

FALL 2024

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

ALUMNI MAGAZINE

A photograph of two hands, one from each side, reaching towards the center and forming a heart shape. The sun is positioned exactly in the center of the heart, creating a bright, warm glow. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with green foliage and a path.

THE HUMAN SPIRIT

Shining a light on the exceptional qualities of OU alumni



South Foundation Hall, 2024

In 2021, a major renovation and expansion of South Foundation Hall began. Completed in 2024, the new building boasts an additional 10 classrooms on top of the previous 37, supporting programs for the College of Arts and Sciences. ➤

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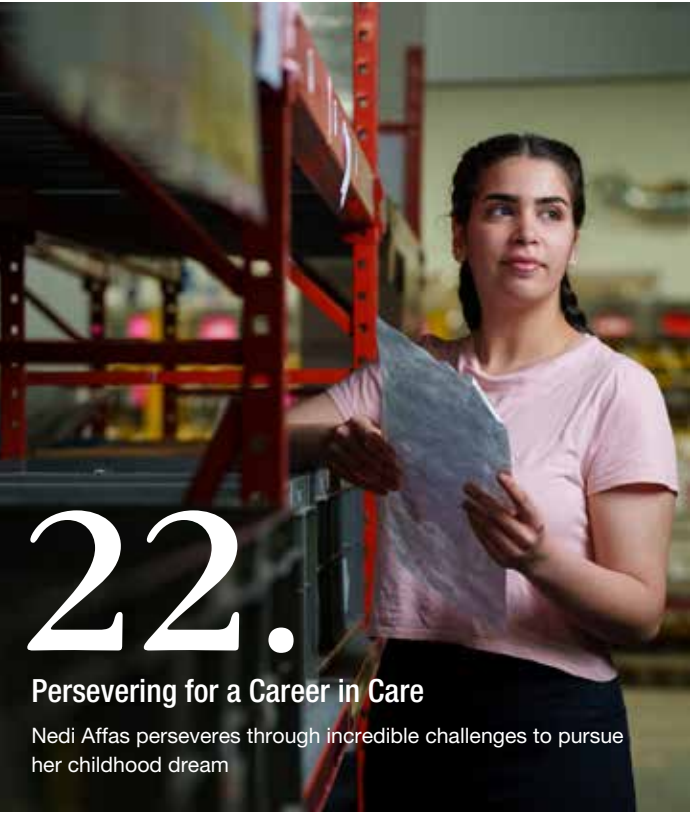
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Fanfare of Faith

Music major Alexis Dill shares her skills as a divisional music director with The Salvation Army

ACRONYMS

CAS | College of Arts and Sciences
OUWB | Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine
SBA | School of Business Administration
SECS | School of Engineering and Computer Science
SEHS | School of Education and Human Services
SHS | School of Health Sciences
SON | School of Nursing
oakland.edu/acronyms



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Oakland University Magazine is a biannual publication distributed free to alumni, staff and friends. See current and past articles on oakland.edu/oumagazine.

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UCM-26093 | Spring '24 Online Issue No. 114

UCM-26860 | Issue No. 115

17270 | ISSN: 1054-6480

Address changes, call (248) 364-6133 or email ouaa@oakland.edu.

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The human spirit is the essence of our being. It embodies our most exceptional qualities. We all personify attributes of resilience, creativity, empathy, hope, tenacity, courage or altruism — qualities that are unique to each of our stories and drive our human spirit, guiding us to where we are today.

According to a 2023 LinkedIn article by Innovate Academy, the human spirit helps us to “navigate diverse environments,” and that “driven by an unwavering quest for meaning, the human spirit strives to make a positive impact and find fulfillment.” The article goes on to explain that we should recognize our achievements, reflecting on our capabilities that make us unique and help guide us in our lives. It’s through embracing our extraordinary attributes that we can accomplish extraordinary feats and make a difference in the world.

Philosophers like Socrates, Kant and Nietzsche have explored the concept of the human spirit, each offering unique insights into our inner motivations and moral frameworks. Socrates, a Greek philosopher considered one of the most prolific and important founders of Western philosophy, believed in the immortality of the soul and its pursuit of wisdom and virtue, seeing the human spirit as the source of moral insight and ethical behavior.

German philosopher Immanuel Kant emphasized the importance of autonomy and the moral law. He believed the human spirit is guided by reason and moral duty, stating that, “Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe ... the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.” German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche explored the concept of the will to power, suggesting the human spirit strives for self-overcoming and personal excellence. Nietzsche proclaimed that, “He who has a why to live can bear almost any how.”



“Studying the human spirit is significant because it helps us understand the core of what makes us human,” says Mark C. Navin, Ph.D., professor and chair of philosophy at Oakland University. “It encompasses our motivations, our ethical frameworks and our ability to overcome challenges. This exploration not only provides insights into individual behavior but also offers a deeper understanding of collective human experiences and societal progress.”

As the editor of the Oakland University Alumni Magazine and an alum, I am constantly inspired by stories that spotlight the human spirit. This issue explores these concepts, from Nedi Affas, SHS ’23, whose perseverance through family loss, immigration and navigating her studies as a first-generation college student led her on a journey toward becoming a doctor; to Nicholas Kristock, SBA ’13 and ’14, whose gratitude drove him to a successful philanthropic career providing warmth and comfort to hospitalized children; and Kate Rougeau, SHS ’07, whose resilience as a team leader for the 2023 USA Women’s



U25 World Championship team for wheelchair basketball fueled her role in advocating for adaptive sports. These and many other alumni are creating a better world by embodying their unique attributes and proving how exceptional the human spirit can be. 🐾

— Kelli Warshefski, CAS ’13 and ’16, editor

Share your stories at oakland.edu/oumagazine.

Photos left to right:

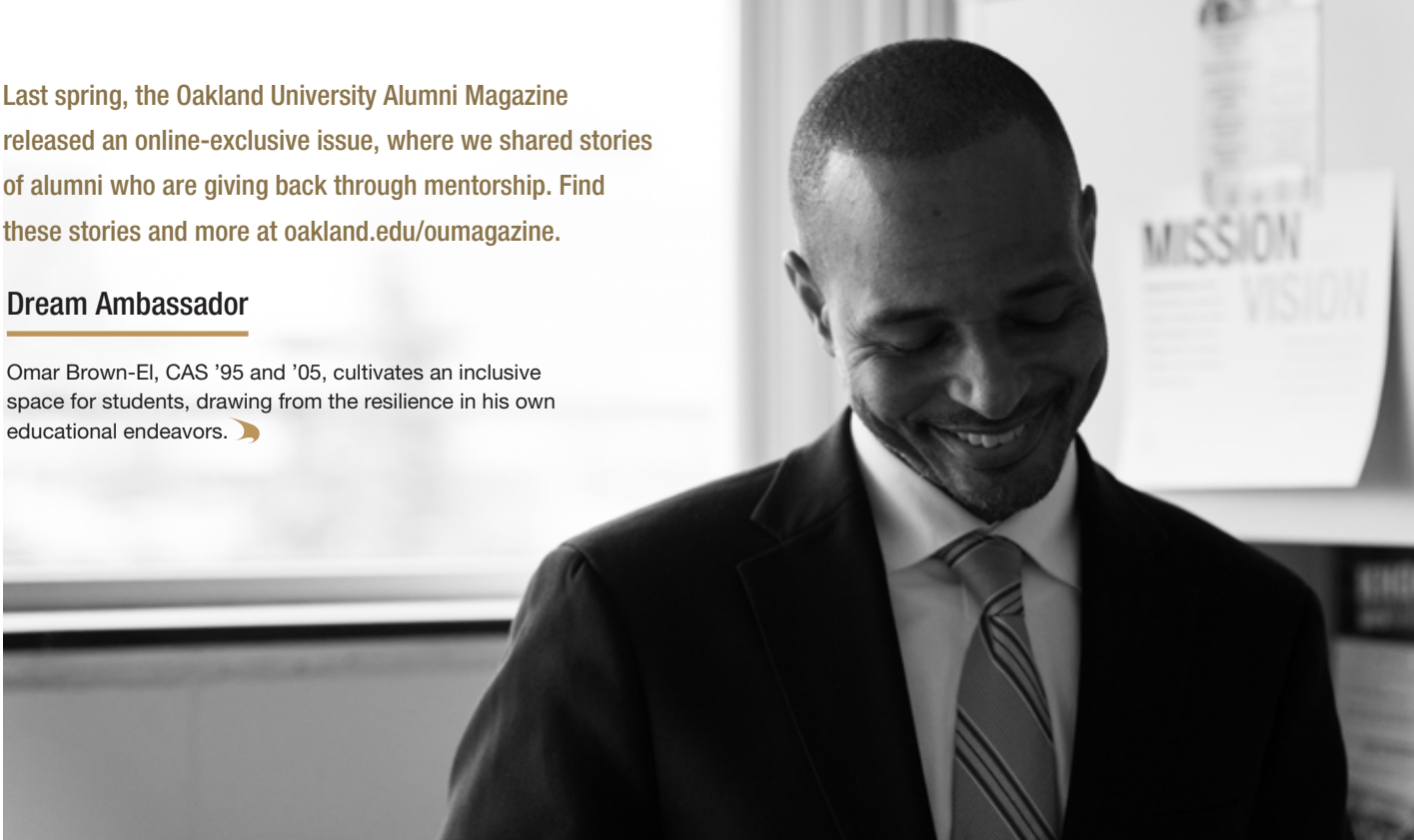
1. Nedi Affas, SHS ’23
2. Nicholas Kristock, SBA ’13 and ’14
3. Kate Rougeau, SHS ’07

Spring 2024 RECAP

Last spring, the Oakland University Alumni Magazine released an online-exclusive issue, where we shared stories of alumni who are giving back through mentorship. Find these stories and more at oakland.edu/oumagazine.

Dream Ambassador

Omar Brown-El, CAS '95 and '05, cultivates an inclusive space for students, drawing from the resilience in his own educational endeavors. ➤



Tuned into Teaching

WXOU adviser Martin “Marty” Shafer, CAS '11 and '14, SEHS '20, devotes his life to music and mentorship. ➤



Teaching Lifelong Lessons

With deep roots in education, Sarah Eidson-Laurence, SEHS '00, leaned on a foundational community to guide her passion toward teaching. ➤

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ALUMNI
Voices

Oakland University alumni emit pride, empowerment and resilience. Your diverse careers speak to the wealth of knowledge instilled in all graduates. Despite varying paths, however, it’s evident by your alumni voices that you took the tools you learned at OU and used this knowledge to become leaders in your fields.

“

I feel a big responsibility to continue showing gratitude and serving others.

”

NICHOLAS KRISTOCK, SBA '13 AND '14

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SUPPORT OU'S GREAT OUTDOORS

Summer is the perfect time to get outside and enjoy nature at OU. Walk our campus, visit Meadow Brook Hall's vast gardens or take in a concert at the Meadow Brook Amphitheatre. Other outdoor spaces include:



STUDENT ORGANIC FARM

Students get hands-on experience in plant sciences, growing crops that benefit the OU campus.



BIOLOGICAL PRESERVE

OU has two biological preserves that span 110 acres and serve as a living classroom.



NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE SITE

The site is a community-engaged project focused on creating educational experiences that promote Indigenous culture and tradition and build respectful relationships through its dynamic classroom spaces and return of biodiversity.



LORACS PROJECT

The Laboratory for Outdoor Research, Agriculture, Conservation and Sustainability (LORACS) is working on adding a greenhouse specifically for expanded plant research.



Support one of these projects today

ucm27158/6.24



A TENACIOUS SPIRIT

By Kelli Warshefski © Josh Scott

Nursing is a noble profession. It's fueled by compassionate people who strive to help those who need it most. But the road to becoming a nurse is not an easy one: It's an academically challenging curriculum, achieved only by those with a tenacious spirit. A trait Simon Keleel, SON '10, proudly possesses.

A pediatric nurse at Children's Hospital of Michigan, Keleel faced the challenges of nursing school head-on, driven by his love of science, teaching and the unique opportunity to merge the two into one fulfilling, diverse career.

"I am proud of my journey," Keleel says. "I'm glad I stayed the course and didn't give up."

