



Journeys

THE SIENA COLLEGE/ALBANY MEDICAL COLLEGE PROGRAM

Spring 2019

Program Update—Ray Walsh '74, M.D.

After directing the Siena/AMC program since its inception some thirty years ago, Dr. Ed LaRow decided it was now time for him to kick back and enjoy retirement. He always wanted his successor to be a retired physician. When Ed found out I planned to retire from my position at Albany Medical Center, he persuaded me to submit the necessary documents to the Siena Search Committee. I spent a day interviewing at Siena and a few weeks later I was given the honor of inheriting the program from Ed.

Readers of this newsletter are likely asking themselves “Who is this guy?” so bear with me as I give some background about myself. I graduated from Siena in 1974 as a Biology Pre-Med major. In 1976, I headed off to medical school at the University of Bologna in Bologna, Italy-- and yes, all the classes and books were in Italian and I had to learn the language because I did not speak a word before going there. Medical school in Italy was six years and in 1982, I returned to the US and began my residency in Internal Medicine and Pediatrics at Albany Med. After two years, I decided to switch to Pediatrics alone. I completed the residency and then spent a fourth year as Chief Resident in Pediatrics. In 1986, I headed off to the Children’s Hospital of Buffalo for a fellowship in Pediatric Critical Care and in 1988 returned to Albany Med as Attending Physician in Pediatrics

and Pediatric Critical Care. In addition to clinical activity, during my thirty years as an attending I was a member of the Albany Med Admissions Committee, spent two years as Vice President and two years as President of the Medical Staff. I was involved in research, quality assurance projects, and a variety of committees. My academic appointment at AMC is Professor of Pediatrics and Pediatric Critical Care. On a personal level, I met my wife at Siena and we married in 1976. I have three grown daughters of whom I am incredibly proud. My wife and I currently reside in Delmar.

I am a firm believer that service activities enhance careers in medicine, regardless of specialty. For over 25 years, I have been a volunteer physician at the Double H Ranch in Lake Luzerne. This camp is part of the SeriousFun Network of camps for children with a variety of chronic life-threatening illnesses and every child attends the Double H free of charge. I also serve on the Medical Advisory Board for that facility and one of the things I am most proud of in my career is helping to develop “Camp Inspiration at the Double H Ranch.” This is a camp session for children who require various breathing devices to stay alive and it would not be possible without the dedication, expertise, and volunteer spirit of my colleagues in nursing

and respiratory therapy who give up vacation time to help at camp. For the Siena/AMC program, I hope to carry on the legacy left by Dr. LaRow and also add new opportunities to the program. It goes without saying that the world has changed radically during the last thirty years. In order of importance, my priorities with the program are: student safety while abroad, having an experience that fosters critical thinking and/or provides clinical exposure, and maintaining fiscal sustainability. With the help of the International Studies Office at Siena and with extensive discussions with my AMC colleagues, I have been examining the optional semester abroad and also the required Summer of Service. I recognize that some students may not want to go abroad. More than a few students have completed the Summer of Service at the Double H Ranch and I hope to increase such domestic experiences. I also want to develop service activities that students could be involved with, for all 8 years of the program. I see my close ties with AMC and my experience as a physician as advantages in preparing the students for the rigors of medical school, the demands of residency, and the rewards of a career in medicine. It is an honor for me to know that Dr. LaRow has entrusted me with 30 years of a program he developed. I can only hope to at least partially fill those very large shoes he has left behind.

AMC Class of 2019 Residency Matches

Monica Anis—**Anesthesia**, Yale-New Haven Hospital

Bella Bautista—**Psychiatry**, Albany Medical Center

David Bowers—**Internal Medicine**, University of Connecticut

Ben Caesar—**General Surgery**, Maine Medical Center

Ryan Chin—**General Surgery**, Montefiore Medical Center/Einstein

Meaghan Flatley—**General Surgery**, San Antonio Military Medical Center

Nikita Gupta—**Pediatrics**, St. Christopher's Hospital

Tim Hartigan—**Internal Medicine and Pediatrics**, Albany Medical Center

Casey Hladik—**Surgery Prelim**, Albany Medical Center

Robert Pacheco—**General Surgery**, Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center

Christina Rudolph—**Plastic Surgery**, Albany Medical Center

Robert Scagnelli—**ENT**, Albany Medical Center

Jenna Schlefman—**Internal Medicine**, University of Virginia

Asha Thomas—**Pediatrics**, UT HSC-San Antonio

Mariam Zakher—**Internal Medicine**, NYU Winthrop Hospital



My Summer in Kerala

By Amy Abraham '19



“Love & Serve.” I saw these simple words on the entrances of St. Joseph’s Home and San Jose Vidyalaya, and at that moment, they made an impression on me. During my eight weeks of service in Kerala, I learned to love and serve generously, build right relationships, and make peace. My experience at St. Joseph’s Home and San Jose Vidyalaya was truly a blessing for me because I learned to value the meaning of life and service in a different perspective.

