotic animal models. If raised in a controlled environment where their microbial exposure is managed, the mice allow scientists to understand how different bacteria impact health in a more reliable way.

"The gnotobiotic facility would be transformative to these investigations, allowing the interrogation of host-pathogen interactions in wild-type and genetically modified, germ-free animal models," Kirkwood said.

UB is planning the facility in consultation with architectural and engineering firms with extensive experience in biomedical laboratory design and green design principles. Construction is expected to begin in 2026.

"When the facility is up and running, it will serve as a unique training ground for the next generation of scientists," Kirkwood said. "Having access to this type of research will make them very competitive in their careers."

"When I think of this center, what comes to mind is the famous saying from 'Field of Dreams': Build it and they will come," Kirkwood said. "This facility will attract top-notch researchers from across the region and lead to crucial discoveries. In addition, its ability to move us into a new level of research would contribute to UB's ambition to become one of the Top 25 public research universities in the country."

*The project reported in this news release was supported by NIH/ORIP under the Grant Number 1C06OD037771. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of NIH.*

*The original article has been edited for length. Read the full story at [dental.buffalo.edu](http://dental.buffalo.edu).*

## Oral biology, biochemistry professors receive \$2.2 million grant to find ways to repair salivary glands



ROSE-ANNE ROMANO, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ORAL BIOLOGY



SATRAJIT SINHA, PROFESSOR OF BIOCHEMISTRY

BY LAURIE KAISER

**R**ADIATION THERAPY, a common treatment for some oral cancers, can leave a patient's salivary glands so damaged that even talking is difficult. Meanwhile, diseases such as Sjögren's, which eradicates moisture from many of the body's glands, can compromise the amount of saliva created in the mouth and also hamper speech and swallowing.

"Imagine shoving 10 crackers in your mouth and trying to speak. You can't," explained Rose-Anne Romano, PhD '08, associate professor of oral biology at the University at Buffalo's School of Dental Medicine. "That is what life is like for patients with salivary gland dysfunction."

Through a \$2.2 million, five-year grant renewal from the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR) within the National Institutes of Health, Romano is hoping to help alleviate suffering for such patients. Her co-principal investigator for the renewal grant is Satrajit Sinha, PhD, professor in the Department of Biochemistry in the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at UB.

Through the project, "Regulatory mechanisms that dictate stem and differentiated cell populations of the salivary gland," they aim to understand how salivary glands develop, maintain and repair themselves after injury or from diseased states.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF CERTAIN PROTEINS

With this new grant, the researchers are primarily focusing on p63, a protein that regulates many cell activities. Specifically, they're examining a version of p63 known as Delta Np63, which is crucial for the development and maintenance of salivary glands.

"Both of our labs have been at the forefront of studying p63 and have generated mouse models which have shown, that in the absence of p63, specifically the DeltaN variant, many organs and tissues such as the salivary glands fail to form," Sinha said. "Under-

standing fundamental gene control mechanisms that direct tissue development and maturation will allow us to better treat human diseases where the organ—the salivary gland in this case—does not work efficiently."

These processes involve stem or progenitor cells, which can renew themselves, or divide and become different types of cells needed for the gland to function, Romano explained.

"With the first grant, we were trying to understand if p63 is actually a stem cell marker and how p63 positive cells contributed to salivary gland development," Romano said. "If it's a stem cell, it's got to give rise to the different cell types that make up the salivary gland. These cells survive about 180 days and then die, yet most people have an endless supply of saliva. This is because of stem cells and their role in the regeneration process. However, we still don't know how this process occurs in the salivary gland."

### BRANCHING MORPHOGENESIS AND REJUVENATION

In the second phase of this research, Romano and Sinha, with help from a handful of lab researchers and students, are trying to identify the other players in this process that help p63 do primarily what it needs to do, i.e., turn important genes on or off.

They also are studying the role of p63 in branching morphogenesis.

"Salivary glands are like mammary glands with all the associated branches," she explained. "Mammary glands continuously produce milk during lactation. Their branched structures provide the increased surface area needed for producing large amounts of milk. In this respect, the salivary gland is no different except for the production of saliva."

Sinha said that they hope that by learning about branching, they can biomedically engineer organs, such as the salivary gland.

By the end of the five-year project, Romano and Sinha will conduct a comprehensive analysis to figure out how p63 and its targets and co-regulators influence the signaling network in the salivary gland.

"This work is innovative because our use of sophisticated technologies to examine genomic and epigenetic mechanisms of gene regulation will lead to new discoveries into salivary gland organogenesis and regeneration," Romano said.

The hope is to eventually implement these processes in human trials.

"Long term, we hope that our studies with the NIH-funded grant will facilitate better design and fabrication of bioengineered glands and stem cell replacement therapies," Sinha said. "We hope this becomes a reality within the next five to 10 years."

*Research reported in this publication was supported by the National Institute Of Dental and Craniofacial Research of the National Institutes of Health under Award Number R01DE027660.*

*This story has been edited for length. Read the full story at [dental.buffalo.edu](http://dental.buffalo.edu).*

## Can AI advance periodontic treatment?

Dr. Nathalia Paiva de Andrade discusses AI's potential to transform clinical care and education.