Upon becoming a student at OU, Keleel immersed himself in the campus community. Although initially commuting, he enjoyed being at OU so much that he joined the Student Programming Board and moved onto campus after his first year. Keleel went on to become an orientation group leader, admissions ambassador and resident assistant, among other student-led positions.

With all the distractions, however, Keleel's academic goals became secondary and his GPA fell short of the nursing program's requirements. "The stresses of college life caught up to me and I was placed on academic hiatus," he recalls. "I had to figure out how to continue this path, though, because I knew this was the right field for me."

Keleel worked vigorously to raise his grades, taking on extra projects and meeting with advisers and professors until he was reinstated into the nursing program. He persevered through the requirements and graduated with his Bachelor of Science in nursing in 2010. But another challenge was awaiting Keleel: the Michigan nursing license exam.

A self-proclaimed "poor test-taker," Keleel hit the books hard for his exam and was heartbroken when he failed. But with a tenacity that knows no bounds, Keleel re-evaluated his studying methods and passed the exam on his second try; a feat that not only brought the nursing graduate immense relief, but the joy to pursue his dream career.

"I'm fascinated with the pathophysiology behind endocrinology," Keleel explains about his role at Children's Hospital of Michigan. "But I also get to spend time with kids and their families. A lot of the patients I see have lifelong chronic conditions that have to be managed, so I teach the families how to care for their child when they get home."

A Daisy Award recipient — a nursing recognition program — and two-time Children's Hospital of Michigan Practice Nurse of the Year award winner, Keleel is proof that the greatest triumphs come from the hardest climbs.

"I am so grateful for my past experiences that have brought me to where I am today," Keleel says. "Although it may not have been an easy road, I know that nursing was the right choice for me. Being a nurse is more than just my degree, it's my passion and who I am." 🌟

FANFARE OF FAITH

By Emily Morris 📷 Robert Hall

Surrounded with support, music major Alexis Dill shares her skills

Earning first trumpet player echoes with responsibility in the music world — everyone else in the section faithfully follows for cohesion and clarity. Through The Salvation Army, Alexis Dill, SMTD '22, weaves the principles of this lucrative role into her career as a music director, where she leads with her music to amplify the sounds of others. “It’s about rising to the occasion,” she says. “When you’re the first player and you play with confidence, everyone else will feel at ease. The whole band will sound better.”

Throughout her childhood, Dill witnessed the worship music of her hometown church swelling past the pews, resonating throughout the greater Toronto community, and she allowed the music to move her as well. The church supported both a junior and senior choir and brass band, giving praise opportunities for all ages. Dill and her sister joined early, which inspired them both to pursue music later. “We climbed the musical ladder of those groups, but even before that, we were always in the service,” she says. “Even when we were babies, we heard the music around us.”

While Dill’s sisterly relationship spurred her first musical bond, many other people struck a chord with her too. “An older man used to sit beside me in [church] band, and he always encouraged me,” she says. “He taught me that we’re all human so we shouldn’t be too hard on ourselves.” After his passing, his instruments were left to Dill, continuing their music and mentor relationship.

Dill leading a young choir at a weekly music school at one of the local Salvation Army churches in Pittsburgh. Photo provided by Alexis Dill



Eventually, a music teacher at her church noticed Dill’s talent and tenacity and offered her free lessons. “It all happened organically,” Dill says. “I was having fun, and I wanted to invest the time to improve. Taking lessons really expanded my view.

“Sometimes people are mentoring you, and they don’t even realize it,” she adds.

Diligent lessons and practice coupled with supportive surroundings primed Dill as a musician and to become a mentor as well. Finding harmony between “being assertive and confident, but also kind and cooperative” is key in both, she says.

Once Dill decided to take her musical aptitude another step, mentors throughout her graduate studies helped her flourish further. At Oakland University, trumpeter and Assistant Professor Jennifer Fox Oliverio, DMA, reached beyond classroom instruction and invited Dill to play with her in an all-female brass band.





“I was surrounded by esteemed professionals who offered themselves as resources,” Dill says.

While at OU, Dill performed in the Wind Symphony, Symphony Orchestra, Latin Jazz Ensemble, Steel Band and Brass Band, and she assisted with the Youth Brass Band. Because of her full-ride graduate assistantship, Dill also led the Golden Grizzlies Athletic Band and the Oakland University Trumpet Ensemble.

Simultaneously, Dill weaved her religious roots into her college career by maintaining a connection with The Salvation Army, working on and off and a collaborative opportunity emerged. “I reconnected with someone from a music camp, and they told me about the divisional director position in Pittsburgh,” Dill says. “That was just really cool to me because it meant I could merge music and faith once again.”

As a divisional music director with The Salvation Army, Dill echoes the music and character of all the mentors who guided her. Through Salvation Army camps, she encourages that initial musical hum in young students. “I see potential in so many,” she says. “It’s a powerful experience.”

Her division also leads regular performances and events, where she connects with other creatives to share her faith. There’s a musical program every week, and every month churches collaborate across the region to merge into vibrant larger ensembles, including dancers, actors, singers and musicians.

“All these good things have come from God,” she says. “He gives me this joy in what I do.” 🌟



Dill leading a gospel choir at a monthly Divisional music gathering. Photo provided by Alexis Dill



Dill leading the School of Rock Conservatory choir at their finale concert. Photo provided by Alexis Dill



At a weekly community music school at one of the local Pittsburgh churches that Dill works with. Photo provided by Alexis Dill



At a larger “territorial” camp, the band is made up of players from different Salvation Army churches across the Eastern United States. Photo provided by Alexis Dill



MAJOR: Bachelor of Arts in political science, 2019; Master of Public Administration, 2021

CURRENT OCCUPATION: Academic Adviser at Oakland University

FAVORITE STUDY SPOT: Fourth floor of the library and the Math and Science Center with its hidden spots that not many people know about.

GO-TO PARKING LOT: I was loyal to P-26 for both undergrad and grad school since the majority of my classes were on this side of campus.

BEST BUILDING TO HAVE CLASSES IN: At the top of the Math Science Center, I saw the sunset every class. I will never forget those nights.

FAVORITE MOMENT ON CAMPUS: September was always my favorite time of the year on campus. I was excited about new beginnings and attended as many events as I could manage.

FAVORITE PROFESSOR: Professor Fails or Professor Trumbore. Their passion is contagious. They taught me how to be eager to learn and explore.

SONG(S) YOU LISTENED TO WHEN STUDYING: Depends on the class. I spent the majority of my time writing papers; this required instrumental music to aid in my focus. If I was studying for a test, it was always rap music.

WHAT IS SOMETHING UNIQUE ABOUT YOURSELF? I believe I am unique in my drive to learn. I am a lifelong learner. I am always excited to try new things and learn from those around me. 🌟

In 2017, Issa co-founded a nonprofit in Macomb County named LK St. Clair. Their mission is to provide high quality, affordable recreational play to communities in need with a focus on social and emotional learning. They focus on soccer and basketball in the 5-13 age groups. Learn more at lkstclair.soccer.

LIFEGIVING FRIENDSHIP

1968



Rose de Vera (Hirsch) pictured far right at Hamlin Hall with students Judi Moreillon and Susie Keenan

More than 50 years after meeting at OU, Nick Vitale donates his kidney to friend and fellow alum Rose Hirsch

By Kristina Lindberg

When Rose Hirsch, CAS '72, and Nick Vitale, CAS '83, met in Vandenberg's dining hall in 1968 fresh out of high school, they didn't know their friendship would result in a lifesaving gift 54 years later. Their time at OU forged fixed bonds between them and a group of classmates, also resulting in Hirsch and Vitale meeting their spouses.

1970



Left to right: Sarah Lindberg, David Franzblau, Nick Vitale, Susie Keenan and Pat Steele in Vandenberg

1987

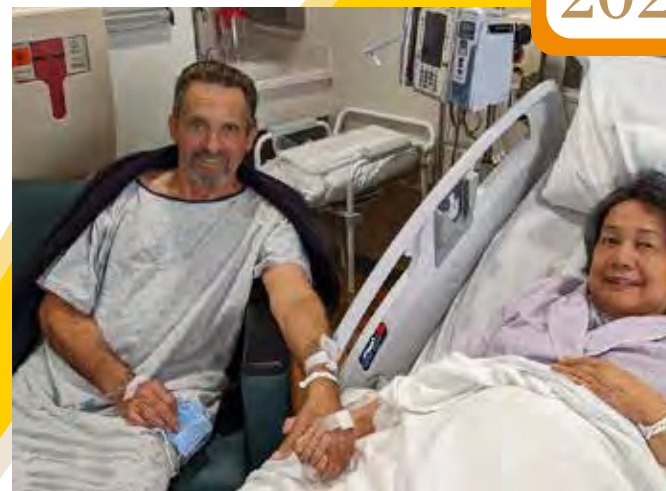


"OU Kids" reunion at Rose and Henry's house, left to right: Nick Vitale, Judi Moreillon, Susie Keenan, Mark Silverberg, Henry Hirsch, Rose Hirsch

Although some moved away after graduation, the connections remained throughout the years. At the start of the pandemic, the group began regularly meeting on Zoom, naming their group chats the "OU Kids."

"By 2021, Rose was appearing less and less on the Zoom calls," Vitale, who lives in Arizona, says. The "OU Kids" virtual hangouts were scheduled for late afternoons to accommodate those living in different time zones — too late for Hirsch, who was suffering from kidney failure and exhausted from her daily home dialysis. In early summer, Hirsch's husband Henry, CAS '73, shared with his college friends his wife's health prognosis and the fact she was on a transplant waiting list.

2022



Nick Vitale and Rose Hirsch one day after the kidney transplant

Vitale and his wife Judi instantly knew they wanted to help. After initial testing revealed that Vitale was a possible match based on his blood type, it was followed by nine months of research, extensive medical tests and virtual meetings with the transplant team at Beaumont's (now Corewell) Multi-Organ Transplant Center. Originally a decision made in a heartbeat, Vitale never doubted his commitment but grew increasingly concerned that a medical test late in the game would exclude him from becoming a donor. "The hardest part of it all was not being able to say anything to Rose and Henry," says Vitale, who had been advised by the hospital not to share his intentions.

His worries were unfounded, though. In February 2022, Vitale got the call that he was a match. Shortly after, the transplant nurse coordinator shared Vitale's long-awaited news with Hirsch. As Hirsch recalls, "She said, 'Rose, you have a donor.' And I said, 'Oh my gosh, that's amazing.' And she said, 'And you know who it is!' It was Nick and I couldn't believe he would do something like this, knowing all of the procedures involved."

Vitale and his wife traveled to Michigan in April 2022 for the lifesaving transplant. Surrounded by their support system of spouses and OU friends — and expertly guided by the Beaumont medical team — the surgery was a success. While Vitale's recovery took longer because of complications stemming from prior surgeries, his donated kidney started working immediately and Hirsch felt better right away. "I almost had a party in my room the day after," she says. "Everything was bright and not foggy anymore."

Laughing, Vitale adds, "Judi and I have this theory that my kidney thinks it died and went to heaven. It's in the body of a natural-food-loving, careful person and out of mine, so it's just happy as a clam."



