

Pitt Public Health



at

Looking Back,
Moving Forward





Marking a Milestone

In 1955, Dr. Jonas Salk and his team at the University of Pittsburgh developed a vaccine against polio that made headlines around the world.

Before the vaccine, polio was a highly feared disease that killed or paralyzed more than 500,000 people a year—including children—worldwide.

The Jonas Salk Legacy Exhibit celebrates the achievement of the polio vaccine, which continues to save countless lives across the globe.

“I look upon ourselves as partners in all of this, and that each of us contributes and does what he can do best.”—Jonas Salk

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75 Years of Public Health

In the 19th century, biographer James Parton famously described Pittsburgh as “hell with the lid off.” In the years since then, the University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health has been in the forefront of efforts to improve quality of life and health throughout the region.

By Michele Dula Baum

SPH Today

With support from donors, the University of Pittsburgh and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, a \$77 million expansion and renovation of the school's main building was completed in 2017. The most significant facility improvement investment since the founding of the school in 1948, the project funded the creation of state-of-the-art laboratories, academic areas and communal spaces.

Pitt Public Health Magazine

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School of Public Health



Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

— NELSON MANDELA

Making our Mark

Dear Pitt Public Health Reader,

I am delighted to introduce the first edition of a new publication designed to share news and information about the School of Public Health and our faculty, students, staff, alumni and the communities we serve, locally and globally. In this issue, we celebrate the school's 75th anniversary — not only by remembering the past, but also by looking forward to a future every one of us has a responsibility to help shape.

Since 1948, when the University of Pittsburgh established the first accredited school of public health in Pennsylvania, we have dedicated our efforts to educating the next generation of researchers, teachers and frontline public health professionals. Every day, these leaders are working to prevent disease, promote healthy behaviors and address community concerns such as food safety, water and air quality, access to care and health equity.

In this issue, you can read more about our past, including the recent opening of an exhibit designed to celebrate the development of the first effective polio vaccine by a scientific team led by virologist Jonas Salk, MD, here in Pittsburgh.

We chronicle studies pertaining to the environmental influences on population health — both good and bad — that faculty and students are conducting today. For example, high school juniors and seniors taking part in our Public Health Science Academy this past summer examined how air quality varies across Pittsburgh's neighborhoods and noted associations with rates of asthma and other diseases.

These adolescents are at the heart of our mission to inspire the youngest students to make their mark on the world. Our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion is exemplified by our national effort to diversify the public health workforce, supported by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. They, along with those in our new undergraduate degree program and our many graduate-level programs, are, indeed, the future of public health.

Our research spans from maternal and child health to aging and from microbes to the spread of online misinformation. Ahead are new priorities to advance the science of precision public health and confront the threat of climate change, which disproportionately affects the most vulnerable among us — here in Pittsburgh and around the world.

We are proud of the strong foundation we've built over the past 75 years. With your support, the best is yet to come.

Maureen Lichtveld, MD, MPH, Dean

Jonas Salk Professor in Population Health
University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health

Celebrating Excellence

JONAS SALK VACCINE RESEARCH ARTIFACTS COME HOME

By Michele Dula Baum

When Kathy Phillips visited Pitt's exhibit of historical laboratory equipment and materials once used by polio vaccine researcher Jonas Salk, MD, she was eager to examine every piece except one. Even thinking about the narrow, coffin-like iron lung took a minute.

The surge of grief surprised Phillips, who visited the Jonas Salk Legacy Exhibit not long after it opened in April 2023. "The feeling stayed with me for days."

Pitt and Pittsburgh figure strongly in scientific history, with such luminaries as 19th century astronomer and aviation innovator Samuel Langley, organ transplant pioneer Thomas Starzl, and Salk—whose exceptional achievements continue to inspire.

When the Salk team worked to foil one of the most dreaded illnesses of the 20th century, though, the city was no mere backdrop. "This is a community that pulled together with the scientists to solve a problem," notes Donald Burke, MD, School of Public Health dean emeritus.

Thousands of Pittsburgh-area children helped Salk and his team refine their vaccine ingredients from experimental mixture to life-saving disease prevention. Data collected from the Pittsburgh school polio vaccine studies (1952 to early 1954) formed the basis of the definitive 1954 clinical trial that involved 1.8 million children across the United States.



At its peak in the 1940s and 1950s, polio was killing or paralyzing more than a half million people worldwide each year. In 1947, the University of Pittsburgh recruited Jonas Salk—an expert in influenza whose flu vaccine is still in use today—to develop a virus program at Pitt. For more than seven years, his team worked tirelessly to develop an effective killed-virus vaccine.

