



Journeys

THE SIENA COLLEGE / ALBANY MEDICAL COLLEGE PROGRAM

Spring 2014

A Message from Dr. Edward LaRow

It is with great sadness that I report the first death of a Siena/Albany Medical College (AMC) physician. On March 13, 2014, Dr. Vasudha Koganti (32) passed away after a two-year battle with metastatic breast cancer. A memorial service, attended by more than 30 of her classmates, took place in Philadelphia on March 15, 2014. Sudha graduated from Siena in 2004 and AMC in 2008. She completed her residency in Family and Community Medicine at Thomas Jefferson University in 2011 and subsequently started working at Westside Family Health Care in Wilmington, Delaware. She devoted her time tending to the healthcare needs of the underserved and had aspirations to be-

come the next U.S. Surgeon General. I was certainly shocked when I heard such a young and talented physician had passed away. All who knew Sudha will certainly miss her. She was a warm and caring individual who always had a smile on her face. She was a dedicated athlete, embodied healthy living, and was one person who really represented the ideals of the Siena/AMC program with her dedication to service. Not only did she volunteer in Oaxaca, Mexico during her first summer of service while at Siena, but her passion for service continued well after completing medical school and residency. She obtained a prestigious and competitive

scholarship to continue working with underserved patients. It is truly sad- dening to know that thousands of her would-be patients will never get to experience her gentle and passionate care. When I personally think of Sudha, the photo below always comes to mind. She looks so happy while riding in the back of a pickup truck with two special-needs children during her summer of service in Oaxaca. She is smiling because she loved to serve, always in a joyous and compassionate manner. We will miss you Sudha, and we will always remember you as a talented, hard- working, loving, and caring sister, daughter, friend, wife, and mother. Our condolences go to her family, loving husband, Shrenik and beautiful two-year old son, Sajan.



Above: Dr. Koganti on her summer of service in Oaxaca, Mexico as a Siena student

Siena-AMC Class of 2014 Summer of Service Sites

Nikita Gupta	Volunteer for the Visayans Inc., Tacloban City, Phillipines
Ryan Chin	Volunteer for the Visayans Inc., Tacloban City, Phillipines
Mariam Zakher	Coptic Hope Center for Infectious Diseases, Maseno/Nairobi, Kenya
Linda Paniszyn	San Antonio Primary School, Punta Gorda, Belize
Molly McGuiggan	Big Falls Primary School, Punta Gorda, Belize
David Bowers	Big Falls Primary School, Punta Gorda, Belize
Robert Pacheco	Maximo Nivel, Cusco, Peru
Brittany Tayler	Maximo Nivel, Cusco, Peru
Lindsey Teardo	San Antonio Primary School, Punta Gorda, Belize
Kelly Moquin	Kenyan Missionary Sisters of Saint Joseph of Mill Hill, Marigot, Kenya
Megha Dasani	Kenyan Missionary Sisters of Saint Joseph of Mill Hill, Marigot, Kenya

The Real Light

By Mariam Zakher '14

Norma B. Rice once said, "Dare to reach out your hand into the darkness, to pull another hand into the light." Last summer, my brother and I were given the blessing of serving in Kenya. Serving in Kenya was an opportunity that brought to life the calling that I had always felt and envisioned. I not only was able to serve in the bustling capital city of Nairobi, but in the remote villages near Maseno and Kisumu. Each and every experience was one that not only filled my heart with joy, but further established the true meaning of reaching out and being a light. It is not every day that one is given the opportunity to go to a prison, sit with a prisoner and hear her life story. I'll never forget sitting with Grace, a young woman who had been wrongly accused of stealing. Grace, had been praying to have a child for quite a few years. A couple of months after giving birth to her daughter, she was sentenced to prison. As I tried to find words to help her, Grace asked me to read Psalm 25 out loud so we could talk about it. Rather than offering comfort and peace to Grace, Grace offered me what she used as her comfort and hoped that I would use this psalm during my difficult times in life. I distinctly remember the first day walking into R.A.H.A Kids (Rehabilitating and Help-

ing Abandoned Kids), and observing boys who sat in their shorts and ties with textbooks opened. Most of these boys had been found on the streets, sniffing glue and scrounging for food through the garbage. By God's grace, these boys were found and given an education, food, a place to sleep, and a loving atmosphere. Each day, while in Nairobi, my brother and I would walk through Nairobi to R.A.H.A. Kids. The boys would run to us as we approached, anticipating what we'd be teaching them that day. It was amazing seeing boys, who previously had been abandoned and sniffing glue on the streets, listening to lectures, doing homework and standing in lines every night to recite nightly prayers. Moreover, I'll never forget the mother who walked 9 kilometers with her baby in one hand and her son in the other. She had heard that there were mzungos (white) physicians in town, giving checkups. As she approached the medical clinic set up in one of the huts, her face filled with joy, at the thought that she had made it to her destination, and could be cared for by us, mzungos. Yet again our hearts

