

# IMPACT STORIES 2024



THE  
FOUNDERS SOCIETY  
at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine

# A MESSAGE OF GRATITUDE TO MEMBERS OF THE FOUNDERS SOCIETY

Our entire Feinberg community is grateful to members of The Founders Society for your support of many critical areas at the medical school, such as scholarships, which are essential to bringing outstanding students to Northwestern regardless of financial barriers.



Jethel with Mary Stainer and Gregory Stainer, '76 MD, at the Commitment to Scholarships Luncheon in October 2023.

*“Your support and encouragement have been a constant source of inspiration for me, and I am determined to make the most of the opportunities afforded to me. I am deeply grateful for your belief in my potential and promise to continue striving toward excellence in all that I do. Your investment in my education has made a profound difference in my life, and I am committed to making you proud. I look forward to staying in touch and sharing updates on my journey in the months and years to come.”*

— Jethel Hernandez, MD Class of 2026 and the Dr. Gregory A. and Mary V. Stainer Scholar



**Cover photo:** Nicholas Volpe, MD, Chair of the Department of Ophthalmology and the George W. and Edwina S. Tarry Professor of Ophthalmology, and Francesca Mattone-Volpe, MD, present their daughter, Lena Volpe, '24 MD, with her hood at Feinberg's Commencement in May 2024. Drs. Nicholas and Francesca Volpe are members of The Founders Society (Lifetime Giving Society and Northwestern University Leadership Circle).





Dr. Eric G. Neilson

Dear fellow members of The Founders Society:

Transforming human health takes a community of loyal members who are passionate about making positive change in the world. At Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, we are fortunate to have such a culture of likeminded individuals who are dedicated to advancing our mission.

As members of The Founders Society, you—alumni, faculty, staff, and friends—are at the core of this community. Your leadership and philanthropy in all its forms—from annual gifts to endowed fund support, from estate giving to volunteer efforts—make a significant difference in what we can achieve. You help us to educate and train tomorrow's medical experts, innovate the next scientific breakthrough, and deliver quality care that enhances lives.

In the following pages, we present the unique stories of your peers and what drives them to give back. We know each of you have your own special stories of connection to Feinberg, and we thank you for investing in our shared future. We greatly appreciate your support.

Warmest regards,

Eric G. Neilson, MD  
Vice President for Medical Affairs  
Lewis Landsberg Dean  
Northwestern University  
Feinberg School of Medicine

# ONUR MELEN, MD, '73 AND '75 GME

**Member of the Henry and Emma Rogers Society, Lifetime Giving Society, and The Founders Society-NULC (Founders' Circle)**

While in medical school in his native Turkey, Onur Melen, MD, thought about becoming an ophthalmologist but didn't think he would make a good eye surgeon. Instead, a strong passion for neurophysiology led him to Northwestern where he completed his neurology residency in 1973. Yet Dr. Melen's interest in ophthalmology never waned. In 1980, he became a full-time neuro-ophthalmology faculty member at his alma mater with joint appointments in neurology and ophthalmology. "I was lucky that my interests joined together," he said.

In the 1990s, Dr. Melen began to foster an interest in movement disorders and the then novel use of botulinum toxin or Botox to treat muscle spasms. The drug also became useful in treating eye conditions. The overlap resulted in Dr. Melen providing Botox treatment to both neurology and neuro-ophthalmology patients.

Being on faculty at Northwestern has allowed Dr. Melen to indulge in his most favorite activity: teaching. Today, at age 81 and as a lecturer in Neurology in the Division of Movement Disorders, he introduces medical students and residents to the subspecialty area of neuro-ophthalmology. Seeing patients

two days a week, Dr. Melen doesn't always have budding young physicians or trainees rotating through his clinic but that doesn't matter to this dedicated educator.

"If I see a patient or two with interesting clinical presentations, I cannot *not* share these valuable teaching moments," he said. "I'll go outside the exam room and grab any student or resident I see in the hallway. They seem to appreciate it. At least that's what they tell me!"