The Jonas Salk Legacy Exhibit at Pitt Public Health celebrates this public health milestone and achievement.



“

I got choked up looking at the iron lung,” says Kathy Phillips, who contracted polio at age 2. “That was hard.”



(Above) The iron lung was state-of-the-art life support for polio patients during the first half of the 20th century. (Left) top, Jonas Salk; bottom, the doctor's desk is a prominent feature of the Jonas Salk Legacy Exhibit.

Exhibit materials, including books, papers, photographs, research documents and awards, along with hundreds of pieces of 1950s-era laboratory equipment and fixtures, are part of a generous gift to the University of Pittsburgh from the Jonas Salk family.

A midcentury modern desk where Salk did much of his work is a centerpiece of the exhibit. Guests are invited to sit at the desk—back home in Pittsburgh nearly 60 years after the famed virologist moved to California to establish the Salk Institute for Biological Studies near San Diego.

“

I remember the church bells ringing when the vaccine was announced.”

KATHY PHILLIPS

“I remember the church bells ringing when the vaccine was announced,” says Phillips.

She has no memories, however, of being hospitalized along with three of her siblings and only knows what her mother shared about what happened next. “We got polio at an apartment complex where we were in and out of that kiddie pool all summer.”

Phillips suffered a blazing fever. Infant twins John and Ann were soon encased in iron lungs. An older sister, Peggy, and John were left with lifelong disabilities. Ann was 18 months old when she died.

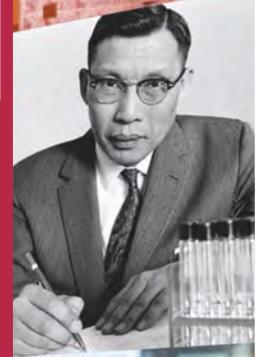
Phillips’ only remnant of polio isn’t readily apparent.

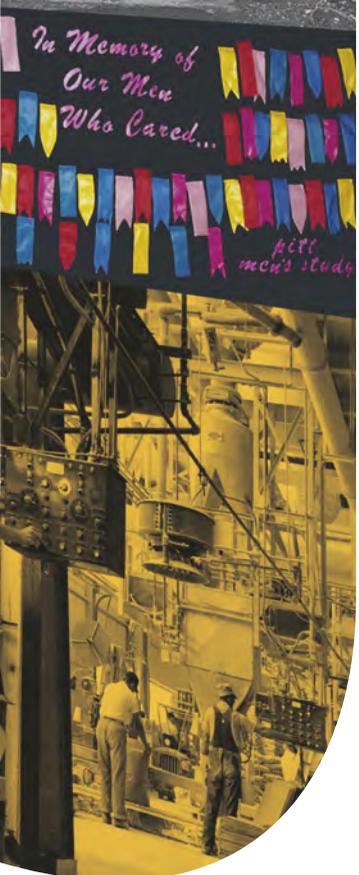
“I have a slight cranial nerve deficit,” she says, moving one eye right to left while the other stays put. “I was lucky.”

The Jonas Salk Legacy Exhibit is located at the Fifth Avenue entrance of the School of Public Health, 130 De Soto St., Pittsburgh, PA, 15261. It is open to the public from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Interested in learning more about the Salk collection? Contact Ed Galloway (edwardg@pitt.edu) from Archives & Special Collections at the University Library System or Jessica Burke (jgburke@pitt.edu) from the Dean’s Office at the School of Public Health.

Pitt Public Health at





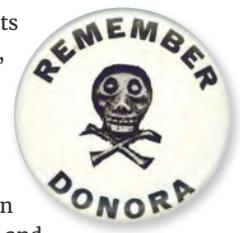
Looking Back, Moving Forward

By Michele Dula Baum

Restoring communities to health and prosperity in the shadow of a catastrophic world war was a universal focus in 1948—a year that saw the establishment of the World Health Organization, Britain’s National Health Service and—closer to home—the Graduate School of Public Health at the University of Pittsburgh.

In its early days, the school—the first public health school accredited in Pennsylvania—focused on occupational health and hygiene.

Pittsburgh’s civic leaders had long recognized the hazards faced by those who labored in the region’s mills and factories, but awareness of the negative effects of air and other environmental pollutants was growing. That same year, a temperature inversion trapped toxic industrial emissions over nearby Donora for days, killing 20 and sickening thousands. Even today, “the Donora Smog” is notable as one of the worst air pollution disasters in the nation’s history.