Nick Vitale, his wife Judi (Moreillon) with Rose Hirsch and her husband Henry a week after the kidney transplant surgeries

2023

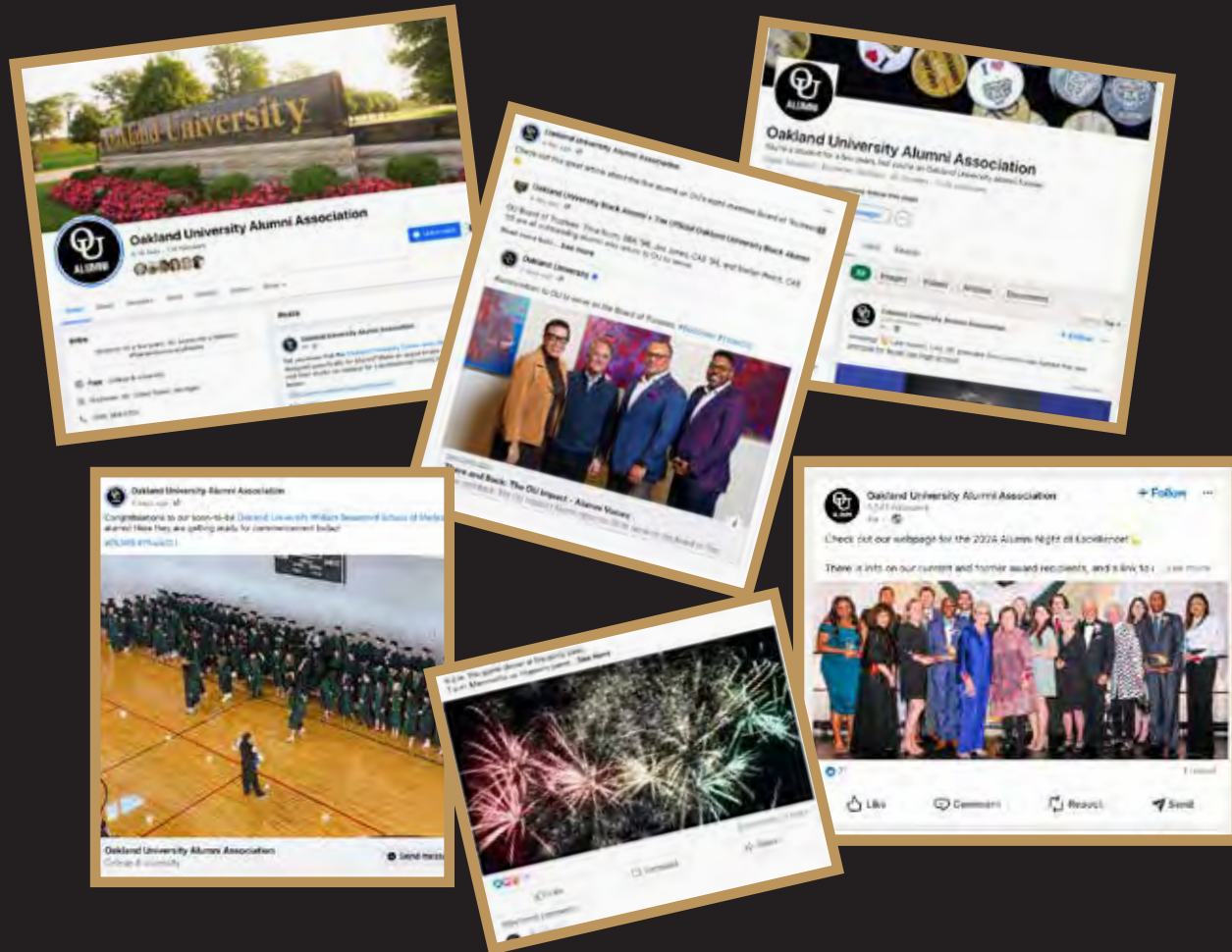


"OU Kids" reunion at the Tucson Museum of Art, left to right: Judi Moreillon, Rose Hirsch, Henry Hirsch, Cheryl Green, Bill Green, Nick Vitale and Mark Silverberg

Vitale and Hirsch's friendship flourished further than their original OU ties, with both their surgeons, Steven Cohn, M.D., and Krishna Putchakayala, M.D., being OUWB faculty. Vitale's transplant nurse coordinator and nurse anesthetist noted that they were also OU graduates, which gave Vitale added peace of mind. "I remember my feeling of calm confidence before the operation that came from the hands-on involvement of so many OU-connected health care professionals," he says. "I went into surgery with fond memories of my campus years in the late '60s and early '70s, mingled with a deep appreciation for what the university has evolved to in the 21st century."

It's been more than two years since the operation, and Hirsch and Vitale are doing well. The careful planning and excellent guidance by their medical team made the kidney transplant an outstanding success, and they hope to encourage more people to consider kidney donation — a lifesaving gift made possible for them by the bonds forged at OU more than five decades earlier.

Join our ONLINE COMMUNITY!



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WRAPPED UP IN GRATITUDE

Nonprofit founder Nicholas Kristock provides
comfort, color and connection to others

By Kelli Warshefski  Josh Scott

“To whom much is given, much is required,” is a mantra Nicholas Kristock, SBA ’13 and ’14, lives by, covering his philanthropic endeavors in gratitude and altruism.

The two-time alumnus is the founder and owner of Fleece and Thank You, a nonprofit organization that brings colorful fleece blankets and video messages of support to hospitalized children, offering comfort in an otherwise often bleak environment. The organization has grown over the past eight years, servicing every children’s hospital in the state of Michigan and employing three full-time, 10 part-time staff and hundreds of volunteers. Additionally, Fleece and Thank You participates in a workforce development program for young adults and adults with various cognitive and physical impairments to aid with production.

Fleece and Thank You’s Farmington Hills facility contains rows upon rows of brightly colored fleece patterns, which are packaged into blanket kits that are sent all over the country to groups requesting them. These groups then tie the fleece into blankets, create their video message for the patient, and ship the kits back to the team at Fleece and Thank You, who do quality-control on each blanket, washing and drying them to hospital grade, before sealing and shipping them to different hospitals. Patients receiving the blankets can then respond to the blanket-maker with a video of gratitude.

“We touch about 150,000 people a year across the country,” Kristock explains about the organization’s operations. “Pretty much any day of the year there is a group somewhere in the U.S. that is making blankets with Fleece and Thank You in some capacity.”

Kristock’s philanthropic drive didn’t just start with Fleece and Thank You; it was woven into his life from a young age and flourished with the people and connections he made at OU.

As a soccer player at Oakland, Kristock and his teammates started a nonprofit during his junior year to help fund transportation for kids to attend mission trips. “That was when I got my first taste of nonprofit and fundraising,” he says. “After graduation, I moved to Australia for a



couple of years to play soccer and started volunteering with nonprofits there, mostly working with kids in the hospital. So, when I moved back to Michigan, I knew working with nonprofits was something I wanted to pursue.”

As the son of a nurse and the twin brother of a pediatric oncology nurse, a part of Kristock was always drawn to helping others. Upon returning to Michigan from Australia, his sister asked him to make a fleece blanket for one of her patients. After consulting with other hospitals, Kristock found a need for this service and a week later, Fleece and Thank You was born.

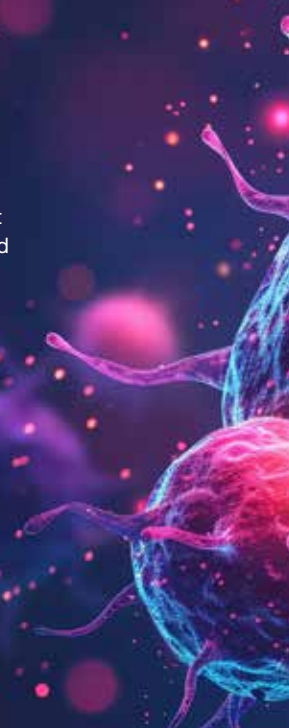
Turning to his OU connections, Kristock held one of the organization’s earliest blanket events in North Foundation Hall with the help of the Phi Sigma Sigma sorority. The event not only helped launch Fleece and Thank You, but also led to him eventually tying a knot of a different kind: it’s where he met his wife, Sara (Costa), SEHS ’17.

“I love OU, and I’m so grateful for the time I had there,” says Kristock. “The resources and support they provided me got me to where I am today.”

Aside from his work with Fleece and Thank You, Kristock developed a tech company, KindKatch, as well as a nonprofit apparel company, Grateful Human. He’s also taken on the role of chair with the Oakland University Alumni Association. “There’s something really special to me about being a part of a university that is still building its presence and it’s a true privilege to be part of building their story,” he says.

“Every day I am grateful for the position I’m in and the resources I have at my disposal,” Kristock adds about his drive to help others. “I feel a big responsibility to continue showing gratitude and serving others.” 🍷

CLASS NOTES



Jonathan Kane, CAS '16

Biomedical and Biological Sciences

Jonathan Kane is the co-founder, partner and Chief Scientific Officer at Lion Labs. Lion Labs is a medical and adult-use cannabis processor/ manufacturer, established in 2018. Prior to starting Lion Labs, Jonathan lived and worked out of Atlanta for Xstrahl, a company specializing in producing radiation-based research/ treatment equipment for cancer and other biological investigations that utilize radiation. He worked with and co-authored peer-reviewed journal articles that used Xstrahl equipment while in graduate school at OU and was recruited by them post-graduation. ➤



Christy Maraone, SBA and CAS '04

Marketing and Spanish

Following graduation in 2004, Christy Maraone moved across the country to Denver, Colorado, where she earned a Master of Business Administration at the University of Colorado at Denver, as well as a Master of Science in marketing. Throughout the years, Christy's career has progressed and advanced. She is currently the vice president of marketing and outreach at the Burn and Reconstructive Centers of America, the largest burn care system in the U.S., managing a team of 32+ individuals in marketing and outreach at their headquarters in Augusta, Georgia, and locations nationwide. Christy has landed stories on Good Morning America, Newsnation, People Magazine, NewsMax, Yahoo, WebMD and more. ➤



Gerald Kearns, CAS '84

Science

Attending Oakland University in the early '80s changed Gerald Kearns' life forever. OU gave him a strong educational foundation and the skills to believe that he could compete in the job market. Upon graduation, he held several successful jobs, including his last career position as a professor in information technology for a college in North Carolina. Gerald truly enjoyed giving back to his community and paying it forward as a professor. He has been the only professor at this college who's been nominated and won the college's Excellence in Teaching Award three different times. ➤



Stephanie Ubaydi, CAS '96

Journalism

Stephanie Ubaydi is a local business owner, opening the first Perspire Sauna Studio location in Michigan in March of 2023. The business has had 2,500 unique guests complete over 20,000 sauna sessions in her studio. Stephanie has spent countless hours educating the community on the benefits of infrared sauna use combined with red light therapy and chromotherapy. Perspire Sauna Studio has supported local business growth through partnerships with other wellness-minded businesses in a growing segment of the market. Stephanie has recently signed a deal to bring Perspire Sauna Studio to the Troy/Birmingham and Novi/Northville areas. ➤



Jay Coomes, SECS '83

Computer Science

In 2023, Jay Coomes was appointed chief technology officer for the Intracoastal Bank in Florida. In this capacity, he is responsible for directing the bank's day-to-day IT operations and continuing to set an innovative technology future for the Bank and its clients. For over 20 years, Jay has held a variety of technology and product executive positions for Fiserv, Inc. a leading Fintech provider and major vendor for the Bank. In his most recent role, Jay brought numerous innovative and award-winning products to market focused on the digitization and automation of lending and banking operational processes. ➤



Alumni Night of Excellence 2024

Congratulations to the 2024 Oakland University Alumni Night of Excellence honorees. A total of 16 alumni and friends were recognized in June for their achievements in business, community service, volunteerism and more, including a special group of young alumni who've graduated within the last 10 years. A gracious crowd of alumni and friends gathered to celebrate the awardees at a special reception and dinner at the Auburn Hills Marriott Pontiac. Special thanks to the Oakland University Credit Union for their sponsorship of this event.

Distinguished Alumni Service Award: Judy Hegelund, SBA '95

Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award: Martin Reisig, CAS '67

Honorary Alumni Award: Daniel G. Walsh, M.D.

Odyssey Award: Timothy Shanahan, Ph.D., CAS '72 and SEHS '74

Spirit Award: Mitchel Shaver, CAS '96, SHS '96 and '00

Community Engagement Award: Tara Michener, SEHS '12

Young Alumni 10 within 10 Awards: Jessica M. Dzubnar Barker, OUWB '19; Sarah C. Blanchette-Swarz, CAS '15; Miranda Divozzo, CAS '14; Kendell Jefferson, CAS '18; Kristin Penrose, CAS '21; Martin Shafer, CAS '11 and '14, SEHS '20; Lesley Sleeman, SHS '13 and '16; Laura Tack, SBA '15 and '17; Nathan Wright, SEHS '18; Elizabeth Zaborowski-Majda, SHS '18 and '20 ➤

Toinette Gunn, SEHS '99 and '13

Counseling

Toinette Gunn was named one of Crain's Chicago Business' 2021 Notable Black Leaders and Executives. She is the first Black executive director of Chicago Debates, an organization that bridges the opportunity gap for Chicago Public Schools students by providing them with an after-school program that supports their academic, career and leadership success. Toinette joined Chicago Debates in 2018, and previously served as the vice president of programs for Chicago Scholars, where she led vision, research and strategy for all programming for nearly 3,000 students annually. ➤





PERSEVERING FOR A CAREER IN CARE

Nedi Affas overcomes challenges
to pursue med school

By Patrick Dunn 📷 Robert Hall

Nedi Affas, SHS '23, decided that she wanted to be a doctor when she was 8 years old, after her father died due to poor medical care in her native country of Iraq.