Dr. Melen has long supported the neuro-ophthalmology area through annual giving. Recently, he expanded his commitment by making a \$1 million bequest to support the Onur Melen, MD Neuro-Ophthalmology Endowed Fellowship and Research Fund in the Department of Ophthalmology.

"Creating this fellowship has been a dream of the department," said Dr. Melen. "I have loved teaching neuro-ophthalmology, and for that opportunity all these years, I am very happy to give back in this way."

As for any thoughts of retiring, Dr. Melen has no immediate plans. "I enjoy my work too much," he said.



**Dr. Melen (front) in 2024, pictured with (left to right) Nicholas Volpe, MD, chair and the George W. and Edwina S. Tarry Professor in the Department of Ophthalmology; Adam D. Baim, MD, PhD, assistant professor of Ophthalmology; Neena R. Cherayil, MD, assistant professor of Neurology and Ophthalmology; and Shira S. Simon, MD, director of Neuro-ophthalmology and assistant professor of Ophthalmology and Neurology.**

# YOUR IMPACT, BY THE NUMBERS

**1,930** members made a leadership gift of \$1,000 or more to Feinberg in fiscal year 2024

**1,300** members are recognized through one of our cumulative giving programs

Did you know that members of The Founders Society aren't just alumni of the medical school?

**Faculty, staff, and friends of Feinberg make up over 60%** of our members!

**229** members have made a **planned gift** to benefit Feinberg

The Founders Society-NULC members supported Feinberg with **over \$48 million** in gifts in fiscal year 2024

## HOW TO JOIN

*Membership in The Founders Society is based on the University's fiscal year (September 1 through August 31).*

### Annual Giving — Northwestern University Leadership Circle

- **Founders' Circle:** Annual gifts totaling \$50,000 or more
- **President's Circle:** Annual gifts totaling \$25,000 – \$49,999
- **Deans' Circle:** Annual gifts totaling \$10,000 – \$24,999
- **Sustainer:** Annual gifts totaling \$5,000 – \$9,999
- **Fellow:** Annual gifts totaling \$2,500 – \$4,999
- **Member:** Annual gifts totaling \$1,000 – \$2,499
- **Young Alumni Society:** By years since earning MD, PT, and PA degrees
  - 5–9 years: \$250
  - 2–4 years: \$50
  - 0–1 year: Any amount

### Cumulative Giving

- **Benefactor Society:** Cumulative lifetime giving totaling \$1,000,000 or more
- **Lifetime Giving Society:** Cumulative lifetime giving totaling \$35,000 – \$999,999

### Henry and Emma Rogers Society

Donors who have notified Northwestern and documented an estate or deferred gift commitment to benefit the medical school, becoming members of both The Founders Society and the Rogers Society, a University-wide program.

### Service Society

Recognizing those who are actively engaged in volunteer activities benefiting the medical school, such as advisory and editorial boards, student mentorship, and alumni-related activities such as board membership and class giving efforts.





Dr. Lacey with her children, Lydia and Liam Pilarowski. Photo: Cassie Connor Photography

## SARAH LACEY, '95, '99 MD

**Member of The Founders Society-NULC (Sustainer) and Service Society**

*“My formative years at Northwestern made me who I am today.”*

At the tender age of five, Denver native Sarah Lacey, MD, announced to her family and friends her intention to become a pediatrician. Visits to her childhood doctor sparked her interest in how the human body worked. Poring over her family's home encyclopedias, she had learned enough about diseases that by the sixth grade she diagnosed her own case of chicken pox. She remembers seeing the telltale blister of the common viral infection on her arm and remarking, “Oh my, it looks like a dew drop on a rose petal. It must be chicken pox!”