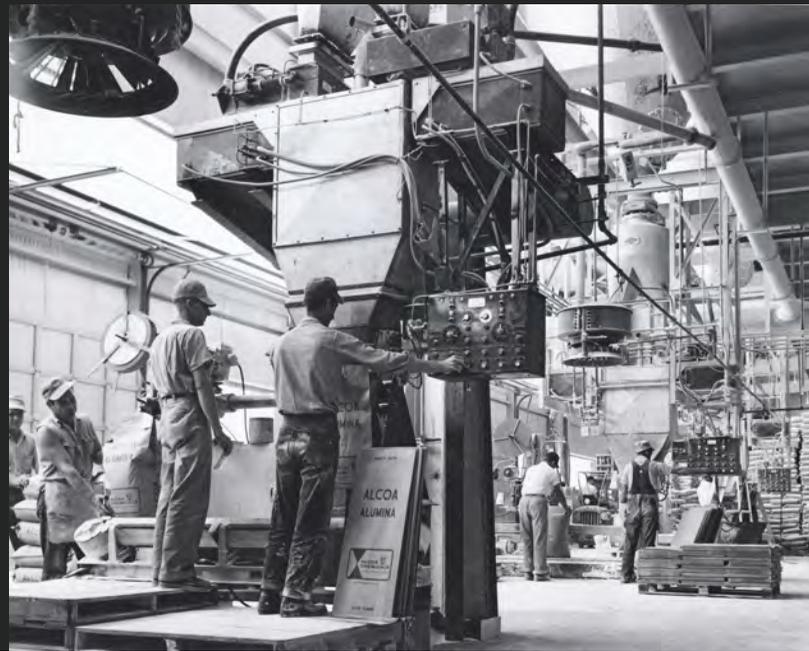
Pitt’s School of Public Health, which celebrates its 75th anniversary in 2023, emerged from this clear need to investigate the causes of illness and forge long-term approaches to prevent disease at the community and population level.

Established with a \$13 million grant from the A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, the school brought some of the most prominent, influential figures in the field of public health to Pittsburgh.



OUR MISSION

Through excellence in research, education and practice, the University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health generates knowledge, trains public health professions and partners with communities locally and globally to promote health, prevent disease and achieve health equity.



Eight deans have led the school since 1948. And though ideas, programs, curricula and areas of research focus have evolved with time, the school's mission remains securely fixed on bedrock principles of public health:

- Emphasis on prevention as opposed to cure
- Study of disease in populations rather than individuals
- Importance of collaborating with community groups and government agencies
- Advancement of health equity

"Public health is as important today as it was 75 years ago," says Maureen Lichtveld, MD, MPH, dean and Jonas Salk Professor in Population Health. "While we have made great strides, there is much yet to do."

Today, the School of Public Health ("Graduate" was dropped upon the establishment of an undergraduate major in 2022) is perhaps the most diverse of the University of Pittsburgh's six schools of the health sciences. Among its faculty are bench scientists, clinicians and investigators engaged in large, population-based studies that span from Pittsburgh to the region, nation and across the globe. Others study ways to improve health equity or evaluate and develop health policy initiatives. Some work in the biggest laboratory of all to build a cleaner, safer environment now and in the future.

"A key strategic goal across our six schools of the health sciences is to grow and enhance interdisciplinary research collaborations, and the wide-ranging experts at Pitt Public Health will be a keystone in this work," says Anantha Shekhar, MD, PhD, Pitt's senior vice chancellor for the health sciences and John and Gertrude Petersen Dean of the School of Medicine. "Through expanding team science around the most pressing health issues of our time, we are uniquely poised at Pitt, and in conjunction with UPMC and our local communities, to lead the way in forging a new future in public health and health care on a national scale."

Healthier people living in a healthier world is the destination upon which the many avenues of public health research converge. And while Pitt Public Health has come a long way over the past 75 years, the school is ready—and eager—for what comes next.

Workers in Pittsburgh's industrial plants faced many hazards on the job. (Left) steel worker in a hot mill. (Right) workers at Pittsburgh's Alcoa plant.

Public health necessarily draws upon many branches of science: the social sciences no less than the natural sciences. In fact, it is a synthesis of the sciences relating to man which constitutes the domain of public health.

REPORT TO PITT CHANCELLOR RUFUS FITZGERALD, 1952

A Look Back

Selected Research Achievements



1948

University of Pittsburgh Chancellor **Rufus Fitzgerald** announces the creation of the **Graduate School of Public Health (GSPH)**, saying “It will be a center, coordinator, and stimulator of fundamental research, dedicated to reducing killing and disabling disease and lengthening the span of life.”