"I was really young at that time, but I was thinking, 'What if there was something I could have done? If I was a doctor myself, I could have saved him,'" Affas says.

Now 23, Affas' commitment to her goal has only strengthened with time. She'll start medical school this fall at Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine (OUWB). But she's persevered through incredible challenges, including even more family loss, immigration and navigating undergraduate studies at OU as a first-generation college student, to get there.

"There were so many instances where, for example, I didn't do well on an exam and I basically thought, 'Oh my God, I'm a failure. I'm never getting into med school. I'm never going to become a doctor like I've always wanted to become,'" Affas recalls. "And then I had those people that kind of got me back up on my feet and reminded me that, 'No, it's not the end of the world. You will do good. You will overcome that.'"

While the death of Affas' father planted the seed of her interest in a medical career, another major family health challenge helped cement it. Affas immigrated to the U.S. with her mother in 2013, and they were soon followed by Affas' grandparents, who were both diagnosed with late-stage cancer during their health checks upon entering the country. Affas says the fact that neither of them had received a diagnosis up to that

point was another tragic indicator of Iraq's poor health care system. However, she had the opportunity to see a better way firsthand while spending many hours at her grandma's bedside at Beaumont Hospital (now Corewell), Troy. Affas often translated for her grandmother, who couldn't speak English.

"I loved the care she received from the nurses, nursing aides, doctors and staff," Affas says. "Their compassion was something that she could truly see and understand, despite the language barrier. I knew I wanted to do the same thing for others."

Affas chose to pursue undergraduate studies at OU because it was close to her family's Sterling Heights home and she was eligible for full tuition coverage as a low-income student. While she initially chose a biology major, as she saw other pre-med students doing, Affas quickly changed her major to health sciences, which allowed her to take more health care-focused classes that she says she "truly cared about."

However, Affas says her first two years of school were the most difficult for her. In addition to navigating college for the first time, she started school in 2019, which meant she hadn't even finished her freshman year when the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

"There were a lot of things to adapt to and so many things changing at once," Affas recalls.

But she got through those difficult years with the support of the

community she found in OU's Explorations in Collaborative Leadership and InterProfessional Education (ECLIPSE) program. Through the leadership development program for health sciences students, Affas met other like-minded students and was assigned a mentor, OUWB student Ethan Dimock, SHS '22, with whom she is still close friends. Dimock says Affas' "infectious and caring attitude" stood out to him as soon as he met her, and her drive to succeed was clear.

"People ask [ECLIPSE mentors] for advice all the time, but it's different to see someone actually working super hard and applying it," Dimock explains. "You would give her these little pieces of information, and then right away, she would apply and work so hard to try and achieve her end goal, which I thought was outstanding."

Affas became ECLIPSE's events coordinator in her junior year, and became an ECLIPSE mentor herself in her senior year. Affas says she was "really shy" when she started school, but she changed "180 degrees" thanks to her experience with ECLIPSE.

"Just to go from a mentee to a mentor showed me I had grown a lot," Affas says. "It helped me build a lot of great characteristics."

Meanwhile, Affas had also thrown herself into the frontline of the pandemic, choosing to work as a nursing assistant at Beaumont Troy in April 2020. She says she felt that if working in a medical career at the height of the pandemic was too much for her, then she "shouldn't go into it in the first place." But her experience only served to solidify



her decision. She developed an appreciation for the important roles played by everyone on a health care team, and was deeply affected by the relationships she built with patients who were isolated from their families.

Affas recalls one interaction with a patient who spoke only Arabic and could not communicate with hospital staff. When Affas first stopped by the patient's room and greeted her in Arabic, the woman immediately reached out to take Affas' hands.

"She told me, 'You're the answer to my prayers,'" Affas says. "And to me personally, that was something really important. I wish to do the same for every single patient."

Affas says engaging in extracurricular opportunities has been crucial for her to gain experience and build supportive connections in her field. She's also served as the public outreach coordinator for OU's Aspiring Surgeons Club and helped ship medical supplies to underserved countries through the nonprofit United 2 Heal. Through her volunteer experiences, Affas noticed that she consistently worked alongside a large number of OUWB students.

"That showed me how OU truly cares about their community and service," Affas says. "And if the school doesn't support that, they wouldn't have taken the time to do it."

This observation helped solidify Affas' decision to pursue medical school at OUWB, where she will begin studies this August.

"I really love the fact that I was with my grandma at Troy Beaumont, and then I get to go back to the same health care system where I would be able to be the doctor that's providing help for patients," she says. "It's full circle for me."

Affas says she's developed "grit" through her undergraduate journey, and she praises family, friends, and professional mentors for helping her keep pushing forward. But Dimock suggests she should give herself some more credit.

"She does have a great support system," Dimock says. "But, she's also internally such a hard worker and such a driven individual. And I don't think that's really something that you can teach. I think she's very self-motivated."

As Affas enters the next stage of her journey to become the doctor she wishes her father had, she says she's grateful for the challenges she's experienced so far.

"It's just nice to turn these struggles into power or the ability to help others," Affas says. "If I didn't go through all these things, I wouldn't know what it means to give back and help others who are in the same situation as me." 🌟

DIALOGUE *throughout* THE DECADES

Historical pillars of the Black Alumni Chapter discuss the group's heritage to celebrate 50 years.

By Emily Morris 📷 Robert Hall

The Association of Black Students (ABS) emerged in 1968, a decade after Oakland University's establishment, as a small pool of Black students seeking out their campus community. Nearly a decade later in 1974, the Black Alumni Association (BAA) was created to accommodate the range of alumni supported throughout the years, and the Black Alumni Chapter we know today took root.

Today's chapter continues to expand under the leadership of alums like Shalonda Dennis, SBA '07, who currently serves as the co-chair of the Student Outreach and Alumni Relations committee for the Black Alumni Chapter. In an interview highlighting its heritage, Dennis discusses perspectives of the present and past with an early ABS and BAA member, Stephanie Spears-Boothe, CAS '74.

Shalonda Dennis

Stephanie Spears-Boothe

Celebrate the Black Alumni Chapter's 50th Anniversary at the **2024 Alumni Reunion Weekend** on **Friday, October 18**. Learn more at oakland.edu/alumni/reunion-weekend.

Dennis: I can only imagine what that atmosphere was like on campus as a part of that inaugural group in '74. What drew you to Oakland University?

Spears-Boothe: It's interesting how it took place. I wasn't even aware of Oakland University. The Association of Black Students came to my high school and arranged a day for us to come to campus. We were so welcomed by the upperclassmen; they surrounded us with love that day, taking us all over campus and paying for our lunch at the grill. They talked to us so sincerely, not just about the campus, but our responsibility as Black students. We needed to make a difference in our community. It opened up a whole new vision for me.

Dennis: How large was the group when you formed the Black Alumni Association?

Spears-Boothe: I would say 100 to 150, which is large. In early classes, there weren't many Black students. The university had thousands of students, but only a few hundred were Black students.

Dennis: That's interesting because when I was a student it was still predominantly a white university, but on campus, it felt different. That added to the familial sense I felt because everywhere I looked, I saw people that looked like me. It made me feel safe.

Spears-Boothe: It wasn't like that for us, but that's why the Oakland Center was so important. We met outside of the classes. There were some [classes] that made it feel like we shouldn't be there. That propelled us to be protective over one another and to be engaged because we were going to stay and graduate.

We also connected with the Pontiac community. There were activists and pioneers that came to campus. Your role is to help your community get to a certain level of freedom. With these connections, students were contributing to what's going on in society.

Even though *Brown v. Board of Education* had been in '54, many

schools weren't desegregated 20 years later. The activists contacted our student leaders, and [the ABS] went to Pontiac Northern High School. When we got there ... the sight we saw ... it was a learning experience. We wanted to show support for the Black community, for desegregating all schools. There were residents there that threatened bombs — the opposition was all lined up.

As a student, you need to be aware and engaged. We found lifelong friends in those moments too.

Dennis: Yes, exactly that. Anyone could've just written you off, but for them to come to you and want you to get involved, that speaks volumes.

Spears-Boothe: We hung in there, and now we see subsequent classes are now in charge. It's a beautiful thing. They're grasping for others to always keep a connection. That's history.

Dennis: It's interesting you mention evolution because I've seen that in the chapter now. Many board members have served well beyond their term, but that's because we needed people to join the board, carry the torch.

Spears-Boothe: Yes, as you evolve, it's important to keep alumni involved and engaged. They will reveal wisdom. It shows young people how far they've come. You can read about a historic perspective, but if you hear about it from someone who did, they can add that bit of spice to further explain.

Dennis: I love hearing all this history. What advice would you give me to continue the legacy of the Black Alumni Chapter?

Spears-Boothe: You should be a motivating factor. You wouldn't be engaged if you weren't motivated yourself, and spread that to younger generations. Just show up for them, and when I say show up, I mean in the community, too. When you show up, there will always be more doors opening for you and others around you. 🌟



CHAMPIONING INCLUSIVITY

By Jillian Wolf 📷 Robert Hall

When Kate Rougeau, Ph.D., SHS '07, started coaching youth wheelchair basketball 17 years ago, she never imagined that her love for sports would lead her to the World Championships with the possibility of the Paralympics. A coordinator and assistant professor of wellness and health promotion in OU's School of Health Sciences, Dr. Rougeau is committed to educating people about diverse populations — including disability as a diversity class — and the psychophysiological benefits of physical activity for all.

"I love sports and the opportunities they afford people," Rougeau says. "I want to help give that to others, especially a population that doesn't typically get to participate."

Rougeau fell in love with adaptive sports after volunteer coaching at an all-sports summer camp for children with disabilities, and officially joined the National Wheelchair Basketball Association (NWBA) in 2009. After a couple of years coaching prep (age 5-13) and juniors (age 14-18), she pursued a graduate assistant position at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where she was the assistant coach for the men's and women's wheelchair basketball teams from 2010-17. Rougeau maintained her involvement in coaching within the NWBA over the years and was ultimately selected as team leader for the Women's U25 Wheelchair Basketball World Championship team.

In 2023, Rougeau traveled with the team to the International Wheelchair Basketball Federation's Women's U25 Wheelchair Basketball World Championship in Thailand. As team lead, she was responsible for all the travel details, including booking flights and places to stay, meal planning and the logistics of international travel for a team of 18, most of whom

are full-time wheelchair users. This was no small undertaking, as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) doesn't exist internationally. While some countries were helpful, careful and involved, travel for individuals with disabilities is unfortunately not always a positive experience. At one point during this trip, the athletes were refused their everyday, custom-built wheelchairs at an airport and instead given the equivalent of hospital chairs, which can negatively impact an individual's mobility, independence and safety.

"Imagine somebody says, 'Oh you don't need your shoes (legs), take these, wear them for seven hours and you'll be fine,'" explains Rougeau. "Well, you're not going to be fine. Our staff worked together to advocate for our athletes so they didn't have to worry about that."

With the support of Rougeau and other leaders, the team successfully made it to Thailand in good health. It was a magical experience for Team USA, who dominated the competition. "Winning gold was the best part of the journey," she says. "And it was incredible to see the team make new connections and play with people they had never played with before."

As for Rougeau, the ultimate goal is the 2028 Paralympic Games in Los Angeles to accentuate the successes she is building in her teaching, research and service work as a professor at OU. "I'm grateful that my passion and career can overlap, and that I can live my dream while supporting others in reaching theirs," she says. "I see my involvement as a way of serving my community and my country, representing something bigger than myself." ➤

CAMPUS Highlights

The Oakland University campus community is ever-evolving. Through keeping in touch with your alma mater, you can witness these changes firsthand. Your memories keep OU rooted in its rich history, and your love for campus continues to help it grow.