DR. ANDRADE IS WORKING WITH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO TRANSFORM PERIODONTAL AND DENTAL CARE. PHOTO BY DOUGLAS LEVERE

BY LAURIE KAISER

In fall 2023, **Nathalia P. Andrade**, DDS, MSc, PhD, clinical assistant professor in the Department of Periodontics and Endodontics, was awarded a \$5,000 seed grant from the UB Office of Curriculum, Assessment and Teaching Transformation to create a new course weaving AI into periodontics.

Andrade, who started studying AI while completing her residency, published an article in the March 2022 issue of *Clinical Advances in Periodontics* about successfully using AI in a procedure to lengthen teeth shortened over time or because of teeth malposition, which causes the gums to be more exposed. "Dual Digitally Guided Crown Lengthening in Esthetic Area Compromised by Disharmonic Implant Crown," ranked as a top-cited paper for the publication.

Andrade recently weighed in on how AI is transforming periodontics and how dental students at UB are using it.

### What is the focus of your AI research?

AI can be used in three different stages of care: diagnosis, treatment and maintenance. My work is mainly focused on diagnosis and treatment, such as the procedure on lengthening crowns. With AI, we precisely know where to cut the gum and where to remove the bone behind it. When you go free hand, it's hard to get the measurements right.

### How does the guide work?

For the crown lengthening procedure, for example, we use AI to determine how the smile will look after the procedure. Once the patient signs off, we create a guide for the exact position where we need to cut. We print it and put it in the patient's mouth. When doing an implant with a patient, a guide can show us the correct position and angulation of the implant. It's helpful in cases with multiple implants.

### What are other ways that AI aids in periodontic care?

It can highlight the treatments that the patient most likely needs by the X-rays, periodontal chart and the information that's in the patient's record. It can also tell you if the patient is missing a treatment or is due for a cleaning.

AI can also help diagnose a patient quicker and more accurately. For example, when an X-ray indicates a problem, there are a lot of variables. One clinician can look at the image and say, "There's 50% bone loss," while another clinician will say, "No, for me, it looks like 60%."

I think AI is going to help us create a standard that will be the same for everybody.

### What are some of the main points you're teaching students about using AI?

My main goal is to teach students to use critical thinking while using AI tools. It is a technology in development and can make mistakes. Different procedures have different kinds of mistakes; we have to explore them so that we teach the machine how to do the procedures properly in the future.

### Talk about the new course and how you used the seed grant to fund it.

The course is designed to supplement the clinical experiences of students in postgraduate programs in 3D surgical digital planning, microscope surgery and AI as applied to periodontics.

With the seed funding, I brought in experts from other schools who taught different aspects of AI. They also worked with me on how to apply AI techniques on a larger scale and how to handle HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996) regulations.

### How do you think the course went overall?

I was very happy with it. I initially planned for 11 periodontic residents, but in the end, about 25 residents from other dental programs, as well as periodontics faculty, observed the class. I see students using AI now. They're digitally planning the surgical periodontal cases of real patients, using it for crown lengthening procedures, advanced bone graft cases—like a sinus lift—and implant placement.

### When will the AI course be offered going forward?

We plan to offer the course every other spring. The activities and access to new software and intraoral scanners are expensive. So, we will look for solutions and support to have it available to the students more often. The students indicated in the survey that they would like to learn more procedures using AI-software. I also would like to introduce the AI-based software to dental students by adding this component to the periodontal course they already take and focus more on the diagnosis of the patient and risk assessment.

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*This interview has been edited for length.*



## Dental student honors retired professor battling cancer during Empire State Ride

BY LAURIE KAISER

When Hurricane Ida hit Mamaroneck, New York, in 2021 and flooded her family's vehicles, Emily Genovesi, a recent college graduate, still needed to get to her waitressing job. So, she hopped on her mom's vintage road bike and never looked back.

That industrious decision bloomed into a passion for the now third-year dental student. Last summer, she participated in the Ride for Roswell and the Empire State Ride, both fundraisers supporting research and clinical trials at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center and across the globe.

Genovesi completed the latter, a week-long, 560-mile ride from Staten Island to Niagara Falls, with a specific purpose: to honor David Brown, DDS '83, emeritus clinical assistant professor of restorative dentistry and former director of

admissions for the dental school, who is fighting a long battle with head and neck cancer.

"Dr. Brown had already retired when I came to UB," Genovesi said, "but I knew he was someone I needed to meet."

"When I reached out to Dr. Brown...he talked about his journey into dentistry and his passion for teaching. He also shared memories of teaching students to perform thorough head and neck examinations during routine oral cancer screenings. As a cancer survivor, Dr. Brown made it his mission to show people how to do proper examinations in the clinic and possibly save lives," said Genovesi.

### RECORD FUNDRAISING IN 2024

Genovesi and Brown joined up for a ride around Grand Island, and Brown encouraged

Genovesi to train for the Empire State Ride. She followed his advice and participated in last summer's 10th anniversary ride.

While Brown wasn't able to participate, he did attend a special event mid-week dedicated to alumni of the event. "They had a session where participants submitted photos of people who inspired their ride," Genovesi said. "It was an emotional night for everyone."

"The teamwork required in cycling has made me better at communicating with both my colleagues and patients."

EMILY GENOVESI

### RECORD FUNDRAISING IN 2024

To participate in the Empire State Ride, cyclists must pay a \$200 registration fee and raise at least \$3,500. Genovesi approached several businesses related to dentistry, including Q-optics, Ivoclar, and KaVo Dental, as well as local small businesses, for donations totaling more than \$4,500. Overall, Empire State Ride participants raised a record \$2.2 million.

