

Founders Week: Entrepreneur of the Year

Oct. 23, 2019
School of Dentistry

Good afternoon, everyone. It's an honor to welcome you to our 2019 Entrepreneur of the Year lecture.

At these lectures, I often start by celebrating our entrepreneurial success over the last year. It's a tempting talking point because we do keep topping ourselves. We executed 48 licenses on UMB technologies last year—our best year ever. We launched seven startups. That's 33 new companies in the last four years. In the last two years, we've had five of our companies acquired.

The metrics are impressive, but they're not what I really want to talk about. I actually want to go back several years. In 2012, we honored two men with the Entrepreneur of the Year award, two men on the front lines of HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, two men responsible for saving and extending countless lives.

Dr. William Blattner and Dr. Robert Redfield—co-founders of our Institute of Human Virology—were recognized for creating our Center for International Health, Education, and Biosecurity in several African nations.

From nothing, they built a health care infrastructure that spawned half-a-dozen businesses. They created massive health care systems—ultimately employing 800 people, and caring for thousands of patients across six countries. It was risky enterprise. It took guts; it took vision. And, of course, it took a lot of hard work.

Last month, I was fortunate to see some of that work. I traveled to Zambia and Botswana, meeting our in-country colleagues and the people they serve. Outside Livingstone, Zambia, I visited the Nakatindi Mother and Child Clinic. I met with five mothers and their children. All five of the women are HIV-positive. All five are benefiting from our HIV program.

The women shared with me how grateful they are for the treatment they're getting—how grateful they are for our presence and our intervention. They introduced me to their children, ranging in age from 2 months to 8 years, all of them born since their mothers began receiving services at the clinic.

All five of these children are HIV-negative. And you know what their mothers call them? They call them their Maryland Babies.

And that's why this award is so powerful. Because it's not about metrics and data points. It's about people—the people we help, the people we save through our best ideas and our hard, hard work.

It's this work that our 2019 Entrepreneur of the Year is absolutely dedicated to. Dr. Robert Ernst isn't only developing new ways to identify pathogens and diagnose diseases, he's working to prevent disease by making vaccines more effective. And just as I met women and children saved by Dr. Blattner and Dr. Redfield, I know there will be generations of people who will meet and befriend and love those whose lives were saved by Bob Ernst.

There's nothing more powerful than knowing we are blessed to have people in our lives—parents, friends, partners, children—whom we would've been robbed of, if it weren't for people like Bob. And I'm so grateful to him.

To introduce our Entrepreneur of the Year, please welcome School of Dentistry Dean Mark Reynolds. Mark?