were filled with the joy as we walked up the mountains to a school of 500 children sitting on the mountaintop waiting for our arrival. Many of these children had to walk up and down the mountain, at least a miles journey, to get lunch, only to find that many times there was nothing for them to eat. I can still hear their laughter and chants as we approached them and will never forget those gleaming faces as we passed out chocolates to every child. I'll never forget the day another school of 500 Kenyan school children sang, "Happy Birthday" on my 21st Birthday. These memories along with the many I have of sitting in the villager's huts drinking sweetened tea with milk and eating chapate (flat bread) and mandazi (fried bread) that they made are among many of the sweet memories that have been engraved in my heart. The conversations that we had, the hearts that were touched, and every one that touched mine surely changed my view on the true meaning of loving and serving others. It is through daring to be a light in the world that we are able to pull others into the light. However, more often than not, it is those we are serving that are a light to us. It is in fact they that pull us out of the darkness that we believe to be the real light.

The Summer of a Lifetime: Punta Gorda, Belize

By David Bowers '14

I arrived in Punta Gorda, Belize not quite knowing what to expect. I guess I had this idea in my head before getting there that it would be a six week walk in the park; I mean, how could one assume otherwise based on the Google images results? I was wrong. The six weeks I was in Belize was hardly a walk in the park, more like a repeated sprint across New York City's Central Park, and let's just say the pictures on the internet are severely misleading to where *I* was living. My host-mother was the best, and I adored her granddaughter who practically lived with her, but there were some things Ms. Elena could not help me with no matter how hard she tried. Everyone says going away to college is a difficult emotional time, but it does not hold a candle to a Summer of Service. I immediately felt isolated; unable to talk to my family even if I wanted to, with hours every day spent reflecting upon what they might be doing. The surrounding environment is relatively hard to cope with as well. As someone who wants to dedicate my life to serving others, it was difficult to see such an impoverished region day in and day out and not be able to help *every* person I came into contact with. Upon reading what I have written thus far, you may be thinking I am implying my Summer of Service was a nightmare, but I am in fact saying the opposite. My Summer of Service was the most important experience that has occurred in my life so far. I learned a lot about the human soul, what kind of doctor I want to be



someday, and what I need to work on in the future. There are so many things we as a country take for granted, so many things *I* take for granted. Simple things like clean water, excess food, and good health care are difficult to come by in Southern Belize. Children in the Big Falls

Primary School that I worked in for the majority of the time I was volunteering, struggled with mild dyslexia, and the language barriers that American donated textbooks impose on Belizean children who have grown up speaking a dialect of Creole within their families. I witnessed the struggles of physicians attempting to provide adequate care with very limited means. I observed people living in houses that *barely* fit the definition of a house. Through all this, I became relatively discouraged; how was it fair that people were living like this, and why does it seem like the things I am doing to help are not helping? Halfway through my trip, I realized, de-

spite all the difficulties, Belizeans endured on a daily basis; they were *always* happy, *always* smiling. Most the time, I felt like the students I taught were teaching me more than I could ever teach them about core subjects, because they were teaching me about something much more important: *life*. From my trip in Be-

elize, I think I have learned that although material wealth and comfort are nice, they are not the goal of life; they will not provide one with permanent happiness and contentment. The goals of life everyone should aspire to achieve are ones focused on compassion, love, and kindness, and I think they are goals Belizeans are much closer to achieving than we as Americans are. I know this sounds Hallmark cardish, but it is truly what I have taken away from my Summer of Service. Sometimes, the best way to help people is to put a smile on their face while showing you care about them. The children of Belize made me smile quite a bit, and I feel as if my time with them may have helped me more than it did them, as although I taught them math and science to become a better student, they taught me how to be a better *person*. I am forever indebted to Ms. Elena, and those school children of Big Falls Primary School, and hopefully someday through the medical profession, I can attempt to return the favor.



