Keck School feted at annual scholarship dinner

A n inspiring evening showcasing the medical, as well as the musical, talents of students at the Keck School of Medicine of USC was celebrated at the Medical Faculty Family and Friends and Salerni Collegium Annual Scholarship Dinner at the Jonathan Club. The Medical Faculty Family and Friends and Salerni Collegium are organizations of the Keck School of Medicine, sharing the mission to raise money for medical student scholarships.

The evening opened with a surprise duet performed by Dean Emeritus of the Keck School of Medicine of USC Allen Mathies, M.D., and Keck School second-year student Morgan Cross. Fourth-year medical student and pianist Matt Greenberg provided piano music during dinner, and third-year medical student Kimberly DeQuattro sang a musical selection from the opera “Carmen.” Chorda Tympani, a mixed voice, a cappella singing group and service organization comprised of Keck School students, provided additional entertainment.

The medical talent of the students was apparent through the announcement of 12 student scholarships representing $95,000 in scholarship funds, as presented by Dean Carmen A. Puliafito, M.D., M.B.A., and Donna Elliott, M.D., associate dean for student affairs. A total of $79,000, some of which will be dedicated to future medical student scholarships, was raised that evening.

Honorees for the evening included Donald I. Feinstein, M.D., emeritus professor of medicine in the Jane Anne Nohl Division of Hematology at the Keck School and emeritus chief of medicine at USC University Hospital and USC Norris Cancer Hospital, and his wife, Jackie; and Steve Giannotta, M.D., professor and chair of the Department of Neurosurgery at the Keck School, and his wife, Sharon.

The evening was capped off with a live auction featuring the dean’s Dodgers box seat tickets, master chorale concert tickets with local school children.

The Keck School plants its first teaching garden

Keck School Dean Carmen A. Puliafito reappointed to CIRM Governing Board

USC Alum Norman Levan Pledges $8 Million in Scholarships to the Keck School

W hen dermatologist Norman Levan was enrolled in the medical school at USC, tuition was a mere $400 a year. During a recent visit with Henri Ford, M.D., vice dean for medical education at the Keck School of Medicine and chief of surgery at USC-affiliated Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, Levan was reminded that the average medical student is now paying $50,000 annually.

Levan last year gave $2 million to endow the Norman E. Levan Chair for Medical Ethics at the Keck School, to which he plans to give another $2 million.

More recently, he has pledged $8 million in scholarships for Keck students. The gift will greatly lighten the load for many future Keck students.

“Thanks to you, we can actually lower the level of indebtedness they’re going to experience,” said Ford. “We cannot afford to just turn our backs on medical education. My concern is if we do that, then there won’t be anybody to take care of me when I get a little older.”

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Keck School plants teaching garden with philanthropist friends

With broccoli, beets, bell peppers and other vegetables and herbs, the Keck School of Medicine planted its first “teaching garden” in the courtyard of the Center for Health Professions building March 30 with fifth graders from south Los Angeles’ Nevin Avenue Elementary School.

“We’re here to learn about nutrition and eating well, and that really starts with eating green things,” said Keck School Dean Carmen A. Puliafito, M.D., M.B.A., who planted heirloom beans from his grandmother’s garden in Italy. “One way to stay healthy is to eat lots of vegetables. It’s even better when you grow them yourself because then you’re connected with those vegetables. It’s a great thing to do to stay healthy.”

The Teaching Garden is a collaborative project aimed at fighting childhood obesity by helping school-age children learn about food through planting a garden. It was co-founded in Los Angeles by philanthropist Kelly Chapman Meyer, co-founder of the Women’s Cancer Research Fund, and wife of Universal Studios’ President and Chief Operating Officer Ron Meyer.

“For us, being able to stand here on the campus of a world-class medical institution that is doing world-class research for cancer and many other diseases, is amazing,” said Meyer. “To have the dean of the Keck School of Medicine of USC talk about the importance of good food and nutrition as a pathway to health and breaking it down to the fact about eating your own green vegetables is mind-boggling, and we are ever grateful.”