Genovesi said her favorite pastime has definitely informed her approach to dentistry. "The focus I use during long rides translates into balancing coursework and patient care," she said. "Plus, the teamwork required in cycling has made me better at communicating with both my colleagues and patients."

EMILY GENOVESI, THIS PAST JULY, CELEBRATING THE COMPLETION OF HER RIDE AT NIAGARA FALLS, NY. INSET: DR. DAVID BROWN AND EMILY GENOVESI. PHOTOS COURTESY OF EMILY GENOVESI



## At age 82, UB professor still helping to launch orthodontic residents into careers

ORTHODONTICS DEPARTMENT CREATES AWARD IN STEPHEN ASZKLER'S NAME, CELEBRATING SERVICE AND COMMITMENT

BY LAURIE KAISER

When Stephen Aszkler, DDS '69, Ortho Cert. '73, opened his Orchard Park orthodontics practice in 1973, metal braces were wrapped around each individual tooth, X-rays were developed in darkrooms, and few adults opted for orthodontic treatment.

Today, in the era of ceramic brackets, clear braces, digitized scans, and a whopping 27% of U.S. orthodontic patients being voting age or older, Aszkler not only keeps up with the changes, but he also passes along his expertise to future generations of orthodontists at the University at Buffalo. He joined the UB School of Dental Medicine in 2008 as a volunteer faculty member in the Department of Orthodontics and officially became a clinical assistant professor in 2010. Now, at 82, Aszkler is still teaching two days a week in Squire Hall on South Campus.

In June, the Department of Orthodontics honored Aszkler for his commitment to its residents and exemplary service to the department with the inaugural S. Aszkler Distinguished Service Award. The department presented the award to Aszkler during a graduating ceremony for third-year orthodontic residents.



STEPHEN ASZKLER HAS BEEN TEACHING IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ORTHODONTICS SINCE THE LATE 2000S. PHOTO BY DOUGLAS LEVERE.

"Stephen Aszkler is always supportive of our residents," said Thikriat Al-Jewair, DDS '21, Ortho. Cert. '12, MS Ortho. '13, the L.B. Badgero Endowed Chair and associate professor in the orthodontics department. "Even after graduating and establishing their own practices, our alumni consistently seek his advice on patient management and practice operations."

The goal of the award is to recognize outstanding service and commitment to the department and the community, Al-Jewair said, adding that the department intends to present the award every year going forward to a UB faculty member or alumnus with a specialty in orthodontics.

### ALWAYS WILLING TO HELP

Aszkler said it was an honor to be recognized by the department and dental school.

"I will try to uphold my end of the bargain," he said with a smile. "I came to UB to make our residents more confident and capable when they leave. My main goal is for them to have a successful practice."

Al-Jewair has seen that desire put into action with Aszkler's cheerful interaction with the residents and willingness to assist his colleagues.

"It's stimulating to be around young people and work in the dental school. Like Vikings, who died with their swords in hand and their boots on, I want to die with my latex gloves and mask on."

STEPHEN ASZKLER

"We're humbled and honored that he continues to work with our residents sharing his valuable clinical techniques," Al-Jewair said,

Although most of his contemporaries have retired, Aszkler said he isn't planning to slow down any time soon.

"It's stimulating to be around young people and work in the dental school," he said. "Like Vikings, who died with their swords in hand and their boots on, I want to die with my latex gloves and mask on."

## UBSDM welcomes first students from Destination Dental School program



FROM LEFT: SEFA GOCMEZ, LATONYA PLUMMER AND RHIANNA JACK, DESTINATION DENTAL SCHOOL PROGRAM GRADUATES AND FIRST-YEAR DENTAL STUDENTS

BY GROVE POTTER

In 2024, the UBSDM achieved a record-high number of applications. Among the 95 students who earned a spot in the competitive fall 2024 class are three graduates of Destination Dental School, the UBSDM's award-winning pathway program.

"We're thrilled to welcome three Destination Dental School alumni to the UBSDM," said Simone Duarte, DDS, MS, PhD, associate dean for faculty affairs, equity, diversity and inclusion. "Their success and the program are direct byproducts of the mission and values of our school and the university."

Rhianna Jack (2021), Sefa Gocmez (2022) and Latonya Plummer (2023) come from different backgrounds, but all picked UB as their dental school home.

Gocmez, a native of Turkey who came to the U.S. when he was 11, said he was attracted to dentistry after watching his brother struggle to get dental care. He credits Destination Dental School with helping him navigate the dental school application process.

"My experience in the program was excellent. Everyone was incredibly helpful, assisting us in preparing for dental school and guiding us through the application process and the DAT," he said.

The program includes five weeks of online lectures and a sixth week of in-person training on campus. Graduates receive DAT prep resources, reimbursement for a DAT and a waived application fee to the UBSDM.

Plummer, a native of North Buffalo and City Honors graduate, noted that growing

up as an African American female in a majority white neighborhood and high school, she did not think a career as a doctor or lawyer was obtainable. When she experienced a dental emergency, she realized she wanted to help alleviate patient pain.

She applied to Destination Dental School to "learn from other minorities who loved dentistry and who have gone through the process and succeeded."

