



## UMB News

### Sweet 'Dreams' at UMB Founders Week Gala

October 25, 2021 | By [Lou Cortina](#)

The University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) had a lot to celebrate Oct. 23 during its 2021 Founders Week Gala, which honored individual and team achievements in academics, public service, entrepreneurship, research, and philanthropy while recognizing the University's resilience and response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 26th annual Gala was a hybrid event with the theme "Dreams in the Making" in support of student scholarships at UMB's six professional schools and interdisciplinary Graduate School. President **Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS**, and Denise Koch of WJZ-TV co-hosted the one-hour event at the Hippodrome, recognizing Founders Week award winners who were in attendance at the historic theater on Eutaw Street while virtual attendees watched the livestreamed festivities from the comfort of their homes.



*Student of the Year Emily M. Smith receives her award.*

"Perhaps you joined us tonight because you love virtual galas and not getting dressed up, or you're actually home enjoying the event and dressed in your finest – whichever way you're participating, I know it's because you understand the importance of UMB," Jarrell said in his opening remarks. "While this past year has necessitated shifts in *how* UMB operates to fulfill its mission, it hasn't changed the *why* – it's only strengthened it.

"Across our seven schools, many people work our mission. I can't begin to thank you for the work you put in every day to solve our grandest challenges; to care for our neediest people; to teach, train, and mentor our incredible students; and to support all of our efforts to improve the human condition with a generosity of heart and spirit."

The Gala featured three stirring performances from Maryland native Toneisha Harris, the runner-up on Season 18 of NBC's "The Voice," who is currently playing Motormouth Maybelle in the touring production of "Hairspray." Harris sang "You've Got a Friend," "I Know Where I've

Been," and an original, "My Superhero," which was written for her youngest son during his successful battle against leukemia.

Before her final song, Harris took time to thank those at UMB who have been fighting the pandemic. "You have carried us through such a harrowing time while we were so uncertain about what was going to happen," she said. "It was the medical professionals who really put us at ease, gave us peace, and helped us understand what we needed to understand. For that, I will be forever grateful. Whether you are on the front lines or behind the scenes, I appreciate the work you do."

Also showing their appreciation were three UMB alumni who touted the power of student scholarships and how such support was crucial to their academic success: Dylan Elliott, JD '21, Francis King Carey School of Law; Nicole Hays, MD '21, School of Medicine (UMSOM); and Lori James-Townes, MSW '91, School of Social Work (UMSSW). James-Townes, president of the UMSSW Alumni Association Board of Directors and executive director of the National Association for Public Defense, recounted how a scholarship changed her life.

"As a first-generation college graduate, it was definitely a blessing to receive those funds. If not for that scholarship, I would not be where I am today," she said. "As a result of my experience, my family and I started a scholarship in memory of my aunt, Terrie Alexander, who also studied at the School of Social Work."

On another philanthropic front, Jarrell announced that UMB's Catalyst Campaign, a multiyear effort to raise \$750 million, has surpassed the \$666 million mark, which is 88 percent of the goal.

"The Catalyst Campaign continues to attract the interest and support of loyal alumni and benefactors to enhance faculty excellence, student scholarship aid, research, clinical initiatives, entrepreneurship, and community engagement," Jarrell said. "We can all be extremely proud this evening that the campaign has achieved this stellar milestone."

#### Award Winners

The Founders Week award winners were honored in video tributes, with faculty members recognized for their excellence in the areas of entrepreneurship, research, public service, and teaching. A new award honored two Students of the Year for their academic success, leadership skills, and commitment to promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion.

**Vincent Njar, PhD**, professor, Department of Pharmacology, UMSOM, was honored as the David J. Ramsay Entrepreneur of the Year. Njar is a leading medicinal chemist and oncopharmacologist who has made significant discoveries in the development of novel therapeutics for breast, prostate, and pancreatic cancers. He also is among UMB's inaugural Distinguished University Professors, the highest appointment bestowed on a faculty member at the University.