In 1999, Dr. Lacey became the first and only doctor in her family when she graduated from Northwestern's seven-year Honors Program in Medical Education. Still passionate about being a kid doctor, she spent her internship year at Indiana University's Riley Hospital for Children and then completed her pediatrics residency training at Children's Hospital Colorado. Today, Dr. Lacey is a provider with Sapphire Pediatrics, a small independent practice based in Denver, where every day she fulfills her childhood declaration of being a pediatrician thanks to Northwestern.

Her gratitude for her medical education has led Dr. Lacey to spearhead fundraising efforts for the Class of 1999 Scholarship to provide future recipients with the opportunity to pursue their dreams. “My father grew up very poor, but he managed to earn a college degree. Both of my parents prioritized education for my siblings and me,” said Dr. Lacey. “Given how far my family has come, I see scholarships as a way to pay it forward and help others realize their potential.”

In addition to giving back to Feinberg, Dr. Lacey became a new board member of the Northwestern University Leadership Circle (NULC) this spring. Committed to volunteering, she is helping to establish an NULC Denver Regional Board to reach out to alumni in the area and share in her enthusiasm for supporting the institution that means so much to her.

“My formative years at Northwestern made me who I am today,” she said, “I still pinch myself with how lucky I have been!”

# ROBERT SHAW '70, '81, AND CHARLENE SHAW '70

**Members of the Henry and Emma Rogers Society,  
Lifetime Giving Society, and The Founders  
Society-NULC (Deans' Circle)**

For Robert and Charlene Shaw of Evanston, Illinois, meeting as undergraduates at Northwestern's Sheil Catholic Center led to marriage upon earning their degrees in 1970. Recalled Mr. Shaw, a mechanical engineer, "The U.S. Navy commissioned me one day, Charlene and I graduated the next day, and we got married the following Saturday."

The Shaws' mutual love for their alma mater has inspired them to give back. Since 2007, Mr. Shaw has volunteered his engineering and management expertise to the NUvention Program—a course that transforms students into entrepreneurs. Through NUvention, Mr. Shaw met former faculty member, Teresa Woodruff, PhD, a national champion of sex inclusive research to improve the health of women and men.

For 28 years, Mr. Shaw co-owned Miledx Products, a medical device company in the obstetrics and gynecology field. His work gave him a deep appreciation for women's health, leading to the Shaws' generous support of sex-based studies at Feinberg. In 2018, the couple established the Shaw Family Pioneer Awards in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology to support early-stage career investigators. Said Mr. Shaw, "Too little had been done in the past to consider gender differences when developing medical treatments that are safe and effective for women."



**Charlene and Bob Shaw in 2023**

To date, the Shaw Awards of \$10,000 to \$20,000 have funded 11 sex-inclusive studies, from sex influences on traumatic brain injury to kidney disease. In 2023, a Shaw Award allowed Hong Zhao, MD, PhD, research professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology, to collect pilot data needed to successfully compete for a \$1.9 million National Institutes of Health grant. Her research focuses on estrogen signaling, astrocyte reactivity, and sex differences in Alzheimer's disease.

"Even the smallest donation to support early research ideas can make a significant impact," said Mr. Shaw. "We are very happy to have helped advance this innovative work to the next level."

The Shaws made a recent pledge to further support the grant program. This gift will fund basic science research that focuses on sex differences in aging in collaboration with the Potocsnak Longevity Institute at the medical school. The couple has also committed to a \$250,000 outright bequest to continue the awards when they pass.

## *Save* THE *Date*

### **The Founders Society Reception**

**MAY 3, 2025**

**Members of The Founders Society  
at the April 2024 cocktail reception  
at The Arts Club of Chicago**







THE  
**FOUNDERS SOCIETY**  
at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine

For more information about The Founders Society, please contact **Sarah Kalsbeek** at **312-503-3459** or **s-kalsbeek@northwestern.edu**.

For information on the benefits of membership in The Founders Society, please visit **feinberg.northwestern.edu/tfs**.

If you do not wish to receive fundraising materials from Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, please call **312-503-8933**.