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*Education can transform
a person's entire life.
That's what really drives me.*

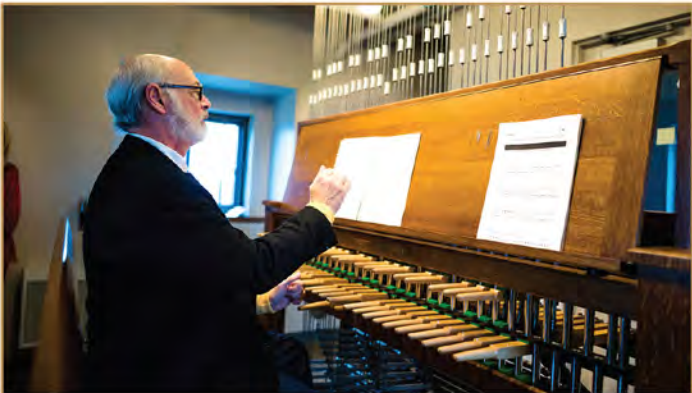
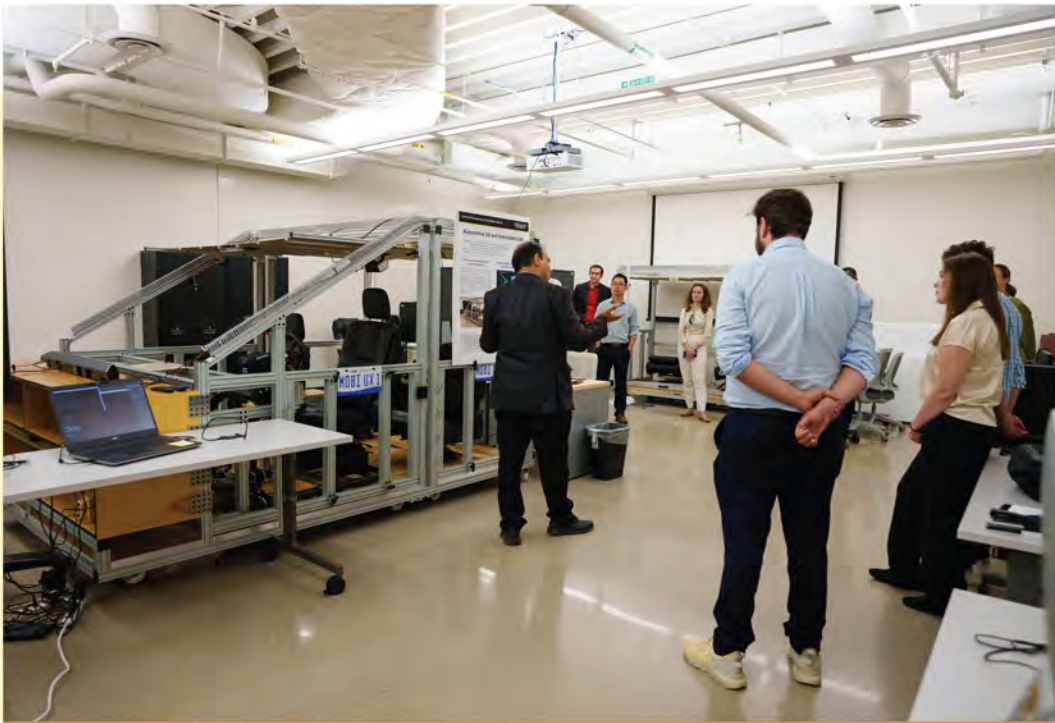
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BETH TALBERT
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NEWS

OU celebrating grand opening of Research and Innovation Center

This spring, Oakland University celebrated the grand opening of the School of Engineering and Computer Science's Research and Innovation Center (RIC), a 48,700-square-foot facility located in Rochester Hills, Michigan, that will house bioengineering, mechanical, electrical, industrial, and computer science labs, and serve as a hub for research conducted in partnership with industry. 🐾



A life in music: Dennis Curry finds calling as OU's resident carillonneur

For the past 10 years, Dennis Curry has been making beautiful music atop Elliott Tower as Oakland University's resident carillonneur. "It's been my honor," says Curry, who also played an integral role in designing the 151-foot-tall tower, which serves as a rallying point for student activities and creates a stunning visual centerpiece for Oakland's campus. 🐾

CCE is home to the Muchmore Presidential History Collection of historic books

Oakland University's Center for Civic Engagement (CCE) is now home to the Muchmore Presidential History Collection, which includes more than 275 volumes about U.S. presidents and by presidents. The collection was made possible by a generous donation to the CCE by Oakland Board of Trustees member Dennis Muchmore. 🐾



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GOLDEN MOMENT

By Michael Downes
📷 Clarence Round

Greg Kampe has been the head coach of Oakland University's basketball team for 40 years. He is the longest tenured head coach in men's Division I basketball and yet this season was filled with firsts.

With an older roster led by senior Trey Townsend and graduate students Blake Lampman and Jack Gohlke, Kampe's team wasn't viewed as contenders to win the Horizon League but rather a middle-of-the-pack team, where they had been the past four seasons. Since joining the league in 2013, Oakland had won the league once, in 2017, but had never won the tournament.

After a challenging 1-3 start to the season, Oakland would go on to win 19 of their 27 remaining games and finish with a 15-5 conference record, good enough to finish as Horizon League champions, but if they wanted a shot at a March Madness bid, they'd have to win three more games in the Horizon League Tournament.

Following close games with Purdue Fort Wayne and Cleveland State, the Golden Grizzlies found themselves facing Cleveland State in the championship game. With an outstanding 38-point, 11-rebound game from Townsend, Oakland would punch their ticket to the NCAA Division I men's basketball tournament.

Kampe's teams have been to the NCAA tournament three other times in his tenure — 2005, 2010 and 2011 — but had never won a game. While they won a play-in game against Alabama A&M in '05, the team never made it past the first round. Odds were not in their favor this year either, having to face the blue blood Kentucky, a tournament favorite with multiple players expected to be selected in the first round of the NBA Draft.

Gohlke, however, would become an internet sensation against Kentucky. Over the course of the season, Gohlke took 364 shots, only eight of them were not threes. That trend would continue as he took 20 shots against Kentucky, all threes, making 10 of them. Townsend would add 17 points and junior DQ Cole finished with 12.

In an absolute stunner, Oakland would take down Kentucky 80-76. Kampe earned his first tournament win and got to see his team take the world by storm. Gohlke was trending on Twitter, both oakland.edu and goldengrizzlies.com crashed and 8,000 OU shirts were sold to Louisville fans, Kentucky's biggest rival.

Unfortunately, despite Townsend's 30-point performance, the dream run was cut short by another Cinderella team, NC State, in overtime the following round.

But, for one night in March, Oakland University's basketball team was the center of attention across the United States, which no one could have imagined. 🐾

Stay Golden AT ALUMNI REUNION WEEKEND

As Oakland University alumni, we are a community of doers. We worked hard as students and continued to evolve, adapt and hone our crafts well beyond graduation. This is what ties us together. It's how we, as alumni, stay golden. And it's what brings us together, time and time again.

Join us on campus October 18-19 for Alumni Reunion Weekend 2024.

Share your triumphs. Explore the expanding campus. Meet with old friends.
Find events at oakland.edu/alumni/reunion-weekend.



A CELEBRATION OF LEGACY

“Alumni Reunion Weekend at Oakland University is not just an event; it’s a celebration of legacy, connection and the enduring spirit of community that defines our alma mater.



As an alumnus of Oakland University, I've experienced firsthand the profound impact that returning to campus can have, both personally and within the broader community. Oakland University holds a special place in my heart, not only for the education it provided but also for the relationships formed, the knowledge gained and the personal growth fostered during my time there. When I think back to my years as a student, I recall the Pioneer way of life and helping to decide the Grizzly way! The vibrant campus life introduced me to faculty who inspired me and the diverse opportunities that shaped my future.

One of the most significant aspects of Alumni Reunion Weekend is the opportunity to reconnect with alumni. These reunions transcend mere nostalgia; they reinforce a sense of belonging and remind us of the shared experiences that unite us as Golden Grizzlies. It allows us to celebrate our journey beyond graduation.

As alumni, coming back to campus also plays a crucial role in supporting current students. We can contribute not only by attending events but also by sharing our knowledge and experiences with the next generation. Serving as mentors, offering career advice, or supporting scholarships are ways we can give

back and ensure that future generations benefit from the same opportunities that enriched our lives.

Moreover, Alumni Reunion Weekend serves as a testament to the university's growth and achievements over the years. It's a chance to witness firsthand the advancements in academic programs, campus facilities and the overall student experience. By participating in these events, alumni contribute to the continued success and prestige of Oakland University, reinforcing its standing as a hub of academic excellence and innovation.

For me personally, returning to campus reaffirms my connection to Oakland University and strengthens my pride in being a Golden Grizzly. It's a time to reflect on how the university has shaped my path and celebrate the achievements of alumni. Each visit rekindles fond memories and inspires me with the progress and accomplishments of current students and faculty.

In essence, Alumni Reunion Weekend is more than just a reunion; it's a celebration of shared values, achievements and aspirations. It bridges the gap between past, present and future, fostering a sense of continuity and community that defines the Oakland experience. It reminds us that our journey as Golden Grizzlies is ongoing and that our alma mater continues to evolve and thrive.

As we look forward to this year's festivities, I encourage you to return to Oakland University, reconnect with old friends, make new memories and contribute to the legacy that binds us all. Together, we celebrate our shared past and pave the way for a promising future, ensuring that the spirit of Oakland University endures for generations to come.”

— Napoleon Harrington, SEHS '04



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

By Rebecca Steketeer 📷 Robert Hall

Out of the tragedy of the loss of his grandfather at a young age, Ryan Ko, M.D., OUWB '24, has forged a path that has allowed him to be an advocate for community health and inspire the next generation.

As a teenager, Dr. Ko's grandfather fell ill with leukemia and passed away within a short span of time. This profound loss fueled a desire for Ko to consider cancer research as a potential career. In the absence of mentors in his life who worked in the medical field, he felt that his biggest impact could be through research. As chance would have it, he worked in biomedical research while attending University of California-Davis for his undergraduate degree where he learned about radiation therapy, a pillar in cancer treatment. After completing his bachelor's degree, Ko was hired to work in radiation oncology research at Stanford University, where he was inspired to go to medical school to become a radiation oncologist.

"When I was working at Stanford, I met Dr. Thomas Guerrero who was faculty at Beaumont's Radiation Oncology Department and had great things to say about the program at Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine," Ko says. After interviewing at OUWB and meeting students who exemplified what he wanted in a medical school, Ko decided this was the right choice.

Looking back on his four years at OUWB, Ko says his most meaningful work was leading the COVID-19 vaccine education campaign. "We started medical school at the height of the pandemic, and I felt a sense of responsibility to help people receive

accurate information about the vaccines and gain access to a free vaccine appointment if they wanted one," he says.

At OUWB, the Compass Community Engagement Team helps to engage medical students with community service through their connections with local, regional and global communities. From this team, Ko sought assistance and guidance for his vaccine campaign. Later, when Compass reached out to him to speak to middle school students about health careers, he jumped at the chance. Looking back at the absence of mentors in his youth, Ko saw the importance of having someone to look to for inspiration and guidance. "I was honored to hopefully inspire the next generation or at least give them a better insight into what this pathway entails," he says. For Ko, being a mentor is an important and meaningful way to help future physicians.

Upon his graduation, Ko received the 2024 Excellence in Public Health Award from the U.S. Public Health Service Physician Professional Advisory Committee for demonstrating leadership and commitment to public health. He will complete his residency at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, a highly ranked hospital for cancer care. Working with the best cancer physicians to make a difference and improve global cancer care is exactly where Ko wants to be. 🐾



CRAFTING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

By Emily Morris 📷 Robert Hall

Special Instructor Beth Talbert's classroom chatter gradually dwindled to two voices echoing to each other. As a communication exercise, she encourages rowdy, widespread conversation, only softening it one-by-one with a tap from her that signifies silence. Eventually, only two students are speaking — Talbert uses this activity to highlight the power of communication and the emphasis silence has on juxtaposed voices.

"That's what happens when you disengage with public discourse," she says. "They're the only ones talking, but there's many more voices in the room."

While Talbert studied communication as an undergraduate, she fell in love with the open-minded environment universities foster. "Education can transform a person's entire life," she says. "That's what really drives me."