"There have been multiple times throughout my journey where I felt isolated," she said. "However, [through] Destination Dental School...I felt empowered to continue my journey. By the end of the program, I was inspired to finally submit my application."

For Jack, a Brooklyn native who was raised on the Caribbean island St. Vincent and the Grenadines, dentistry became a goal after she got braces.

"I got my braces when I was 11 and initially, I wasn't the best patient. I was scared and I didn't know what to expect," she said. "I ended up looking forward to my appointments and I didn't want my braces off when it was time because I enjoyed having them. I owe this change of heart to the team that worked with me."

All three students concur that the Destination Dental School program influenced them to attend the UBSDM.

For Plummer, who attended Northeastern University in Boston and never planned to return to Buffalo, the week spent at the dental school changed that. "On that first day of Destination Dental

School when we went outside for lunch and I walked UB dental's campus, I felt right at home," she said. "That's when I knew I was where I belonged."

Jack was inspired by the dental students she met. "I think a lot of it had to do with the testimonies from the students," she said. "They had nothing but praise for the school."

Gocmez was similarly impressed. "I appreciated the school, faculty, and fellow students," he said. "I enjoyed the area and the facilities, especially the clinical settings and the improved technology."

All three students concur that the Destination Dental School program influenced them to attend the UBSDM.

Thus far, Destination Dental School has graduated 115 fellows representing 32 states and territories and 73 colleges and universities. In August 2024, over 70 alums responded to an annual outcomes survey. Of the respondents, 97% are still pursuing a career in dentistry, 51% had taken the DAT and 39% had applied to dental school. Of those who applied, 60% were either accepted or enrolled in schools across the country, including UB.

Visit [dental.buffalo.edu/destination-dentalschool](https://dental.buffalo.edu/destination-dentalschool) for information on the 2025 application cycle and program.



# BNDM 2024

## Celebrating Tradition, Innovation and Connection in Dentistry

BY JOSEPH RUMFOLA, DDS '02, AEGD CERT. '03

**W**HILE THIS YEAR'S BUFFALO NIAGARA DENTAL MEETING marked its 47th iteration, the 2024 meeting, held Nov. 6-8, was the first with the UB Dental Alumni Association under the umbrella of the UB Alumni Association.

In an era of declining attendance and decreased sponsorship, many dental meetings have gone the way of the landline. Yet, the BNDM bucks the trend, with over 2,000 dental professionals coming together to celebrate dentistry, make connections and learn from the best and brightest.

The BNDM welcomed attendees at the Buffalo Convention Center on Wednesday evening for the usual required courses: infection control, risk management, BLS certification and the newly mandated Child Abuse Identification and Reporting. These were followed by the Smile in the Aisle party on the exhibit floor, with food and drinks sponsored by Vital Dental Laboratory

and entertainment provided by Central Groove, Western New York's favorite dentist band featuring all UB dental alumni.

Shuttle buses sponsored by Patterson Dental were out early Thursday morning to carry attendees from the free parking area at Buffalo Riverworks to the convention center, where they could enjoy complimentary coffee, tea and refreshments on the exhibit floor or head right to a continuing education course. Nine speakers shared insights on topics including dental hygiene, TMD, dental insurance, pediatric dentistry, and appropriately, Dr. Arthur Tomaro discussed the future of dentistry: digital workflow and artificial intelligence. Over 70 exhibitors were eager to share their products and services throughout the day and welcomed attendees back to the exhibit floor for a happy hour sponsored by WNY Dental Group to wrap up the day.

The Hyatt Regency Atrium greeted reunion classes for the Remember When Reception on Thursday evening. Vital Dental Laboratory sponsored this event as well, and alumni enjoyed the atmosphere, libations and opportunity to reminisce.



Friday featured CE and a busy exhibit floor. Twelve speakers, several of whom are graduates of the UBSDM, educated attendees on a wide array of topics. The Robert J. Genco Distinguished Speaker, Effie Ioannidou, DDS, MDS, discussed the evidenced-based oral-systemic connections, and the Department of Oral Diagnostic Sciences shared their perspectives on 30 years of excellence at UB. Specialists taught about endodontics and the latest in clear aligner orthodontics. Dental hygienists and assistants had opportunities to learn from colleagues, and the ballroom speaker discussed the timely topic of fighting the mental health and wellness crisis within the profession. Dedicated Major Sponsors, Ivoclar and MLMIC Insurance Company, exhibitors, and individual speaker sponsors helped provide great value for all who attended.

The annual Reunion Dinner Dance was held at the Buffalo Convention Center Ballroom, where alumni enjoyed the large foyer that made for pleasant conversation space while drinks and hors d'oeuvres were served prior to dinner. The program honored the five-year classes with special recognition of the

50-year class of 1974 as well as the Distinguished Service Award recipient, Brendan Dowd, DDS '86, and the Honor Award recipient, Marshall Fagin, DDS '70.

The UB Dental Alumni Association welcomed guests from the UB Medical Alumni Association. They were impressed by the size, efficiency and careful planning of the Buffalo Niagara Dental Meeting.

In the future, the UB Dental Alumni Association looks forward to its partnership with the University at Buffalo Alumni Association. Kudos to the sponsors and UB Dental Alumni Association's executive council, but especially to Sherry Szarowski, the meeting coordinator, and her administrative assistant, Mariah Troidl, for their dedication to arranging a world-class event right in our backyard.