'50s

1950

GSPH is accredited by the **American Public Health Association** to offer master's and doctoral degrees. The first class of 30 students, a third of whom have medical degrees, is enrolled.



1951

Ching Chun “C.C.” Li, PhD, is recruited to join the Department of Biostatistics. A pioneer in human genetics, Li serves as biostatistics chair for six years and is instrumental in the creation of the school's first Department of Human Genetics. Li is noted for his **fundamental contributions to quantitative genetics and experimental design, as well as the development of several important statistical methods still in use today, including a method to determine the “DNA fingerprints” used in forensics.**

William Hammon, MD, PhD, MPH, conducts studies using the **blood protein gamma globulin to induce immunity against poliomyelitis infection**. His studies would provide the first evidence that antibodies to polio virus could temporarily prevent the disease in humans, revealing critical information that Jonas Salk's team used to perfect the first safe and effective polio vaccine.



1952

A killed-virus **polio vaccine is developed** by **Jonas Salk, MD**, and a team of researchers at the University of Pittsburgh. The introduction of the vaccine to the public in 1955 is hailed worldwide and leads to a rapid and dramatic drop in the incidence of this previously unpreventable disease.

1955

Harwood Belding, PhD, Theodore Hatch, MS, Bruce Hertig, ScD, MPH, DrPH, David Minard, MD, and colleagues devise the **Wet Bulb Globe Index to measure heat stress among those working in metal and glass production and military field operations**. It is still commonly used as a heat-stress index in the military, steel mills, marathon races and industrial environments. In 1960, Minard uses the index to evaluate astronauts taking part in the first U.S. human space flight program at the Naval Medical Research Institute.

1956

A **training program for epidemiologists, biostatisticians and others interested in the theory, methods and operation of field research in cancer**—the first program of its kind in the country—is established at GSPH.

1958

William Hammon and David Yohn, PhD, begin a **search for animal viruses** thought nontransmissible to humans that could be **capable of specifically destroying malignant human cells. Eight candidate viruses are identified for further investigation** as possible anticancer agents.

William Hammon, Albert Rudnick, PhD, and Gladys Sather, MPH, are the **first to isolate Dengue viruses 3 and 4**. The severe form of dengue fever can cause serious bleeding, shock and death.

1959

The first edition of the **Hospital Law Manual** is published. The two-volume compendium, produced in collaboration with the School of Law, **for the first time codifies laws and court decisions on hospital administration in all U.S. states**. By 1962, a supplement covering Canadian law is added.

'60s

1962

Monto Ho, MD, pioneers investigations of the **mechanism of action of interferon**, the inducers of interferon, including endotoxins and the mechanism of its induction. He and colleagues **conduct the earliest clinical trials of type 1 interferons in viral diseases**.

1963

Elsie Broussard, MD, DrPH, and **Miriam Hartner, MD**, launch the Pittsburgh **First-Born Project, a longitudinal study focusing on how maternal perceptions affect the child**. Broussard follows the participants for nearly 50 years.



1965

Carol Redmond, ScD, conducts field studies showing that **coke oven workers in steel mills ran a greatly increased risk for lung cancer**—leading to new safety standards implemented by the U.S. Occupational Health and Safety Administration.

The **adeno-associated virus, now used worldwide as a vector of choice for delivering DNA in gene therapies, is discovered** by **R. Wayne Atchison, PhD**.

'70s

1972

The **Multiple Risk Factor Intervention Trial (MRFIT)**, a 10-year project, is launched by **Lew Kuller, MD, DrPH, Arlene Caggiula, PhD, and Robert McDonald, MD**, to determine the best methods to prevent heart disease.

1973

Philip Enterline, PhD, leads studies of retired asbestos workers that link the degree of asbestos exposure to the likelihood of developing lung cancer. Enterline later serves on the advisory board of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.



1975

A hallmark study led by **Monto Ho** shows that primary cytomegalovirus (CMV) infections are transmitted by the transplanted organ. He is one of the first to determine infection risk before transplant using CMV serology of the organ donor and organ recipient, which is now the standard of care.

1976

Carol Redmond and the **Department of Biostatistics** are tapped to handle data analysis for the **National Surgical Adjuvant Breast and Bowel Project** cooperative clinical trial group involving over 80 institutions evaluating treatments for breast cancer. **Clinical study results**, conducted in collaboration with **Bernard Fisher, MD**, herald new standards of care including that **tamoxifen** drug treatment could improve long-term survival, a surgical preference for less-invasive **lumpectomy** and the emergence of genetically targeted therapies like **Herceptin**.