Initially, she pursued administrative roles in higher education, dedicating a decade of experience to OU's student affairs. She progressed rapidly into more leadership roles, but day-to-day communication with students dwindled with more responsibility. Eventually, Talbert found a moment to reassess, leaving her position as associate director of admissions to focus on her family.

"I just gave my notice." Talbert says. "I said I'm not coming back. I just need some time, and I'm not joking, within 15 minutes, I got a call."

The former chair of the Communication program, David Lau, reached out to persuade Talbert to stay at OU to teach communication instead, whenever she felt ready. Talbert took the leap, and her first class was open for registration the following fall. "Once I got into the classroom, I thought, 'Oh my gosh, this is where I was supposed

to be all along,'" she says. Being a special instructor gave her the responsibility and leadership she'd grown to love in administration, matched with her passion to guide students.

In turn, Talbert utilized her previous experience and pioneered the leadership class within communication studies — although it attracted the attention of many other majors as well. Sharpening her students' curiosity, she approached each leadership class individually, and asked students to "search" for meaningful topics to them, then mapping corresponding assignments. While these assignments often resulted in a research paper or project, Talbert would never call it "research" because "searching" implies more — "finding a passion area."

Talbert devoted another 25 years to teaching at OU until retiring at the end of 2023, amounting to 35 years of service. Whether she devised a new classroom activity or a new program, Talbert found her calling in the classroom. "I loved creating new things, trying to find how we can do something better," she says. "Honestly, I could probably create a new class every semester if I felt like it, but eventually, there comes a time to start paving the way for others too." 🐾

RESEARCH



Organic Chemistry

Ngong Kodiah Beyeh
Associate Professor, Organic and Materials Chemistry

Ngong Kodiah Beyeh, Ph.D., conducts research that focuses on structural, organic, and supramolecular chemistry and bio materials. His team is particularly interested in utilizing weak bonds to connect and assemble soft hybrid polymeric materials with many applications. Current research focus includes; exploration of halogen bonding for the design of self-healing materials; identifying organic macrocyclic compounds as potential therapeutic agents for treating diseases such as cataracts; designing new protein-based materials to separate a range of pollutants from heavy metals to hazardous organics from water, and; using suitable organic macrocycles as dispersants for petroleum asphaltenes to help facilitate the flow and transportation of petroleum products. All projects sit at the chemistry, polymer science, materials science and biology interface. ➤

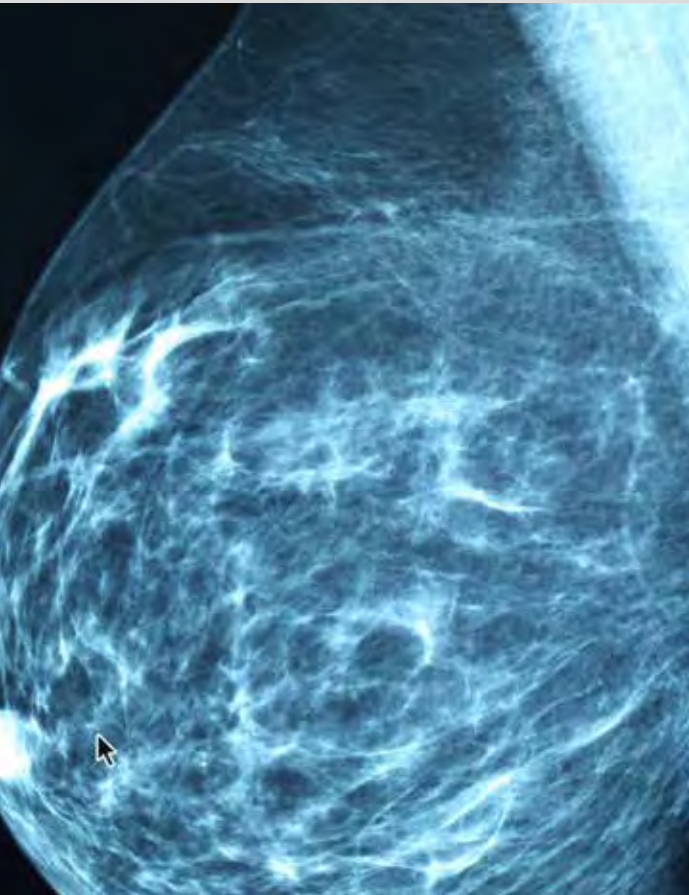
WERE YOU INVOLVED IN RESEARCH?

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Is community research important to you?
Let us know at oumag@oakland.edu.

Medical Imaging

Alycen Wiacek
Assistant Professor, Electrical and Computer Engineering and Bioengineering

Compared to other medical imaging methods, ultrasound is widely considered to be low-cost and portable. However, it requires significant training and expertise to collect and interpret these images with high accuracy, limiting where and how ultrasound is used in medicine. Therefore, the goal of the Medical Acoustics for Global Health, Imaging, and Clinical translation (MAGIC) lab at Oakland University is to use engineering to improve the availability and quality of ultrasound and other similar imaging methods. To accomplish this, Alycen Wiacek, Ph.D., and her team are developing innovative signal processing and artificial intelligence-based algorithms and applying them to real and simulated patient data. The applications for their technologies are still expanding and currently include pain free breast cancer screening, noninvasive visualization and characterization of blood clots, methods to guide physical therapy treatment, and improved biopsy accuracy with augmented reality. Overall, her work has the potential to change the places and ways that health care professionals can help patients, increasing access to high quality, noninvasive medical imaging technologies. ➤



Genome Evolution

Taras K. Oleksyk
Associate Professor, Fullbright Scholar, Genomics and Conservation Genetics

Taras K. Oleksyk, Ph.D., focuses on genomics, evolutionary genetics and comparative genomics, with a particular interest in genome evolution and its implications for adaptation and disease. Through all these efforts, connected by genomics and bioinformatics data analysis, Dr. Oleksyk wants to understand diversity in the context of recent human evolution and contribute to personalized medicine. His training was in analyzing genome diversity in admixed populations, contributing to analyses identifying candidate genes through GWAS and admixture scans. His collaborations with the 1000 Genomes Project and the 1+ Million Genomes Initiatives led to population genomic studies in Puerto Rico and Ukraine, highlighting the potential for novel genetic discoveries in understudied regions. Currently, Oleksyk's lab develops genomic research in Eastern European countries to uncover genetic factors influencing Type 1 diabetes, aiming to improve disease prediction and therapy. Additionally, he is dedicated to the genetics of endangered species, using genome assembly, variant analysis, and selection scans in both wild and domesticated animals to help design conservation strategies. ➤



Mathematics Identity

Dawn M. Woods
Assistant Professor of Elementary Mathematics Education

As an educator, Dawn M. Woods, Ph.D., noticed that many PK-16 students have few opportunities to engage in learning experiences supporting them to identify as doers of mathematics, characterized by seeing sense in mathematics, perceiving it as useful, and believing that steady effort in learning mathematics pays off. Because of this, her research is twofold: understanding the role mathematics identity (i.e., one's participation in and across activities in mathematical learning spaces and the sense one makes of oneself in relation to these activities) plays in the learning of mathematics; and supporting pre- and in-service teachers to design and enact equitable high-quality mathematics instruction. Currently, Dr. Woods is working on a five-year National Science Foundation funded project, entitled "Sparkling 'Number Talks' to Strengthen Mathematical Identities." In collaboration with students, families, and school and community partners, Woods leverages everyday, out-of-school activities to design number talks (i.e., 10-to-15 minute math discussions where students mentally solve mathematics problems and share their mathematical reasoning) fostering the growth of students' mathematical identities and skills. ➤



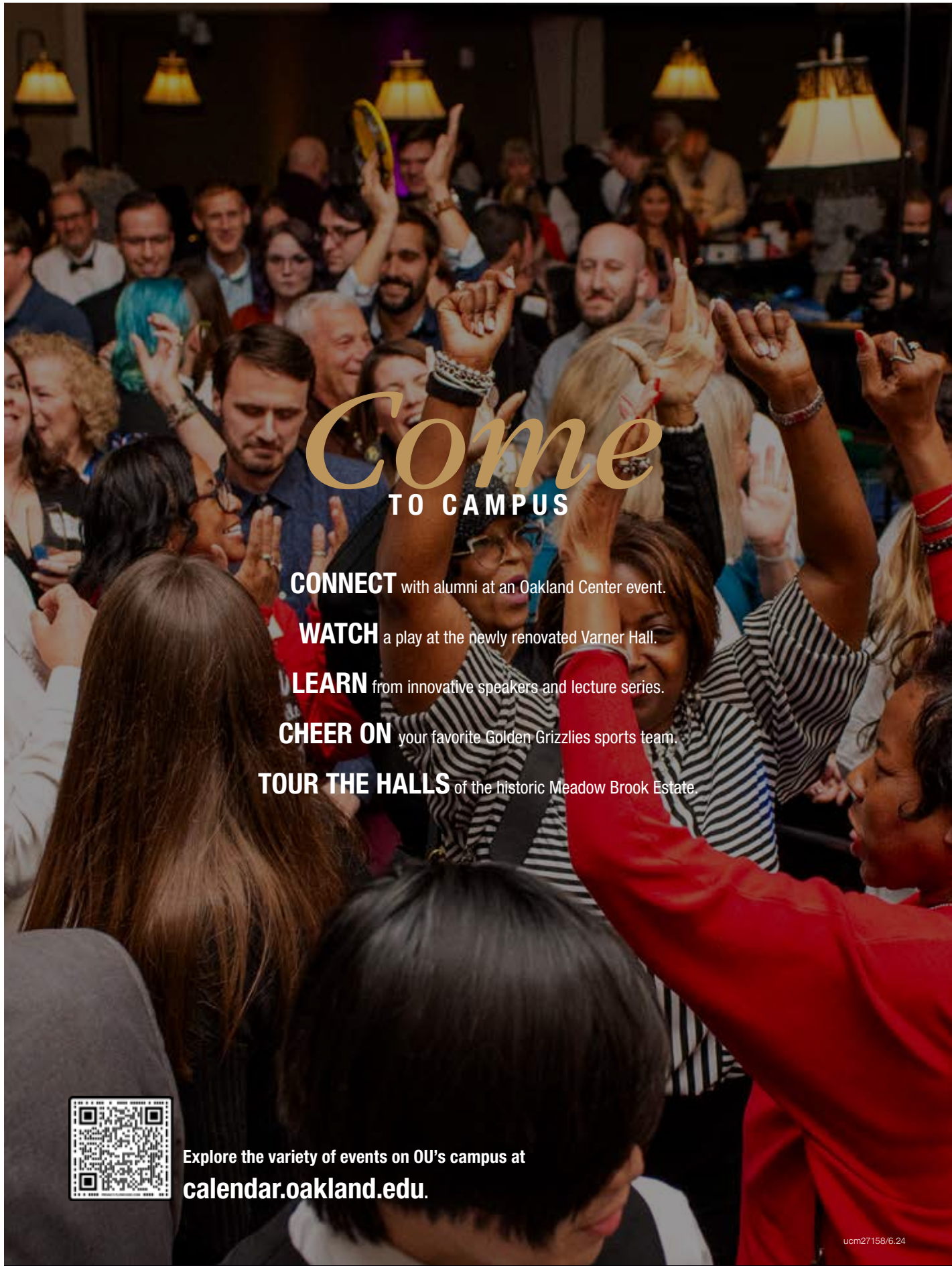
2024 OU RESEARCH OFFICE PRIDE POINTS

Faculty won three prestigious
NSF CAREER
awards in one year

Rose 44 places
in the national rankings of
research expenditures to
233rd in the country



Received over
\$25M in total
external funding
awards for the
third year in a row



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CHEER ON your favorite Golden Grizzlies sports team.

TOUR THE HALLS of the historic Meadow Brook Estate.



Explore the variety of events on OU's campus at
calendar.oakland.edu.

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ACADEMIC *Spotlight*

“

[In college] I learned that I really liked problem solving, working with a team, understanding a business ... this is what helped me decide I wanted to go into consulting as my career.

”

MARIELLA SIMONCINI, SBA '23

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Oakland University's academic programs do exceptional work every day – not only in educating students, but through community advocacy, securing grants and creating new programs. These schools are empowering the next generation of OU alumni.