I was fortunate to have been introduced to this site for summer of service from my great-aunt, Sr. Cecilia, a nun in Sisters of St. Joseph Congregation. I was immediately drawn to this site because of my roots in Kerala. Because I spoke Malayalam, the patients, students, and staff at these sites were able to easily open up to me, and I felt like I was able to foster meaningful relationships with them by communicating and getting to learn more about them.

At St. Joseph’s Home, we assisted the staff by cleaning rooms, dressing wounds of patients, giving baths to patients, and leading recreational activities for patients. Many of these patients sat in their rooms all day, had minimal interactions with

others, and only left their rooms to eat food and pray. Every day I would converse with each patient and they would tell me all about their life stories. I never knew that the simple act of listening could have such a profound impact on someone else’s and my own life. My experience in Kerala allowed me to understand how critical it is for a physician or any health care provider to listen, empathize, and be culturally competent in order to treat his or her patients.

I was initially shocked to see cancer patients with missing or severely infected body parts. In India, the general public are not as aware and do not have as much access to cancer prevention and treatment as we do in America, and it can lead to situations like this. One patient I met, Radhakrishnan, had oral cancer, and only came to St. Joseph’s Home after his tumor became infected with maggots. The nurses and sisters gave



him proper care and were able to get rid of the maggots, but his infection left him without his right jaw. When I saw Radhakrishnan, I could not imagine the pain and agony his cancer had caused him. He could not speak, and the way he communicated with the staff was by groaning and whimpering. One day while we were changing his wound

dressing, Radhakrishnan would not stop groaning because of his excruciating pain. In the spur of the moment, I held his hand while the nurses tried to change his dressing to reassure that we were there. This gesture may not have taken away the pain for him, but as soon as he stopped wailing, I realized my support definitely made a difference for him.

San Jose Vidyalaya, our second site, was a school for differently abled students aged 4 to 40 years. It was a completely different experience than working with cancer and HIV/AIDS patients, but our experiences here were as equally enjoyable and enriching as St. Joseph’s Home. Some students are able to learn what the teachers are teaching them, but the majority of the students are unable to. Even though there are only 5-8 students in a classroom, the teacher is in charge of taking care of the physical, mental, and emotional needs of all the students. Our responsibility was to help the teacher manage the students, feed them rice if they were unable to feed themselves, and give one-on-one attention to the students when the teacher could not. We had to learn to observe each student and find out what each student liked and disliked in order to figure out a way to engage them. I learned to be patient, flexible, creative and most of all, positive.

As my four years at Siena come to end, I am eternally grateful to the Siena-AMC program for laying the foundation for me to become a humane physician. Serving others is a lifelong journey, and I hope one day I can give back to these sites as a doctor. My summer of service in Kerala has taught me that my journey to become a physician should be as simple, yet meaningful as the motto “Love and Serve.”

Program Spotlight

Nimmi Menachery

Trapasso

Siena Grad Year: 1998

AMC Grad Year: 2002

Summer of Service:

Ikanga, Kenya

It all started with “nice.” EJM once asked me many years ago when I was a freshman what made our Siena AMC students different. Specifically, what characteristic do we all have in common? I think he expected something profound but I stuck by my answer of “nice”. As he would often say, if you look up “nice” in the dictionary, you see synonyms like “personable”, “engaging”, “gracious”, “sympathetic”, “understanding”, “compassionate” and “good”. I could have said “intelligent”, “motivated” or “diligent” but even my 18-year-old self knew that being a good physician was more than just those things. Being a good physician is about serving your patients, giving of yourself in both time and talent, and yes, about being nice. As a family physician in a busy primary practice, I see a wide variety of patients and the diagnoses that are a part of their stories. Experience has taught me, as physicians before me have learned; that there will be times that our medical knowledge will be inadequate to help our patients. There will be unexpected deaths or devastating diagnoses, and the only thing I can offer to my patients is myself- a sympathetic ear, an understanding patience and heartfelt compassion. This was one of the many lessons I learned while at Siena that has profoundly impacted how I practice medicine. As a physician, I am called to serve my patients to the best of my ability and to render this service with kindness and compassion. This is often a challenging undertaking but the lessons I learned both inside and outside the classroom at Siena have prepared me, and many others, well. Dr. LaRow founded this program on the values of service and compassion, and these fundamentals have transformed my life, as a physician and as a person. I am so profoundly grateful to him and Siena for making me the person I am today and helping me realize that sometimes “nice” is exactly what is needed.

Nicole Mundackal

Siena Grad Year: 2017

AMC Grad Year: 2021

Summer of Service:

Kolkata, India

My experience at Albany Med would not be the same without the love and support of all those in the Siena-AMC family! It is so wonderful to be able to continue that strong community atmosphere from Siena over to AMC, where I can always count on seeing friendly faces. As I finish up my second year at AMC, I cannot help but appreciate how much my time at Siena has shaped who I am today. With the opportunity to study abroad and then complete our Summer of Service, and not to mention the countless extracurricular/service opportunities available to us at Siena, we built our character and grew as individuals that truly care about helping others. Siena not only prepared us academically, but also prepared us to be kind, strong future-physicians. This all can be seen in the volunteer services we Siena-AMC students take part in, as well as, the different leadership positions we hold, and how we treat our fellow classmates with simple acts of kindness, such as the renowned Siena custom of holding the door open. I will forever be grateful for the countless blessings this beautiful program has gifted me with!

Aidan Sullivan

Siena Grad Year: 2019

AMC Grad Year: 2023

Summer of Service:

Kolkata, India

As I reflect on the past four years at Siena, I am filled with an overwhelming sense of gratitude. The Siena/AMC program has given me so many opportunities to grow as a person. My desire to make a difference in the world through medicine has multiplied the past few years because of the conversations, lessons, and relationships that Siena has given to me. Between my summer of service in Kolkata to my Saturday afternoons with the Mentoring program and everything in between, my notion of who I am has changed. I have been challenged to move beyond my own self-imposed limitations. I know that I am ready for the next step. My time at Siena will be something that I can always look back on and feel inspired. I believe that this program has helped me to learn the intangible skills and values that will allow me to be a good physician. I thank God for the friends, mentors, and experiences that have come as a result of my time at Siena.

Freshman Reflections

Medha Palnati

At my Siena/AMC interview, and I was given the privilege to speak with several current Siena students who radiated kindness, energy, and passion. They told me about the service projects they were involved with, the community that they got to be a part of, and the joy that they had been able to find at Siena. As I left my interview day, I knew that Siena was where I was destined to be. At Siena, I have met the most incredible people, from all over the country, who are just as passionate about serving others and bettering the world as I am. I have been gifted to be able to take part in several service opportunities, my favorite of which include my Habitat for Humanity trip to Cape Fear, NC, monthly sibling sessions and holiday events for Bus Stop Club, and monthly dinners at Interfaith Partnership for the Homeless. However, the club that I have been most involved with this past year has to be Refugee Partnership. Through this club, I have been able to partner with NiLar, a high school student at Bishop Maginn who is a refugee of Karen descent, and help her improve her writing skills and confidence. I also helped her apply to college and cheered with joy when she finished at the top of her class and was accepted to Sage College of Albany, where she will be pursuing a career in nursing. I always say that if I can make my little corner of the world just a little bit brighter, I will feel like my life's duty is fulfilled. Coming to Siena, I can confidently say that I am able to make my corner just a little bit happier, kinder, and just a little bit more beautiful.

Alexander Tran

As a freshman at Siena College, I've joined a community that has supported me every step of the way. As a member of the AMC program, I've met both future colleagues and lifetime friends. Coming from California, I was initially unsure of how my college experience would be so far from home. Ultimately, I found a group of people who share my interests and passions and I couldn't be happier with the decision I made. The memories I've created at Siena are ones that I will treasure for the rest of my life. At Siena, I've had the opportunity to explore new interests by joining numerous clubs such as club volleyball and habitat for humanity. Through these clubs, I've been able to go skiing across the Northeast and visit major cities such as Boston and NYC. Although I'm still getting used to New York's bipolar weather, I can confidently say that the Siena and AMC communities have given me a second home for the next seven years.