'80s

1980

Katherine Detre, MD, DrPH, establishes the **Epidemiology Data Center (EDC)**, a research resource that builds collaborations with clinical researchers to **design, conduct and analyze multicenter randomized clinical trials and epidemiological studies**. The EDC develops and refines data collection, data management, computing and statistical methods to advance disease treatment and prevention. Currently, the EDC coordinates data management and analysis activities for 26 projects, including clinical trials, registries and case-control studies spanning institutions worldwide.



1982

Charles Rinaldo, PhD, Anthony Silvestre, PhD, and colleagues conduct a pilot study in Pittsburgh that evolves into the **largest and most extensive epidemiological study of HIV/AIDS in the world, the Multicenter AIDS Cohort Study**. The project is combined with the Women's Interagency HIV Study in 2019 and remains ongoing. The Pittsburgh portion is known as the **Pitt Men's Study**.

1983

Lew Kuller, Arlene Caggiula and colleagues **Karen Matthews, PhD, Rena Wing, PhD, and Elaine Meilahn, PhD**, begin the **Healthy Women Study (HWS)**, a companion to MRFIT. HWS is the **first study to focus on cardiovascular risk among women during the menopausal transition**, including the effects of blood hormone levels and hormone replacement therapy.



1984

Meryl Karol PhD, investigates the **Bhopal, India, chemical plant disaster**, which killed an estimated 20,000 people and is considered among the worst industrial accidents in history. As a result, she and colleagues recommend global safety initiatives.

1986

Victor Yu, MD, and graduate students **Janet Stout** and **Jeff Zuravleff** show that **Legionella pneumophila** was ubiquitous in the water supply of a hospital with endemic Legionnaire's disease; further studies show that heating or chlorinating of water sources could decrease the bacteria's spread.



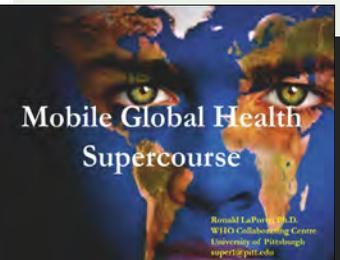
1989

Carol Redmond and colleagues confirm earlier findings **comparing treatments for breast cancer that lumpectomy followed by radiation to the affected breast is as effective as complete removal of the breast**. The study offers reassurance concerning longer term survival for those who opt to undergo less-invasive treatment.

'90s

1991

Enzyme replacement therapy pioneered by **John Barranger, MD, PhD**, is approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for use in patients with **Gaucher disease**, a genetic disorder affecting multiple organ systems and causing bruising, bleeding and bone pain.



1995

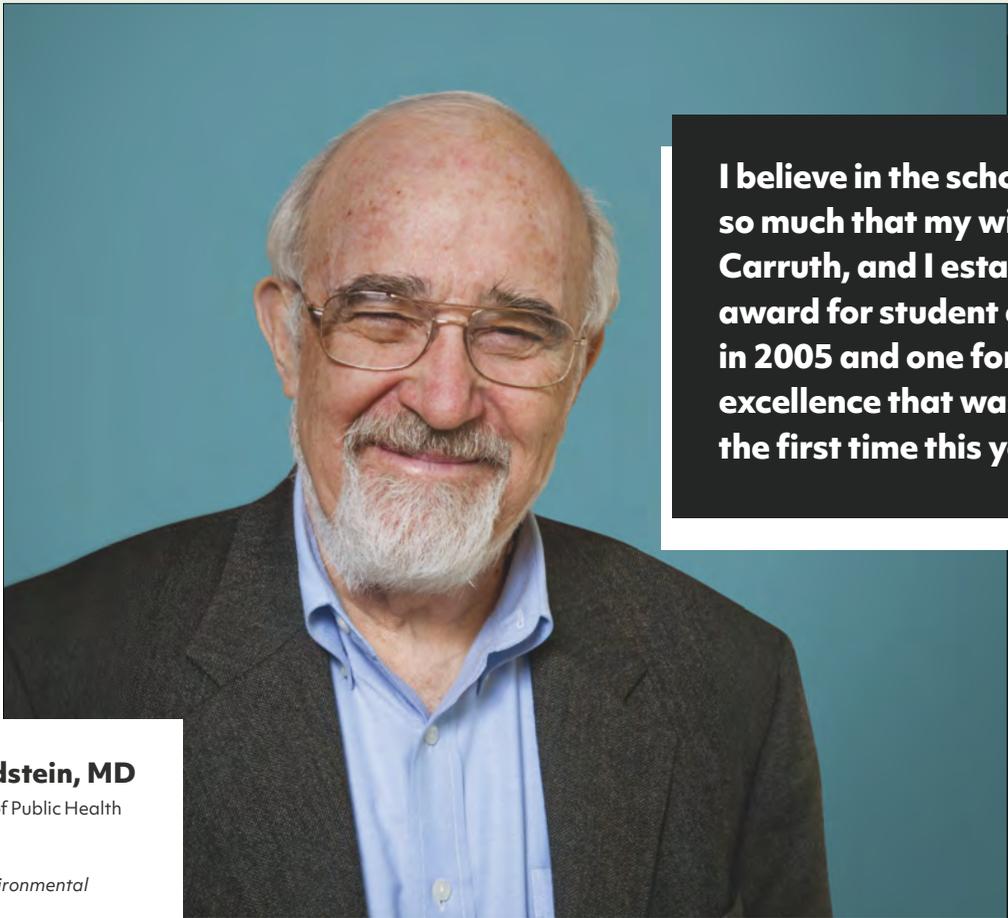
Ronald LaPorte, PhD, establishes the **Supercourse**, also known as "**Epidemiology, the Internet and Global Health**," a collection of PowerPoint lectures from experts on all aspects of global health. By the time of LaPorte's death in 2021, the repository had grown to more than 200,000 lectures in 38 languages, reaching more than 2 million scientists and students around the world.