Years in the Making

Emily Richardson's journey into postsecondary education may have culminated earlier this year with the completion of her Ph.D. in counseling education and supervision, but it began in 2001 at the University of Michigan, where she earned a bachelor's degree in biopsychology and cognitive science. Shortly after completing her undergraduate studies, Richardson realized she could take her education a step further, opting to pursue a master's degree in addictions counseling from the University of Detroit Mercy. "I originally went into counseling because I knew I wanted to help people, especially people with addiction-related issues," she said. "I wanted to learn more about how people both developed ... and recovered from addictions." 🍷



A Legacy of Leadership

Jessica Jannaman has built a distinguished career in environmental health and safety (EHS) thanks to her education at Oakland University. Following her father's legacy, she earned degrees in environmental science, safety management and organizational leadership, along with Lean certifications from the Pawley Lean Institute. Now the global director for health and safety at TE Connectivity, Jannaman oversees EHS for over 60 sites worldwide. Her role emphasizes ensuring employee safety and well-being. As an adjunct professor and board chair at OU, she continues to mentor future leaders, driven by a passion for lifelong learning and community impact. 🍷



Building Connections Beyond the Classroom

Outside the box methods have always been a teaching strength for Louis Williams. The Paw Paw, Michigan native has an impressive teaching career that spans over two decades. His journey began in the classroom, where he taught third grade for two years, fourth grade for one year, sixth grade for three years and kindergarten for his longest stretch of 14 years. He then moved into the role of principal at Sandusky Elementary School, a PreK-6 school in the thumb of Michigan. Williams has a clear passion for early childhood education and has dedicated a great deal of time studying and understanding the most appropriate methods to work with young children. His academic pursuits eventually led him to obtain an early childhood endorsement from Saginaw Valley State University and most recently, a Doctorate in Early Childhood Education from Oakland University. 🍷



'Everyone deserves healthy eating'

Prescription for a Healthy Oakland, led by Drs. Jennifer Lucarelli and Laurel Stevenson, provides community individuals of need with produce prescription vouchers that can be used at markets, online health education and referrals to supportive services. The innovative program was recently awarded \$453,000 from the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program. As the first and only prescription produce program in Michigan to receive this grant, the funding enables enrollment of more participants and expansion to additional markets and stores, allowing the team to reach more people across Oakland County. Furthermore, Drs. Lucarelli and Stevenson were also awarded half a million dollars from the Michigan Health and Endowment Fund to improve efficiency by integrating technology into the program. From these efforts, Michigan is now a leader in produce-prescription programs. 🍷

Celebrating Healthy Diversity

The School of Health Sciences invited over 30 co-chairs and speakers from 18 organizations to host the 2024 Healthology Symposium: Healthy Diversity with focus on knowledge, ability, family, mental health and nutrition. True to the Healthology Symposium theme — where science, practice and social interests meet — the sessions consisted of uplifting lightning talks, followed by vibrant, wellness fair interactions including a Jamaican and Palestinian dinner from community chefs. The evening culminated with keynote speaker Kirstie Ennis, U.S. Marine veteran, amputee and adventure athlete with an inspirational story of rising above adversity, who held the audience captive. The symposium was a success, and everyone looks forward to the future of the event, enabling students, faculty and the community to make meaningful connections, effect positive change and impact the needs of OU and beyond. 🍷

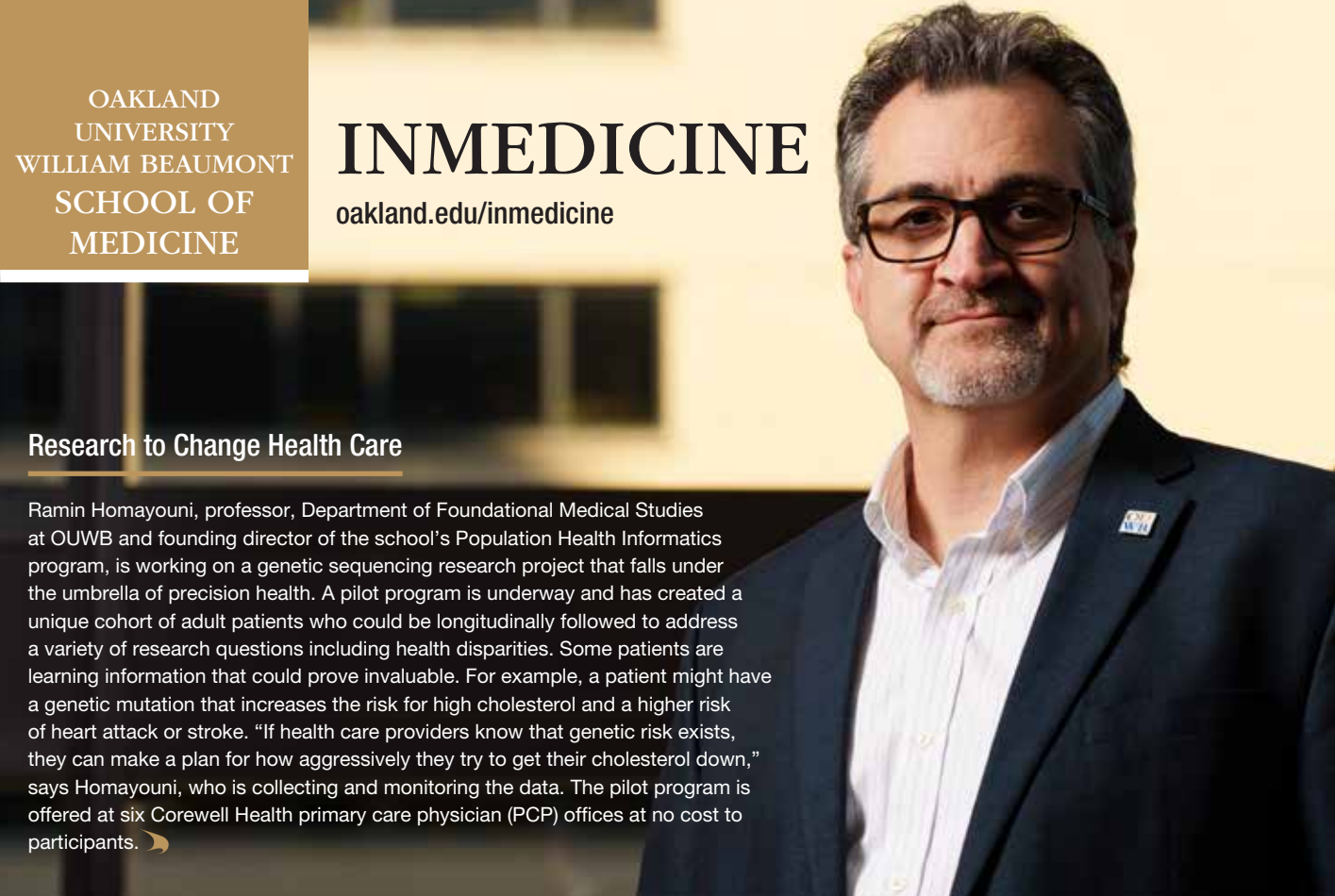


The First Step

When Julie Czech's, SHS '23, cousin was able to regain all normal function through use of a prosthetic leg, Czech knew she wanted to enter the field of orthotics and prosthetics to help those in need of assistive technology. With OU's School of Health Sciences being home to the only orthotist and prosthetist assistant program in the country, Czech knew that Oakland was the perfect school for her. She graduated with a Bachelor of Science in exercise science with a specialization in orthotist and prosthetist assistant studies in 2023 and immediately began working in the field as an orthotic technician. Having gained an exceptional foundation for graduate study from Oakland, Czech is now pursuing a Master of Prosthetics and Orthotics at Northwestern University. 🍷

INMEDICINE

oakland.edu/inmedicine



Research to Change Health Care

Ramin Homayouni, professor, Department of Foundational Medical Studies at OUWB and founding director of the school's Population Health Informatics program, is working on a genetic sequencing research project that falls under the umbrella of precision health. A pilot program is underway and has created a unique cohort of adult patients who could be longitudinally followed to address a variety of research questions including health disparities. Some patients are learning information that could prove invaluable. For example, a patient might have a genetic mutation that increases the risk for high cholesterol and a higher risk of heart attack or stroke. "If health care providers know that genetic risk exists, they can make a plan for how aggressively they try to get their cholesterol down," says Homayouni, who is collecting and monitoring the data. The pilot program is offered at six Corewell Health primary care physician (PCP) offices at no cost to participants. ➤

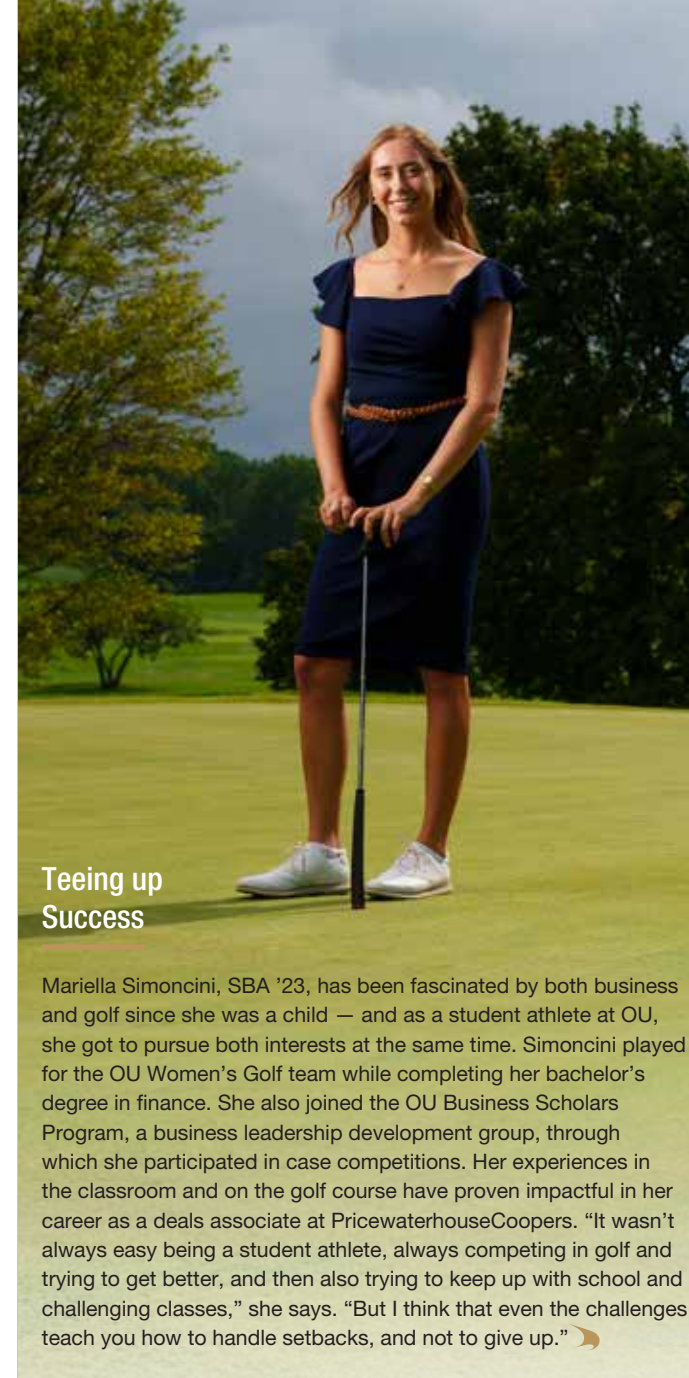
Alums Return to Anatomy Lab

Kevin Weisz, M.D., OUWB '19, wanted medical students to take a bit more away from their lessons when he returned to teach anatomy to first- and second-year medical students. "The session is really trying to show [students] why everything they're learning in the anatomy lab is important and how this can be used in their practice as physicians," says Dr. Weisz. The lab has more than 30 down-draft, stainless-steel tables — each with a donor who has generously donated their body to medical education allowing for a more humanistic education. Malli Barremkala, M.D., associate professor, Department of Foundational Medical Studies, and founding director, OUWB Body Donation Program, says there is "great motivation" for current medical students when they are taught by alumni who once were in their shoes. Weisz is one of five alumni so far who have come back to the lab in this new capacity. ➤



