



Who Do You Admire?

THE MEDICAL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION WANTS YOU TO BRAG ABOUT YOUR PEERS.

When the niece of Patricia Numann, MD '65, was admitted to Princeton University, one of the first things she received after her acceptance letter was a list of prestigious alumni. The unstated message was pretty clear: come to school here and this is what you can achieve.

Dr. Numann took note of that message because of her involvement with the Upstate Medical University Alumni Association and in selecting the alumni honored annually by the organization with the Distinguished Alumnus and Outstanding Young Alumnus awards.

"The quality of your alumni speaks to the quality of your institution," says Dr. Numann.

Honoring exceptional alumni, she says, can be both a marketing tool for prospective students and a motivational tool for current students. Most importantly, however, it's an important recognition by the institution to graduates for "having gone the extra mile."

According to Numann, every Upstate Medical University class has special graduates, individuals who have distinguished themselves through outstanding contributions to research, to their communities, and to the practice of medicine. In order to recognize that achievement, she says, the Alumni Association needs help in identifying those individuals.

"Every year we solicit nominations in the *Alumni Journal* and in the reunion class mailings," she says. "Unfortunately, the response does not match the level of excellence we know is out there."

People like Nancy Tarbell, MD '79, chief of radiation therapy at Children's Hospital in Boston; or Philip S. Schein, MD '65, a leader in cancer pharmacology; or Coleen Cunningham, MD '85, a pediatric HIV specialist.

Numann believes many are hesitant to respond because they think an alumnus must be "famous" to be recognized.

While there certainly have been Distinguished Alumnus recipients who've been in the public eye, many have been honored for more basic reasons—being a community's sole

physician, service to community organizations, or medical missionary work.

"We're looking for someone who has set themselves apart academically, clinically or through service or loyalty to their community or alma mater," adds Hal Wanamaker, MD '56, a member of the selection committee.

"It's not about fame," says Numann. "It is somebody we're proud to have as an alumnus because they have represented medicine and our medical school well."

The litmus test is a simple question—Who do you admire?

"If you ask any class, 'Who do you admire? Who do you think has done a great job in their career?' you immediately get a name. Those are the names we're looking for," Numann says.

Alumni should not hesitate to nominate one of their peers simply because they don't have access to extensive biographical data or time to write an eloquent nomination letter. "All we need is a name and a brief statement about why this person should be considered," Wanamaker says. "We'll do the rest."

Each year the Alumni Association presents two awards during Reunion weekend. While not a requirement, the recipient is often a member of one of the Reunion classes.

The Distinguished Alumnus award was established in 1966 to recognize the extraordinary achievements and outstanding service of individual alumni. This year's recipient, Jonas T. Johnson, MD '72, was selected for his leadership in otolaryngology, through training future specialists, in furthering the medical literature of the specialty through extensive publishing, and his stewardship of the professional otolaryngology societies.

Over the years, the selection committee recognized that most recipients were toward the end of their careers and in 1995 created the Outstanding Young Alumnus Award, given to someone who has graduated within the last 20 years, to recognize physicians doing great things earlier in their careers.

This year's recipient is pediatric orthopedist Danielle Katz, MD '97, HS '02. "She's only a few years out of her residency, but has demonstrated significant leadership through her involvement with various American Colleges of Surgeons committees,

as the orthopedic surgery clerkship director at Upstate, and as the recipient of pilot research grants," says Numann. "She's someone who has tremendous potential."

Despite the age or stature of the recipient, the award holds special meaning. "There is a very special sense of pride when you are honored by your own institution," says Samuel Thier, MD '60, professor of medicine and health care at Harvard Medical School, chairman of the Commonwealth Fund, and 1995 recipient of the Distinguished Alumnus Award.

Wanamaker, the 2001 Distinguished Alumnus, concurs. "It was very humbling to be honored by my peers, but gratifying to be recognized for my interest and dedication to the medical school through the years."

In addition to pride, receiving such an award provides a platform for the recipient to champion the causes he or she is passionate about while at the same time bringing recognition to the institution giving the award. "If your graduates are doing good things I think it makes people look at any school a little differently," says preventive cardiologist Lori Mosca, MD '84, who received the Outstanding Young Alumnus award in 2004.

In turn, the alumni awards should bolster the stature of all Upstate Medical University Alumni. "Your medical education has a lot to do with how you proceed through your career," says Numann. "For a small, state medical school, we have a much higher percentage of alumni who pursue academic careers than many schools. We've had graduates become presidents of a variety of distinguished societies, deans of prestigious schools. That tells you that the institution provides a good solid basis."

—Renée Gearhart Levy

Mail, fax or email nominations to:
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