1998

Judith Lave, PhD, Edmund Ricci, PhD, and colleagues publish a study evaluating health outcomes among insured and uninsured children. Results lead Congress to expand the **Children's Health Insurance Program** from three states to all 50, where it remains a major source of health care for low-income families.

1999

Lew Kuller and **Roberta Ness, MD, MPH**, publish *Health and Disease among Women: Biological and Environmental Influences*, illuminating **sex differences in rates of illness, causes of death, how drugs are metabolized, lifestyle-related concerns, and uses of health care services**.



I believe in the school's future so much that my wife, Russellyn Carruth, and I established an award for student excellence in 2005 and one for teaching excellence that was given for the first time this year.

[Reflections]

Bernard D. Goldstein, MD

Dean, Graduate School of Public Health
(2001–2005)

*Emeritus Professor of Environmental
and Occupational Health*

When I became dean soon after our 50th anniversary celebration, my major goals were to support our superb faculty and students, who were soon leading all Pitt schools in their annual percentage increase in external funding and student enrollment; and to work more closely with community organizations and local, state and national public health programs. During that period, we had significant programmatic growth at the school in minority health and public health practice, and also began renovation of our antiquated building.

I am fortunate to have remained a faculty member, now emeritus, and am excited about the school's continued forward movement. I also know that public health education needs donor support to help fulfill its mission.

My wife, Russellyn, and I have contributed to support students and postdoctoral researchers interested in environmental health disparities or public health practice for decades. Earlier this year, we funded an award to recognize faculty excellence in classroom teaching in the school's new undergraduate program. There are many such opportunities to provide a relatively small amount of support and make a significant impact.

Finally, we've arranged for a \$1 million bequest to endow a professorship that will help to recruit new faculty to advance research, education and outreach in environmental and occupational health.

These gifts reflect our commitment to public health education and confidence in the strength of our school to help future generations of public health professionals make a difference.



I couldn't have lasted a day, let alone 13 years, without my extraordinary team of associate deans, department chairs and dean's office staff. It was a privilege and a joy.

[Reflections]

Donald S. Burke, MD

Dean, Graduate School of Public Health
(2006–2019)

*Emeritus Distinguished University
Professor of Health Science and Policy*

My main responsibility was to support the education and research activities of our amazing team of 160 faculty, 600 graduate students and 400 staff.

On the public health science front, we created a new program in computational modeling and simulation of public health problems that became a National Institutes of Health National Center of Excellence. We expanded our global health activities to sites in India, Brazil and South Africa—programs that became deeply engaged with solving the critical health issues of those regions. And we launched a school-wide interdisciplinary program on research to curb the drug overdose epidemic in the United States.

On education, we reinvigorated a combined 4+1 Bachelor's/Master's program in public health that was a forerunner of the new undergraduate public health major, and created several new graduate certificate and degree programs in areas as diverse as disaster preparedness and public health genetics. And we brought our Department of Environmental and Occupational Health back into the main building from off-campus.

A major accomplishment of my deanship was the completion of a sorely needed upgrade of our physical infrastructure. First, we added a four-story state-of-the-art laboratory pavilion. Over the course of three year-long phases, we completely transformed the offices and classrooms in our main building. Creation of a bright commons area, complete with a café, was a priority. For seven years, we all stoically endured jackhammers and office dislocations, but it was worth it.