AWARD RECIPIENT

**Distinguished Service Award**

**Brendan P. Dowd, DDS '86**

The Distinguished Service Award is given in recognition of outstanding leadership, advocacy and support to the dental profession, the UB School of Dental Medicine and the Alumni Association. This year, the award was given to Dr. Brendan Dowd.

Dr. Dowd completed his postgraduate residency in general dentistry at New York Hospital-Cornell Medical. Dr. Dowd then moved back to Buffalo, joining a practice in the Town of Niagara. He eventually purchased the practice, which he ran for 25 years.

Dr. Dowd joined the UBSDM's Department of Restorative Dentistry in 2007. He served as a group director and a senior group director. Dr. Dowd was the assistant dean of clinical operations for almost two years. Today, he teaches at the school two days a week and is in his tenth year as course director of Introduction to the Profession for first-year students.

Dr. Dowd is very active in organized dentistry. He went through the chairs of the Eighth District Dental Society, serving as president in 2012. He was the president of the New York State Dental Association from 2018-19. In 2019, the NYSDA elected him to be its representative on the ADA's Board of Trustees, a seat he currently holds. He was



instrumental in developing NYSDA's Dental Demonstration Project, which provides care to underserved individuals. Dr. Dowd has participated in the UBSDM's annual Dentistry Smiles on Veterans Program and has donated his time to the American Red Cross, serving as chair of the Niagara Falls chapter.

## AWARD RECIPIENT

## Honor Award



## Celebrating 30 Years of Innovation and Leadership in Oral Diagnostic Sciences

BY SARAH SMYKOWSKI

**T**he Department of Oral Diagnostic Sciences (ODS) celebrated its 30-year anniversary in 2024, a milestone that highlights decades of vision, innovation and excellence. Founded by the late Norman Mohl, DDS '56, the department was innovative for its time, emerging as a groundbreaking integration of biological, behavioral and clinical sciences. Mohl championed initiatives such as the oral sciences master's program and faculty development programs, fostering a congenial and collaborative culture that continues to define the department.

Subsequent department chairs, including Mirdza Neiders, DDS, Perio. Cert. '74, Scott McCall, PhD, Heidi Crow, DMD, PhD, MS Oral Sciences '91, TMD Cert. '91, Yoly Gonzalez-Stucker, DDS '05, MS Oral Sciences '95, TMD Cert. '96, Perio. Cert. '02, have built upon Mohl's legacy. Over 30 years, the department has gained prominence in radiology, forensic dentistry and special needs dentistry and maintained its worldwide recognition in the fields of orofacial pain and oral and maxillofacial pathology.

The department celebrated 30 years of excellence at the recent Buffalo Niagara Dental Meeting with a well-attended presentation given by its faculty experts. As ODS reflects on its three decades, the department's transformative contributions to oral health education and clinical research and practice continue to inspire the next generation of oral health leaders.

ABOVE: PAST AND PRESENT MEMBERS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ORAL DIAGNOSTIC SCIENCES CAME TOGETHER AT THE BUFFALO NIAGARA DENTAL MEETING TO CELEBRATE 30 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE IN THE DEPARTMENT.



## Marshall D. Fagin, DDS '70

The Honor Award, the highest honor the Dental Alumni Association bestows, is given to an individual whose enthusiastic and untiring endeavors have helped to promote the continued growth, development and success of the UB School of Dental Medicine. This year, the award was given to Dr. Marshall Fagin in recognition of his passion, enthusiasm and untiring commitment to the school.

Dr. Fagin, a prosthodontist and part-time associate professor in the UBSDM, has been an international lecturer and educator at UB for over 50 years, a milestone he achieved in 2024. He was instrumental in the establishment of implant education at the school. Dr. Fagin also established two foundations at the UBSDM, one for creating a modern dental lab in the new graduate prosthodontic clinic and another for providing an annual award for a graduating D4 student entering the prosthodontic program.

Dr. Fagin has shared his expertise widely through teaching and lecturing at dental schools, implant study clubs and dental laboratories across the country. He was named one of the "Best Dentists in America" by his colleagues, cited in "Top Dentists" for many years, and was named a Global "Who's Who Man of the Year" by Dental Health. In 2023, Dr. Fagin received the Erie County Dental Society's most coveted award, the Frank Stone Award, for his many years of contributions to dental education and organized dentistry. In 2024, the Eighth District Dental Society named its spring all-day continuing education event the Dr. Marshall Fagin Annual Spring Lecture.

# UBDAA REUNION DINNER DANCE 2024

FRIDAY, NOV. 8  
BUFFALO CONVENTION CENTER BALLROOM



UB Dental Alumni Association Executive Council



## Celebrating 60+ Years of Reunions





# REMEMBER WHEN RECEPTION 2024

THURSDAY, NOV. 7  
HYATT REGENCY ATRIUM





STUDENTS RECITE THE DENTIST'S PLEDGE IN UNISON DURING THE CLASS OF 2028 WHITE COAT CEREMONY. PHOTOS BY HEATHER BELLINI PHOTOGRAPHY

“When we place the white coat on your shoulders, you take on the enormous responsibility of upholding the standards of our profession and carrying it into the future.”  
—DEAN MARCELO ARAUJO

## Dental school welcomes CLASS OF 2028

WHITE COAT CEREMONY MARKS THE BEGINNING OF DENTAL SCHOOL JOURNEY

BY SARAH SMYKOWSKI

**O**N AUG. 9, the School of Dental Medicine held the White Coat Ceremony for 95 students in the Class of 2028, welcoming them into the Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS) program and as future oral health professionals.