“How Siena Prepared Me for Medical School”

“Choosing to go to Siena was honestly one of the best decisions I ever could have made. My time at Siena, especially my service experiences, like alternative Spring Break trips with Habitat for Humanity and to the St. Francis House in Boston, as well as all of the projects with the Siena/AMC program and the cross country team, have shaped who I am today. When school gets tough, drawing on my experiences at Siena reminds me of why I went into medicine and continue on this track over the years despite lots of challenges. I want to make the world a better place in the best way that I can. Medical school can get stressful, but I know I can handle it because Siena taught me to work hard, but also take care of myself, have fun, and, most importantly, trust in God!”

-Meghan Yi, Siena College Class of 2012/Albany Medical College Class of 2016



“As a 4th year med student in the middle of interview season, I find myself time and time again talking about Siena. Sure, any school can prepare you to excel in genetics, biochemistry, and anatomy, but Siena prepared me to be a doctor. I learned what it was like to be poor, abandoned, not wanted, handicapped, and alone. I took care of all of these as an undergraduate student, which prepared me to help them as a med student, so I may heal them as a doctor. Though aging wonderfully (just kidding!), Dr. LaRow was instrumental to my success. He hand picked fine minds, with greater hearts. My colleagues from Siena are some of the most outstanding members of the Albany Med Community. As we are all interviewing at fine institutions like Yale, Hopkins, and the Mayo Clinic, it is our humble beginning at Siena that afforded us the opportunity for great success. Keep the spirit of St. Francis as you continue your journey. Kiss the leper in society. He needs you.”

-Ramy Sedhom, Siena College Class of 2010/Albany Medical College Class of 2014

Albany Medical College Class of 2013 Residencies

Delores Blais	Pediatrics	University of Texas, San Antonio, TX
Meridith Chan	OB-GYN	Albany Medical College, NY
Alexander Chapman	Surgery	Riverside Methodist Hospital, Columbus, OH
Anthony Conte	Neurosurgery	Georgetown University Hospital, DC
Matthew Cummings	Internal Medicine	Columbia University Medical Center, NY, NY
Jennifer Dinnel	Internal Medicine	Virginia Commonwealth Hospital, Richmond, VA
Katelyn Moretti	Emergency Medicine	University of Pittsburgh Hospital, Pittsburgh, PA
Roshini Naik	Internal Medicine	Einstein/Beth Israel Medical Center, NY, NY
Jenny Shim	Pediatrics	University of Texas, Dallas, TX
Ali Valimahomed	Physical Medicine	NYP Hospital of Columbia and Cornell, NY, NY
Miduhna William	Family Practice	Carilion Clinic, Roanoke, VA

Alum Feature: Dr. Sarah Sindell

Siena College Class of 2003

Albany Medical College Class of 2007

Winston Churchill once stated, “We make a living but what we get, but we make a life by what we give.” Since graduating from Siena College in 2003 and going on to graduate from Albany Medical College in 2007, Dr. Sarah Sindell has been living out Churchill’s words. Now residing in Anchorage, Alaska with her husband, she currently works in the only hospital in Alaska that serves Native Alaskans and Indigenous Peoples. We had the privilege of interviewing Dr. Sindell over the phone on her life, her work, and her time in the program.

What is your work about? Can you describe what you do on a day-to-day basis?

I am a general surgeon at the Alaska Native Medical Center for all natives and all American Indians. Even though there are about 140,000 natives, this is the only hospital in Alaska that serves natives and does surgery. We do the whole range of surgery. I do colonoscopies, gall bladder surgeries, thyroid surgeries, and we do a lot of trauma. The only patients we don’t see who are not natives are for trauma. I see patients in clinics and set people up for surgery. People don’t realize that there are parts in the U.S. that need just as much help as in other countries.

What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?

One of the interesting things is that I didn’t go to medical school thinking I would be a surgeon. I started thinking I’d be a family practice doctor. It

was only when I did my rotation in medical school that I decided surgery was for me. I was worried, though, that I wouldn’t be able to find a job that specifically served the less fortunate in surgery because we normally think of primary care clinics in that aspect. When I started residency in Seattle, I told my director that I wanted to serve a population that actually needed help. He’s the one that told me about this hospital in Alaska. I don’t have to worry about billing, insurance, or getting supplies I need to get because I’m paid on salary

and they all get healthcare. It’s an amazing opportunity for the patients because we do what’s best for them, and we don’t put them under any stress. I also don’t have to worry about billing a certain amount for making a certain amount of money. My patients are incredibly grateful for all the care they are getting. They are a really unique population; these are people who are living a very indigenous lifestyle—you know, hunting and gathering—and they come to Anchorage when they need healthcare.

They’re really thankful and appreciative, and it’s extremely rewarding. I feel really, really lucky to be able to do this for them.