I couldn't have lasted a day, let alone 13 years, without my extraordinary team of associate deans, department chairs and dean's office staff. It was a privilege and a joy.

'00s

2000

Researchers led by **Bora Baysal, MD, PhD, Robert Ferrell, PhD, and Bernard Devlin, PhD**, discover that a mutation in a **gene encoding a mitochondrial protein is the cause of hereditary paraganglioma**. This study is the first to link the structure of mitochondrial DNA to tumor development.

Katherine Detre designs and leads a seven-year study to determine the best way to treat people with both type 2 diabetes and early coronary artery disease. The \$52 million study, funded by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, is one of the largest awards in University history.

2001

The **International Agency for Research on Cancer reclassifies glass insulation wool as "not a human carcinogen"** based on studies led by **Gary Marsh, PhD, Ada Youk, PhD, and Jeanine Buchanich, PhD**, allaying homeowners' and industry fears about insulation and lung cancer risk.



2002

Lew Kuller and colleagues report results of a 15-year Women's Health Initiative study finding that **post-menopausal women taking estrogen and progestin hormone therapy for menopause symptoms had an increased risk for breast cancer, heart disease, stroke, blood clots and urinary incontinence**. Today, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration urges women who take hormone therapy to use the lowest helpful dose for the shortest amount of time.

2003

Trevor Orchard, MD, and colleagues find that **women who have pregnancy-related high blood pressure conditions or diabetes can develop heart disease risk factors as soon as two years after giving birth**.



2005

Ron Stall, PhD, MPH, establishes the **Center for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Health Research (LGBT)**, the first program to offer MPH and doctoral public health training geared to LGBT health.



2008

In collaboration with the Peace Corps, **GSPH institutes a program that blends classroom learning with real-world experience for students interested in a career in global health**. The Master's International track enables students to earn a master's degree in public health and also volunteer with the Peace Corps.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention awards **GSPH \$8.4 million** to create a Preparedness and Emergency Response Research Center. The Center's experts will **develop methods to evaluate emergency response plans and "best practices" to handle public health emergencies** caused by the spread of infectious diseases, defective water and sewage systems, natural disasters or intentional acts.

2009

There is **no difference in mortality among patients with type 2 diabetes and stable heart disease who received prompt bypass surgery or angioplasty compared to drug therapy alone**, according to a **landmark study focused exclusively on patients with both conditions**. The study, led by **GSPH investigators** and involving a large international team, also finds that while prompt bypass in patients with more severe heart disease does not lower mortality, it lowers risk of subsequent major cardiac events.



Richard Garland, MSW (above), Steven Albert, PhD, MS, and the Center for Health Equity establish a **Violence Prevention Program to understand the reasons for homicide through collaborations with Pittsburgh-based organizations**, including law enforcement, social service providers, trauma physicians, advocates and community members.

'10s

2010

Stephen Grant, PhD, and colleagues determine that **newborns of nonsmoking moms exposed to secondhand smoke during pregnancy have genetic mutations that may affect long-term health**. The abnormalities, which were indistinguishable from those found in newborns of mothers who were active smokers, may affect survival, birth weight and lifelong susceptibility to diseases like cancer.

The **Public Health Dynamics Laboratory is established to provide leadership in computational simulation and modeling** within GSPH and as a liaison to the University's Center for Research Computing and collaborators throughout other Pitt schools and at Carnegie Mellon University.

2011

Susanne Gollin, PhD, and colleagues identify a **new genetic biomarker in tumor cells pointing to chemotherapy and radiation resistance**. The studies lead to breakthroughs in treatment for oral, lung, breast and ovarian cancers.

2013

Willem van Panhuis, MD, PhD, and colleagues unveil **Project Tycho, a digitized data source of all weekly surveillance reports for reportable diseases in the United States going back more than 125 years** that will help scientists and public health officials to track patterns of illness and eradicate deadly and devastating diseases. Most recently, Project Tycho 2.0 released COVID-19 datasets for 237 countries.

2014

Lisa Bodnar, PhD, MPH, and colleagues report that **women who are deficient in vitamin D in the first 26 weeks of their pregnancy may be at risk of developing severe preeclampsia**, a potentially life-threatening disorder diagnosed by an increase in blood pressure and protein in the urine.

Nancy Glynn, PhD, and colleagues create the **Pittsburgh Fatigability Scale, a method of scoring patient overall health** in which people rank how tired they believe certain activities—such as a leisurely 30-minute walk, light housework or heavy gardening—might make them. Studies show that elders with higher scores have a higher likelihood of death within three years. The survey has now been translated into 11 languages.