The White Coat Ceremony is an annual rite of passage for incoming students that marks the beginning of their dental school journey. Students are presented with a white coat, a symbol of clinical service and care, and recite the dentist's pledge in unison.

Donning their coats for the first time, the students pledge to sustain the honor and integrity of the profession, earn the public's respect and confidence, and to accept their patients' oral health as their primary responsibility—qualities every dental professional must exhibit throughout their career.

“When we place the white coat on your shoulders, you take on the enormous responsibility of upholding the standards of our profession and carrying it into the future,” Dean Marcelo Araujo DDS, MS '99, PhD '03, told the audience during his opening remarks.

“I have no doubt you will do all of this and more.”

Nearly 2,400 students applied for 95 spots in the class, the most competitive applicant pool in

the school's history. Mary Bush, DDS '99, AEGD Cert. '00, associate dean for student affairs and associate professor, noted the class's unique attributes in her ceremony address.

The Class of 2028 hails from 11 different states and were born in 18 countries, including Poland, Haiti and Nepal. They speak 23 languages.

The class includes students of all backgrounds and life experiences, from EMTs and pharmacy technicians to teachers and camp counselors. There is an ice dance figure skater who was a gold medalist in the U.S. and Canada, a book translator, and a shepherd who cared for animals in Northern Europe.

Bush acknowledged the students' proficiency in working with their hands, as good hand skills are critical to rendering superior oral health care. She also recognized the students' work ethic, commending them for the thousands of combined hours of care and service for the betterment of patients and communities in Buffalo and beyond. “You have volunteered around the world, and you have assisted those needing help right here in Buffalo,” Bush said. “Class of 2028, you are a remarkable group!”



# Dental professors' forensic work featured in 'Unsolved Mysteries'

BY LAURIE KAISER

**T**HIS SUMMER, the iconic television show "Unsolved Mysteries" released an episode featuring forensic dental work performed in 2015 by Mary Bush, DDS '99, AEGD Cert. '00, Raymond Miller, DDS '85, UBSDM alumni, and Peter Bush, director of the South Campus Instrument Center.

The case involved an unidentified severed head discovered in the woods in Pennsylvania. The UB dental forensics team was tasked with determining if the head belonged to a torso in a broken-into mausoleum in Uniontown, PA.

UB was tapped for the project because the Pennsylvania State

Police worked with Miller, a clinical associate professor who also serves as the forensic dental consultant to the Erie County Medical Examiner's Office, in a previous murder investigation he helped crack through dental records. Miller emphasized that the microscopy work that Peter Bush oversees in the South Campus Instrument Center also put the dental school on the forensics map.

Through evaluating the dental work, the team discovered that the severed head did not match the headless body. "The problem was the body was interred in 1952 and all the dentistry in the

head was modern, from the mid-1980s at the very earliest," Bush said. "It more likely was done in the 1990s or even later."

The UB team spent an entire day with the head but were stymied as to its identity.

"We used every technique and tool in Peter's lab and in the dental school," Miller said. "But we couldn't come to a conclusion. Thus, it's an unsolved mystery."

Mary Bush, a forensic dentist, associate professor and the UBSDM's associate dean for student affairs, was interviewed in May 2023 for the iconic mystery documentary show in the

coroner's officer in Beaver County, PA. While Mary Bush said she considers this Miller's case, he had a conflict at the time of filming, so she represented the team on the show.

"Mary is very personable, and I knew she would make a good interview," Miller said. "I'm glad they are putting the story out there. Sometimes, these cases do stimulate answers from the viewing public."

VOLUME 4, EPISODE 3 OF "UNSOLVED MYSTERIES" IS STREAMING NOW ON NETFLIX.



BEHIND-THE-SCENES OF "UNSOLVED MYSTERIES." PHOTO BY MARY BUSH.

## HOMECOMING UB TAILGATE PARTY AND UB BULLS FOOTBALL GAME



On Saturday, Oct. 19, UB School of Dental Medicine alumni and friends gathered at the Homecoming football game for a pregame tent party with complimentary food and beverages. Everyone in attendance showed off their UB spirit on a beautiful fall day before the UB Bulls game against the Western Michigan Broncos kicked off at 3:30 p.m.

## Genee Crofut, DDS '03, BS '92, elected to UB Alumni Association Board of Directors



**Genee Crofut** has been elected to the UB Alumni Association Board of Directors as a liaison to the Dental Alumni Association. The group represents the interests of more than 300,000 graduates around the globe. Crofut is one of six additional board members elected to a two-year term to represent each of the constituent associations, including the Dental Alumni Association.

Crofut is founder and dentist for her general family dental practice in Getzville. She is committed to service and volunteerism, most recently completing her two-year term as the UB Dental Alumni Association president. She is very involved in the annual Buffalo Niagara Dental Meeting that brings together dental practitioners, professionals, staff and alumni for continuing education and reunion in support of UB's dental school and the community. In addition to her DDS, Crofut also holds a BS in physical therapy from UB.