Christopher Barra

I applied to this program because it combined my passion for service with my love of medicine and I cannot be more thankful that I got accepted. This first year has been amazing! This program allows you to meet friends across all years as it is such a close-knit community. Everyone here is here to help you and guide you along the way: through what classes to take to what extracurriculars to get involved with. This first year I have gotten involved with many clubs, but my favorite one by far has been Best Buddies. Going to the events and social games every week has allowed me to immerse myself in an environment that is composed of pure joy and happiness. Not only is it extremely rewarding, but it has allowed me to take a break from the traditional academic stresses of college. Next year, I will be an officer on the Best Buddies e-board, and I cannot believe that I will get to plan the exciting things that we do each week!



Hannah Muller

I chose the Siena AMC program because I felt the values embodied by the program are representative of both the type of person and the type of doctor I want to become. The strong emphasis on service has provided me with the opportunity to get involved with Best Buddies, Bus Stop Club, Habitat for Humanity, and volunteering at the Interfaith Partnership for the Homeless. This program has introduced me to some of the most compassionate, generous, intellectual, and outwardly oriented individuals I have ever met. I feel so thankful that all of these people have entered into my life, and I am proud to call them my friends.

Summer of Service in Vietnam

By Meg Bouyea '19



My summer of service proved to be a period of extensive personal growth and development. By committing to 6 weeks of volunteering in Hanoi, I was able to focus on serving the Vietnamese community and building meaningful relationships. I not only learned about the Vietnamese culture, but more importantly I learned how to simply be with people and truly love them. I also became comfortable with being uncomfortable, and rapidly improved my problem solving and communication skills. I was able to witness firsthand the common good in humanity and that despite our cultural differences, we are still bound by love and a common good in humanity. The first three weeks of my summer were spent at a private school for children with disabilities called Khanh Tam. Some children had severe physical, mental, and/or learning disabilities, while others were highly functional and simply needed extra support. I spent the majority of my time in Khanh Tam acting as a teacher's aide in a classroom full of children aged between two and four years old. The classroom was crowded with students; two teachers managed a class of twelve disabled children. It was difficult to simply keep all of the

children sitting, nevertheless engage in a lesson. Volunteering at Khanh Tam was my first experience working with children of such a young age, and I admit that I was quite nervous. My first day was overwhelming. Neither of the teachers spoke any English, and I struggled to discover how I could help in the classroom. Often times, most of the kids were unable to make eye contact, follow directions, or stay focused on the lesson. Yet after only a week, I was able to establish a routine and fall into rhythm with the teachers. I quickly learned about each of the individual children and recognized how vastly different the needs of each child were. With more knowledge about each child came an understanding about their needs, and I was able to more effectively manage, help and encourage their learning. My time spent in the Vietnam Friendship Village was also an incredible experience full of learning. The Vietnam Friendship Village is a facility that provides education, vocational training, and medical care to children, adults and veterans who were affected by Agent Orange. It was remarkable to experience the forgiveness and compassion that the Vietnamese people showed us, as Americans. The Vietnam-American War recently ended in 1975 and the country is still healing from the atrocities of war. However, the teachers, children, and staff at the Friendship Village welcomed us with open arms into their community. During my time at the Friendship Village, I acted as an aide in the classroom, led in-class activities, and simply played and

cared for the children. Affection was what these mentally and physically disabled children craved most; they live for several years at a time in the village, because their parents are either unable to care for them or simply do not want to. The forgiveness and genuine kindness that the people of the Friendship Village showed me demonstrates the true beauty of humanity.

A quote from St. Francis of Assisi reads: "For it is in giving that we receive." I learned much more from the children of Khanh Tam and the Friendship Village than I can express. The power of love, forgiveness, and compassion echoed throughout all of my experiences in Vietnam; for that, I will forever be grateful. I undoubtedly recognize how important these virtues are. Meaningful interactions require patience, listening, understanding, and love. Although improving cultural



awareness was valuable, these traits are useful not only in every day interaction, but in being a compassionate physician and building a meaningful patient-physician relationship. I know without a doubt that my summer of service has allowed me to grow as an individual. My experiences and growth will also be reflected in the physician I aspire to become.