Much of the Teaching Garden’s focus is on nutrition and exercise. Jamie Davis, Ph.D., assistant professor of preventive medicine and lead investigator with the Childhood Obesity Research Center at the Keck School of Medicine, conducted a nutrition lesson that demonstrated healthy alternatives to sugar-heavy sodas for the students.

The USC Trojan Band joined the celebration, along with Sherry Yard, executive pastry chef for Wolfgang Puck World-wide, who was on hand to show that “you can eat dessert and it can still be good for you.” Among those attending were Marion Laurie, co-founder of the Women’s Cancer Research Fund and member of the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center Advisory Board, and eight Keck School students who volunteer with the garden.

The Teaching Garden collaborates with entities such as the Farmer-Veteran Coalition, an organization that helps returning veterans find work and training opportunities in the thriving organic farming industry. The veterans from the Farmer-Veteran Coalition helped build the raised planter boxes used by the Keck School’s teaching garden. Helping with the construction were fifth graders from Malibu’s Point Dume Marine Science Elementary School.

Members of the coalition who help build gardens in other elementary schools are pivotal in sustaining the gardens and often return for “salad days” during which they show students how to prepare salads from the vegetables they have grown.

As recipients of teaching gardens themselves, students from both Point Dume and Nevin Elementary participated in the teaching garden at USC’s academic medical center as a way of “paying it forward”—a tenet of the Teaching Garden.

Dean’s Photo Gallery

Keck School of Medicine Dean Carmen A. Puliafito joined donors and friends of the Keck School and USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center and Hospital for the 14th Annual Unforgettable Evening on February 10 in Beverly Hills. The celebrity-filled event benefitted the Entertainment Industry Foundation’s Women’s Cancer Research Fund, which supports innovative cancer research.

Photos by Steve Cohn Photography.
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USC Alum Norman Levan Pledges $8 Million in Scholarships to the Keck School

In 2007, Levan donated $6 million to USC to establish the USC Norman E. Levan Institute for Humanities and Ethics to provide a center for students interested in the humanities. Levan said he personally reads essays of students applying for scholarships. While Levan’s commitment to USC and the Keck School of Medicine is extraordinary, so too is his dedication to his chosen profession. Though he certainly doesn’t need the money, he continues to see patients once a week at his practice in Bakersfield, California. He has cared for three generations of some families, and said he continues to learn and grow as a physician.

“On Monday I saw a case that I never saw before in my life,” he said. “As a matter of fact, the largest dermatology textbook doesn’t mention it.”

USC Alum Norman Levan Pledges $8 Million in Scholarships to the Keck School continued from page 1

What advice does Levan offer students entering medical school?

“Don’t waste your time reading the medical journals,” he quipped, arguing that literature is a more worthwhile pursuit. At the time of most recent visit to the Keck School, the 95-year-old avid reader had recently finished all of Jane Austen’s novels and had moved on to Joseph Conrad’s The Secret Agent.

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Keck School Dean Carmen A. Puliafito reappointed to CIRM Governing Board

Keck School of Medicine Dean Carmen A. Puliafito, M.D., M.B.A., has been reappointed to the Independent Citizens Oversight Committee, a governing board of the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM). Puliafito has served as a committee member since 2008.

CIRM is governed by 27 dedicated Californians representing patients, researchers and the biotechnology industry. According to CIRM, their collective knowledge, passion and commitment to CIRM’s mission has guided the organization since its inception.

Puliafito has served as dean, professor of ophthalmology and holder of the May S. and John Hosval Dean’s Chair in Medicine for the Keck School since 2007. He previously served as professor and chair of ophthalmology at the University of Miami, Miller School of Medicine, and director of the Bascom Palmer Eye Institute from 2001 to 2007. He was professor and chair of ophthalmology at Tufts University School of Medicine and was director of the New England Eye Center from 1991 to 2001.

Puliafito is featured in a video highlighting the new Eli and Edythe Broad CIRM Center for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research at USC, available online at http://tinyurl.com/29r4eab.