## 2025 UPCOMING EVENTS

**Hanau Cup Hockey Game**  
Buffalo Riverworks  
Feb. 28, 2025  
6:30 p.m.

**Buffalo Niagara Dental Meeting**  
Buffalo Convention Center  
Nov. 5–7, 2025  
BNDMeeting.com

### REUNION SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

This year celebrate the 50-year reunion of the Class of 1975 as well as all the UB Dental Classes ending in 0s and 5s.

**Alumni Remember When Reception**  
Hyatt Regency Buffalo  
Thursday, Nov. 6, 2025  
5:30–7 p.m.

**Alumni Dinner Dance Reunion**  
Buffalo Convention Center  
Friday, Nov. 7, 2025  
6:30 p.m. cocktails  
7:30 p.m. dinner

**UB School of Dental Medicine Tour**  
Saturday, Nov. 8, 2025  
Squire Hall Atrium  
10–11:30 a.m.

If you are interested in becoming a reunion leader for your class reunion, please contact **Sherry Szarowski** at 716-829-6419 or [ss287@buffalo.edu](mailto:ss287@buffalo.edu).

CALLING ALL ALUMNI

### It's time to renew your alumni association membership for 2025.

Your membership directly supports current UBSDM students through scholarship, charity, social events and more.

Members receive a variety of benefits, such as a reduced registration fee for the Buffalo Niagara Dental Meeting, hospitality receptions and reunion activities.



SCAN TO JOIN OR RENEW.

classnotes



**Frank C. Barnashuk**, DDS '80, GPR Cert. '81, retired clinical assistant professor in the Department of Restorative Dentistry, was honored with the 2024 Mark J. Feldman Distinguished Service Award for his outstanding service and commitment to NYSDA, where he has contributed more than two decades of continuous work to the state association.

AT LEFT, DR. BARNASHUK RECEIVING THE MARK J. FELDMAN DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD, PRESENTED BY NYSDA PRESIDENT DR. ANTHONY CUOMO.

**Robert F. Majewski**, DDS '76, MS Oral Sciences '83, TMD Cert. '83, Pediatric Cert. '85, was recently promoted to adjunct clinical professor in the Department of Orthodontics and Pediatric Dentistry at the University of Michigan School of Dentistry.

**Stuart Segelnick**, DDS '92, MS, became editor of The New York State Dental Journal in January 2025. In late fall 2024, he was elected president of the Northeastern Society of Periodontists for 2025.



DR. ELIZABETH KAPRAL

**Elizabeth B. Kapral**, DDS '13, director of Special Needs Dentistry, Department of Dentistry, Division of Oral Oncology and Maxillofacial Prosthetics, Erie County Medical Center, received the 2024 Excellence in Health Care Award, which recognizes outstanding individuals whose work has improved the health care system in WNY hospitals, labs, clinics, nonprofits and health facilities.



DR. DAVID P. MORRISON

**David P. Morrison**, DDS '07, was awarded Mastership in the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD). The AGD Mastership Award is one of the most respected and recognizable designations in general dentistry, which approximately 4% of licensed dentists in the United States have achieved. The award is a testament to his expertise in various aspects of dentistry, including cosmetic dentistry, restorative procedures, and preventive care and commitment to advanced study and training to ensure he remains at the forefront of dental innovation and patient care.

in memoriam

**Thomas J. Alessi, Jr., DDS '56**, passed away on Sept. 5, 2024. After earning his DDS at UB, he was commissioned as a captain in the U.S. Army and was stationed at Fort Jackson, SC. Dr. Alessi opened his dental office in Columbia, SC, and served the community out of that office on Broad River Road for 40 years. He was an active member of the St. Andrews Rotary Club and member of the American Dental Association.

**Ivan J. Bobier, DDS '46**, passed away on May 17, 2024, six months shy of his 100th birthday. While studying at UB's dental school, Dr. Bobier met his wife of 77 years, Edie. After serving in the army during WWII, he practiced dentistry for approximately 50 years, most of the time in the diverse Canarsie neighborhood of Brooklyn, where he cared for generations of local families.

**William G. Cihak, DDS '74**, passed away on Sept. 18, 2024. He is fondly remembered by his beloved family and many friends.

**Peder J. Hancher, DDS '67**, passed away on Nov. 21, 2024, at the age of 84. In addition to his DDS, he obtained seven doctorate degrees from numerous universities. Peder was a dedicated dentist who operated a family dental practice in Wellsville for over 50 years. He loved his work, his patients and his incredible staff.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 30

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Submit your class notes to Sherry Szarowski at [ss287@buffalo.edu](mailto:ss287@buffalo.edu).

in memoriam

**Dr. Joseph R. Natiella**  
1935–2024



Dr. Joseph R. Natiella passed away on Sept. 18, 2024, at the age of 89. Dr. Natiella, a professor in the Department of Oral Diagnostic Sciences who retired in 2006, was a highly respected oral pathologist, dedicated educator

and mentor and esteemed colleague. Dr. Natiella earned his DDS from Georgetown University in 1961 and a certificate in oral pathology from UB in 1968. He became a faculty member upon completion of his postgraduate certificate and achieved Board Diplomate status in 1971. In addition to teaching, he was an integral part of the head and neck clinic at Sister's Hospital and pathologist for Quest Diagnostic Laboratory, Inc., and Beutner Laboratories.