Do you feel like the Siena-AMC program influenced you in your decision to serve in Alaska? How so?

I interacted with people who have similar values, and I went to medical school with a group of people who were such a great support system. Because of all the service we did together in the program, you have that sort of background outside of medicine to help people. Having that kind of background helps you help others.

What are some things you loved about Siena/being in the program?

The people at Siena. The sense of community and feeling like you were in a little town—not

too big but not too small. It seemed like everyone was watching out for you. Something that no one else gets to experience is having LaRow in your life as a caring, father figure and having friends who feel like your family. Also, one of the really great things is that the program takes a lot of pressure off of you so you can explore things outside of biology and chemistry. I was able to explore things I actually enjoyed and hold onto parts of me that are outside of science.

Any words of advice for the rest of us going through the process?

Enjoy it! It’s easy to get overwhelmed when testing gets hard and there’s a lot going on, but just enjoy the process because you’re going to get through it. There are really great people who will help you get through it. It will be over sooner than you think, and you will miss it so much. And when you’re not enjoying it, just remember...life will get better.



Siena-AMC Class of 2017: “Why I Chose Siena”

“I came to Siena because I could feel a strong sense of community and togetherness when I was on campus. All the professors I met were as friendly as the students were. Now that I am at Siena, I can see the faculty here really helps you to succeed. My professors all push me to perform my best with all the energy and time they invest in each student.”

-Jack Looney

“Siena just seemed like a great fit, and I’ve come to realize that it was an awesome decision. With the program, I can pursue medicine while remaining involved with my other interests. I love how passionate everyone is about service here, and I always feel a genuine sense of community here at Siena.”

- Demiana Azmy

“There are plenty of schools that could prepare me to be a great doctor. I chose Siena because I know it is the best place for me to become the type of doctor and the type of person that I want to be. The emphasis placed on medicine for the service of humanity distinguishes Siena's program from all others.”

- Kevin Flatley

“I chose Siena because of the small class sizes and the attention that I saw professors giving students during my tour. I really liked the service focus of the program, and the idea of going on a Summer of Service made me really excited.”

- Priyanka Kolli



Above: The Class of 2017 poses together after planning and throwing a Fall Festival for the girls at St. Anne Institute, a non-profit organization that cares for and protects girls from troubled families in New York State.

Right: The Class of 2017 visit Our Lady of Hope, a local nursing home for low-income senior citizens, to put on musical concerts every semester. During the concerts, the residents are able to enjoy listening to piano, guitar, and vocal performances.

Fall Semester Service Projects and Events

Jezreel International Humanitarian Aid:
All classes of the Siena-AMC program came together to sort and pack supplies for needy families overseas.



Equinox: Members of all classes of Siena drove into downtown Albany to help make Thanksgiving dinners for those in need. Pictured below are the seniors and sophomores, getting ready to start cooking!



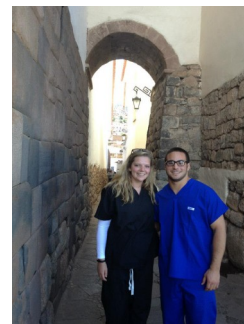
Food Pantries of the Capital Region:

Serving at the food pantry is a popular project for all classes! Pictured to the left are some freshmen who helped pack daily essentials and food items for the less fortunate.

Bus Stop Club: Seniors and freshmen frequently attend Sibling Sessions and BSC events at sites around the Capital Region, during which they spend time with the siblings of children with chronic illnesses. Juniors and sophomores recently organized a Holiday Extravaganza here at Siena for Bus Stop Club members to enjoy (pictured to the right).



Summer of Service: Between the summer of Junior and Senior year, Siena-AMC program students travel to international areas of need to perform 6-8 weeks of service. This year's seniors traveled everywhere from Peru to the Philippines, returning to Siena in September with an even deeper love for service and tons of stories to tell!



From left: Nikita Gupta in the Philippines, Mariam Zakher in Kenya, Ryan Chin in the Philippines, Brittany Tayler and Robert Pacheco in Peru



Above: Members of the Junior Class (minus those studying abroad for the fall semester!) pose with program co-founder and director, Dr. Edward LaRow at the annual Siena-AMC program picnic



Above: The sophomores took the freshmen out to eat for the annual Sophomore-Freshman Class Lunch at the very beginning of the year

We want to hear from you!
To submit information for
publishing or to receive this
newsletter electronically,
please contact
Dr. Ed LaRow.
larow@siena.edu

Siena/Albany Medical College Program
c/o Siena College Admissions Office
515 Loudon Road
Loudonville, NY 12211