The Researcher of the Year, **Ronna P. Hertzano, MD, PhD**, professor, Department of Otorhinolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery, UMSOM, is a highly respected otolaryngologist, surgeon, educator, and researcher. With significant grants from the National Institutes of Health and other sources, Hertzano's research is focused on developing new therapeutics to prevent and treat genetic and acquired hearing loss.

**Joshua M. Abzug, MD**, associate professor, Departments of Orthopaedics and Pediatrics, UMSOM, was recognized as Public Servant of the Year. In 2015, Abzug founded Camp Open Arms, which allows children with limb differences to enjoy a carefree summer experience. The program in Monkton has grown into a weeklong camp with activities such as hiking, arts and crafts, and visits from musicians, entertainers, and zoo animals.

Ten UMSOM faculty members who comprise the **Renaissance Curriculum Team** were honored as Educators of the Year. The new curriculum devised by the team incorporates information learned from other institutions with UMSOM's strengths and values. The goal of this major revision is to train the Renaissance Physician: lifelong learners who are clinically excellent and possess humanism, professionalism, scholarship, leadership, critical thinking, and attention to social justice and diversity.

The inaugural Students of the Year are **Jazmin Jones** of the School of Dentistry (UMSOD) and **Emily M. Smith** of the Graduate School. Jones is the Doctor of Dental Surgery Class of 2022 president and attends school on a full U.S. Army Health Professions Scholarship. Smith, a PhD candidate in the Graduate Program in Life Sciences in Molecular Microbiology and Immunology, has been active in the Graduate Student Association since 2017, first as a program representative, then vice president, and president from May 2020 to June 2021.

UMB also granted a special award to three UMSOM faculty members for exemplary service during the pandemic: **Kathleen Neuzil, MD, MPH, FIDSA**, Myron M. Levine, MD, DTPH, Professor in Vaccinology and director of UMSOM's Center for Vaccine Development and Global Health (CVD); **Wilbur Chen, MD, MS**, professor of medicine and chief of the Adult Clinical Studies section within CVD; and **David Marcozzi, MD, MHS-CL, MHS-CL, FACEP**, professor of emergency medicine and chief clinical officer and senior vice president for the University of Maryland Medical Center.

"I thank Drs. Neuzil, Chen, and Marcozzi for their leadership, research abilities, and emergency responses to the COVID-19 crisis, guiding vaccine development across the country and serving as key advisors to Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, the World Health Organization, and U.S. policymakers," Jarrell said. "Your commitment and your role in this pandemic have saved so many lives."

#### Philanthropists and Catalysts

The UMB Foundation honored **Louis F. Friedman, JD '65**, and **Phyllis C. Friedman, JD '77**, with its Distinguished Service Award, which recognizes the achievements of volunteers who have substantially contributed to enhancing and sustaining the University. The Friedmans have been generous supporters of UMB for more than 20 years through their Louis and Phyllis Friedman Foundation and other foundations they manage.

"The Friedmans have shown a steadfast dedication to higher education and scientific advancement," Jarrell said. "As alumni of our School of Law, they've provided support for the School of Medicine's Center for Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine, the School of Law's Erin Levitas Initiative for Sexual Assault Prevention Endowment, and the School of Nursing through the Herman and Walter Samuelson Foundation Scholarship Endowment.

"They've created and supported professorships, awards, prizes, and scholarships. We are so grateful for their commitment to UMB."

The University also recognized the 2021 Catalysts for Excellence, chosen for being powerful advocates for success, achievement, and philanthropy for their respective UMB schools while serving as visionaries for future progress:

Melvin F. Kushner, DDS '66, UMSOD

Stuart M. Salsbury, JD '71; Suzanne B. Salsbury, JD '73; Benjamin S. Salsbury, JD '07, and Rebecca C. Salsbury, JD '08, Francis King Carey School of Law

Richard L. Taylor, MD '75, UMSOM

John Bing, CRNA, School of Nursing

Victoria Hale, BSP '83, PhD, School of Pharmacy

Alumni Association Board of Directors, UMSSW

*(Read more about all of the award winners and honorees on UMB's [Founders Week website](#).)*

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