Over his illustrious 37-year career at UB, Dr. Natiella built a reputation for unparalleled service and dedication to students and patients. The graduating classes of 1979, 1989, 1995 and 1999 named him the Educator of the Year. He received the Dental Student Association's Excellence in Teaching Award in 1984 and the William M. Feagans Award in 1994. In 1996, he received the SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching for mastery of teaching, dedication to students, adherence to the highest academic standards and continued professional growth and scholarship. He was recognized with the Dental Alumni Association Honor Award in 1999 and the Dr. Richard T. Sarkin Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2006. His contributions to the school's predoctoral and postdoctoral programs are invaluable, and he left a legacy that continues to make an impact nearly 20 years after his retirement.

**John H. Lonnstrom Jr., DDS '56**, passed away on April 13, 2023. Dr. Lonnstrom studied pre-dental at Champlain College before obtaining a Doctor of Dental Surgery from UB. He served as a captain in the U.S. Army from 1956–58. He was a dentist in the Korean Military Advisory Group, a United States military unit of the Korean War. In 1970, Dr. Lonnstrom established a private dental practice in Delmar. Dentistry was a natural fit for John, affectionately referred to as "Doc" throughout most of his life by patients and friends alike.

**Peter C. Procopio, DDS '69**, passed away on Nov. 20, 2023, at the age of 80. He graduated with his DDS from UB in 1969. He served a one-year residency at Upstate Medical Center and volunteered there in the dental department as an adjunct professor for 40 years. Dr. Procopio opened a private dental practice in Liverpool, NY, in 1971, where he practiced general dentistry for 30 years before retiring in 2000.

**Robert C. "Doc" Roback, DDS '55**, passed away on July 26, 2024, at the age of 93. Dr. Roback served in the U.S. Army from 1955–57. In 1957, he opened his private dental practice, retiring in 2000. He was a past president of the Oneida Herkimer County Dental Society, a member of the New York State and American Dental Societies, and a former chairman of the Municipal Housing Authority for the City of Utica. Dr. Roback was held dear by his patients, and those who knew him appreciated his kindness.

**Carmen J. Ronca, DDS '73**, passed away on May 5, 2024, at the age of 83. After earning his DDS, he returned to Schenectady, where he was born, to open his own dental

practice. He went on to be a founding partner of a group practice in Latham (First Advantage Dental). He retired at the age of 70, living between NY and Florida. He was grateful for the opportunity to become a dentist and proud to build two practices.

**Frank V. Sansone, DDS '58**, passed away on Oct. 10, 2024, at the age of 91. Upon completion of his service with the U.S. Air Force, he started Sansone Family Dental Practice. Over his long, successful career, Dr. Sansone developed many lasting relationships with his loyal patients and dedicated staff. He was a longtime member of the Apollonian Dental Study Club and former president of the Italian American Sports Club.

**Joanne H. Sasse, DDS '63**, passed away on March 25, 2024. After graduating from UB with her DDS, she continued her education at Eastman Dental School in Rochester, ultimately becoming one of the first women to be a licensed orthodontist. Joanne provided orthodontic services from her offices in Fairport, Penfield, and Victor and thoroughly enjoyed getting to know and learning about her patients' lives.

**Joseph J. Speicher, Jr., DDS '84**, passed away on June 1, 2024, at the age of 65. After dental school, he worked with dentists in Dryden, then with his father, Dr. Joseph J. Speicher, Sr. He continued the dental practice until his own retirement in 2020. Joe served multiple terms on the New York State Board for Dentistry and was active in the Sixth District Dental Society. Joe was a friend to many, a devoted father and grandfather, and a great storyteller.



# TOGETHER WE ARE EVER BOLD




## ***Boldly Buffalo Campaign a Huge Success***

The university recently wrapped up its *Boldly Buffalo* campaign, the largest and most successful fundraising campaign in its history. What began as an ambitious \$650 million goal ultimately surpassed \$1.1 billion for the university.

Specific to the School of Dental Medicine, the original \$20 million goal was also surpassed, and more than \$44 million was committed in support of our students, faculty, research, facility renovations and more.

“We are grateful to the many donors who supported the school during this monumental campaign,” said Neil Dengler, senior director of University Advancement for the school. “While we celebrate our accomplishments, we also know the need to raise funds for the school continues.”



To learn more about how you can support the School of Dental Medicine, please contact Neil Dengler at 716-881-7486 or by email at [ndengler@buffalo.edu](mailto:ndengler@buffalo.edu).

**BOLDLY  
BUFFALO**  
THE CAMPAIGN FOR UB

FSC LOGO

The University at Buffalo is a premier public research university, the largest and most comprehensive campus in the State University of New York system. The School of Dental Medicine is one of 12 schools that make UB New York's leading public center for graduate and professional education and one of five schools that constitute UB's Academic Health Center.

# THANKS A BILLION!

**One historic campaign, over 82,000 donors and more than \$1 billion**

The University at Buffalo is celebrating the largest fundraising campaign in university history! Because of the generosity of alumni, donors and friends, more UB students will realize their dreams. More faculty will discover solutions to complex challenges. And UB will continue to change our world for the better. Learn more at [buffalo.edu/campaign](https://buffalo.edu/campaign).

**BOLDLY  
BUFFALO**  
THE CAMPAIGN FOR UB