Impacting the Global Community

As an undergraduate, Quinn Simpson returned from a life-changing medical mission in Colombia wanting to do more for the community after learning the region hadn't been visited by a doctor in 15 years. "Being there, seeing the needs and feeling the amount of appreciation for what we were doing, made me want to do more," says Simpson. This experience led the fourth-year Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine student to start a nonprofit, iHelp, that continues to grow as he furthers his studies at OUWB. Simpson serves as co-founder, co-president and chief executive officer. He is one of 12 on the leadership team that also includes OUWB classmate, Corey Shafer, who serves as assistant director. "Having the ability to do things like this throughout medical school really reinstills why I'm in medicine," says Simpson, who was drawn to OUWB because it prioritizes delivering medical care to underserved and marginalized populations. ➤



Teeing up Success

Mariella Simoncini, SBA '23, has been fascinated by both business and golf since she was a child — and as a student athlete at OU, she got to pursue both interests at the same time. Simoncini played for the OU Women's Golf team while completing her bachelor's degree in finance. She also joined the OU Business Scholars Program, a business leadership development group, through which she participated in case competitions. Her experiences in the classroom and on the golf course have proven impactful in her career as a deals associate at PricewaterhouseCoopers. "It wasn't always easy being a student athlete, always competing in golf and trying to get better, and then also trying to keep up with school and challenging classes," she says. "But I think that even the challenges teach you how to handle setbacks, and not to give up." ➤

INSIGHT

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SCHOOL OF
BUSINESS
ADMINISTRATION

Tunnel Vision

Competing with other commuting OU students on who has the quickest drive home, there's a peculiar twist when it's the guy from Windsor, Ontario, who wins. "It usually takes me 40-45 minutes to get home from OU's campus," says Canadian and second-year Executive MBA (EMBA) student Jordan Kehoe, who drives home via Windsor Tunnel. Kehoe's drivetime competitors are part of a 14-member cohort within OU's EMBA program, which cultivates leadership capabilities and executive-level business acumen. With EMBA students meeting alternating weekends on campus, the program is specifically designed for busy, experienced professionals such as Kehoe, who works as a press project engineer in the ME Stamping Department for General Motors, out of the GM Technical Center in Warren. ➤



Community Influencers

OU's business students are helping Pontiac youth through a dynamic Baldwin Center partnership focused on community engagement and experiential learning. For more than 40 years, the Baldwin Center has been a vital support system within the underserved community of Pontiac. Dedicated to creating a thriving community rooted in the values of honesty, respect, integrity and compassion, the center addresses the area's needs with more than 30,000 healthy meals annually and an array of 25 critical services and programs. Since 2020, OU's School of Business has been aligned with the Baldwin Center in one of those community-empowering programs. As part of the center's after school enrichment program, OU's student business leaders invest their time, knowledge and attention into the center's youth through a mentorship of engaging educational presentations and fun, interactive activities. ➤



Racing to the Future

The engine of the future will be powered by electricity. And the future starts here and now. With the market for electric vehicles growing rapidly, engineering occupations play pivotal roles in the design and development of electric cars. At OU's School of Engineering and Computer Science, graduates are well equipped to meet this challenge. Electric Racing Association (ERA) is a new student organization that stemmed from SECS Spring 2023 Senior Design Project: a hands-on culminating design experience at the end of undergraduate education. The hefty goal of the project that involved 18 students was to create OU's first prototype of an electric car. Four ERA leaders — Logan Hein, Gabe Petersen, Jason Wegryn and Fares Al-Shubeilat — have emerged from this experience, steering ERA toward the goal of competing at OU's first ever race at evGrand Prix at Purdue University. ➤



Sound Solutions

"Through my research, I strive to improve ultrasound technologies to create a new paradigm of acoustic-based screening methods for various diseases," says Alicyn Wiacek, Ph.D., who works across two departments — the Department of Bioengineering and the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering. "When combined with the correct hardware for signal detection and software for image combination and display, acoustic-based technologies can pave the way to a new generation of painless, ionizing radiation-free and low-cost screening methods," she adds. In her second year at Oakland University, Dr. Wiacek's laboratory, the Medical Acoustics for Global Health Imaging and Clinical translation (MAGIC) Lab, continues strengthening SECS expertise in biomedical imaging and AI. ➤

Reversible Future

Across various industries, science is paving a way to a vast array of changes aimed at making structural components lighter, using fewer components and designing for disassembly in order to move toward a sustainable global economy. At OU, Marco Gerini-Romagnoli, Ph.D., assistant professor of mechanical engineering, makes positive strides toward a circular economy by investigating de-bondable and reversible adhesives that facilitate part replacement, repair and end-of-life recycling. Utilizing OU's Fastening and Joining Research Institute site (FAJRI), one of the few academic research facilities in the world that is solely dedicated to material joining, Dr. Gerini-Romagnoli and a group of OU researchers are in the beginning stages of working with epoxy-based vitrimers. A vitrimer-based adhesive can be reshaped, reformed, de-bonded and reused, opening up exciting possibilities for recycling and repair in many applications. ➤



Dean of the School of Nursing Receives Prestigious Award

Christopher Lance Coleman, Ph.D., dean of the School of Nursing, is the National Black Nurses Association 2024 NBNA Trailblazer Award recipient in recognition of his leadership, dedication and contributions to the care of patients, especially his long-term work in HIV/AIDS prevention and nursing administration. Dean Coleman's research focuses on understanding factors that influence health-promoting behaviors of HIV infected middle-aged and older African American men and HIV risk factors among vulnerable populations. His program of research has collectively made a substantial and significant contribution toward reducing the transmission of HIV/AIDS to the public in particular African American MSM and women. Coleman says, "I am thrilled and honored to be recognized with this prestigious award from the National Black Nurses Association whose members have made an impact on communities nationally and globally." ➤

Celebrating the 2024 Nightingale Awards for Nursing Excellence

With a strong history in tradition, the Oakland University Nightingale Awards for Nursing Excellence has applauded the constant advancement of nursing through the work of outstanding professionals for their contributions in going "above and beyond" in strengthening Michigan's nursing community. This year, the event continues to celebrate the invaluable contributions of the awardees for their resilience, dedication and unwavering commitment that defines the noble profession. Every day, nurses confront challenges head-on, embracing the highs and lows of patient care and challenges in nursing education with resilience and grace. ➤



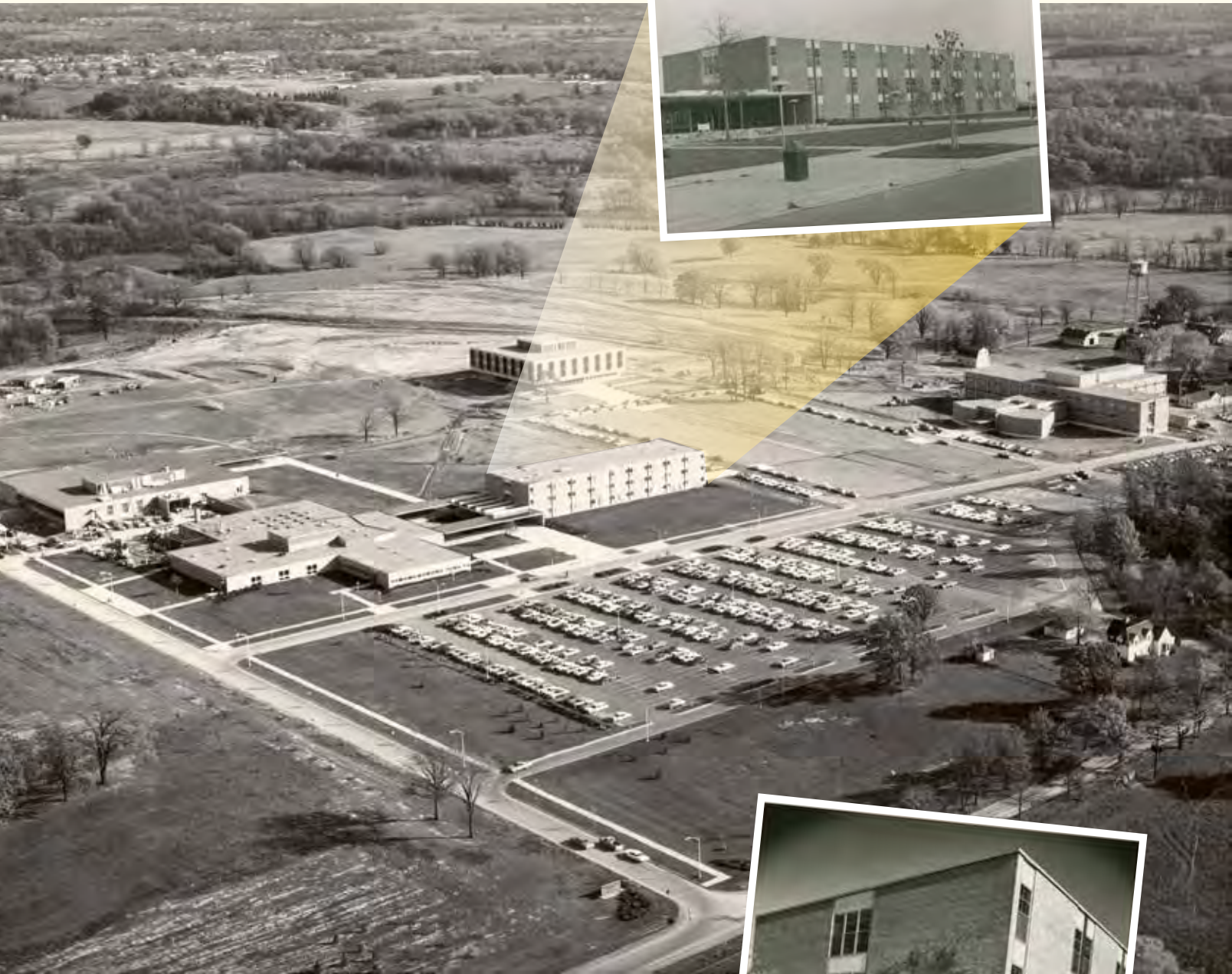
Ashlee Barnes, DNP, SON '09, '12 and '13, is the winner of this year's Distinguished Alumni Award. Dr. Barnes has been practicing as a board certified, family nurse practitioner since 2014. Additionally, she has over a decade of experience as a nursing educator. ➤

Combining Passion with Purpose

Difficult terrain, significant climbs and 50 miles inspires Lucas Pfruender, SON '18, to give back. While training for the Marquette Trail 50 Ultramarathon, Pfruender knew he wanted to use this opportunity to contribute to something meaningful. As a certified registered nurse anesthetist, he chose to raise money for the OU-Beaumont Graduate Program of Nurse Anesthesia Student Success Seminar by collecting donations for each mile he ran, raising approximately \$2,000. The Success Seminar welcomes incoming students and provides them with the tools to be successful in the rigorous nurse anesthesia program. Pfruender attended the seminar as a student, was on the team that put the seminar on in 2016 and 2017 and was the inspirational speaker in 2021 and 2022. "His generous donation raised while competing in an Ultramarathon is a testament to not only his personal dedication, but his dedication to the anesthesia program too," says Andrea Bittinger, DNP. ➤



OU MOMENT



South Foundation Hall, 1959

Deliberately an unembellished building, South Foundation Hall has remained relatively spartan throughout the years, in accordance with the philosophies of Oakland University’s founders. From the university’s inception, emphasis has been placed upon the institution’s function rather than form, making academics and growth the main focus of the structure. Since 1959, South Foundation Hall has remained predominantly classroom-based. 🏡



Be Dazzled
at Meadow Brook Hall this holiday season
November 29-December 30, 2024

Located on the campus of Oakland University, historic Meadow Brook Hall will be the most dazzling destination this holiday season. Explore the historic mansion decked in shimmering splendor for Holiday Walk during the day or let your nights be bright with an evening light show at Winter Wonder Lights. Evening visitors also have the opportunity to tour the main level of Meadow Brook Hall.

OU ALUMNI AND THEIR GUESTS RECEIVE A DISCOUNT ON THE FOLLOWING DAYS:

Winter Wonder Lights: December 5 and December 19
Holiday Walk OU Day: December 15

Join us for the most wonder-filled time of year at Meadow Brook Hall.

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**PERSEVERING FOR A CAREER
IN CARE, page 22**

Deciding to become a doctor at
8 years old, Nedi Affas, SHS '23, is
pursuing her dreams and helping
others along the way. 🍌