2015

Valerian Kagan, PhD, Joel Greenberger, MD, and colleagues continue a project to **develop drugs that could provide protection from radiation in emergencies such as terrorism or reactor meltdowns.** Previously, the researchers had developed and patented two drugs to mitigate the effects of radiation on the body.

Bruce Pitt, PhD, and colleagues report that **pregnant women living close to a high density of natural gas wells drilled with hydraulic fracturing were more likely to have babies with lower birth weights** than women living farther from such wells, according to an analysis of southwestern Pennsylvania birth records.

2016

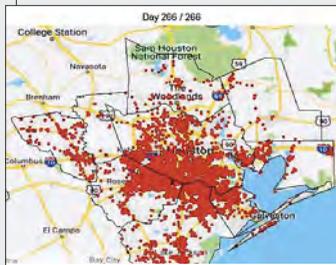
Anne Newman, MD, MPH, and colleagues report that older adults with the **healthiest lifestyles could expect to spend about 1.7 fewer years disabled at the end of their lives**, compared to their unhealthiest counterparts.

A. Everette James, JD, MBA, Brian Primack, MD, PhD, and colleagues report that **use of multiple social media platforms is more strongly associated with depression and anxiety among young adults**—an association strong enough to warrant clinicians asking patients about their use of social media.

Jennifer Adibi, MPH, ScD, Ernesto Marques, MD, PhD, and colleagues suggest the **placenta plays a central role in cases of microcephaly due to Zika infection during pregnancy**, either because of viral evasion of the placental barrier or because of immunological responses within the placenta, calling for rigorous testing to determine the viral mechanism of action.

2017

Eleanor Feingold, PhD, John Shaffer, PhD, and colleagues, along with an international collaboration involving investigators in the United Kingdom and China, determine that **at least 49 genes are involved in earlobe attachment, challenging previous knowledge about dominant and recessive genes.**



2019

Using a computer simulation, **Mark Roberts, MD, and colleagues** report that growing numbers of children arriving at Texas schools unvaccinated makes the state increasingly vulnerable to measles outbreaks in cities large and small. Findings indicate that **an additional 5% decrease in vaccination rates, which have been trending down since 2003, would increase the size of a potential measles outbreak by up to 4,000% in some communities.**

By analyzing comments on social media, **Beth Hoffman, PhD, and colleagues** determine that **anti-vaccination arguments center on themes of trust, safety, alternatives and conspiracy.** Health care providers who understand these underlying themes may be able to deliver more effective information to counter anti-vaccine beliefs.

'20s

2020

Coleman Drake, PhD, and colleagues report that **Medicaid expansion through the Affordable Care Act increased early-stage cancer diagnoses as a result of increased access to care.** At the same time, diagnoses of late-stage cancers decreased.

Studying nearly 40 years of data on deaths from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, **Hawre Jalal, PhD, and colleagues** determined that the **overdose epidemic emerged among the Baby Boomers, shifted to Generation X,**

and then soared to new heights among Millennials. The regular patterns from older to younger populations thus uncovered may give policymakers a tool for testing whether their measures to curb drug overdose deaths are working over the long term.

Study by **Robert W.S. Coulter, PhD, MPH** and **Elizabeth Miller, MD, PhD** finds that **men who harbor more harmful attitudes about masculinity, including beliefs about aggression and homophobia, also tend toward bullying, sexual harassment, depression and suicidal thoughts.**

2021

Using data from the Pitt Asthma Institute Research Registry, a team of researchers that includes **Sally Wenzel, MD, James Fabisiak, PhD, and Brandy Byrwa-Hill, PhD,** determines that a **2018 fire that destroyed pollution controls at the Clairton Coke Works exacerbates asthma among people living near the plant.** The plant emitted 25-fold greater levels of sulfur dioxide for 102 days after the fire.



The largest analysis to date of **opioid use disorder** among Medicaid recipients finds that considerable **evidence-based treatment gaps remain along racial lines, Julie Donohue, PhD,** and her **team** report. These results provide insights that policymakers and medical providers can act on to improve access to quality care for opioid use disorder, one of the leading causes of death in the U.S.

2022

A consortium of scientists led by **Marian Jarlenski, PhD, MPH,** finds that nearly **a third of pregnant Medicaid beneficiaries who have opioid use disorder and are screened for hepatitis C test positive for the potentially deadly virus** and that,

despite the existence of medication that can cure the disease, fewer than a fifth of those patients receive follow-up care for their hepatitis C within six months of giving birth.



Building on their history of **collaborative filmmaking research, Sara Baumann, PhD, Jessica Burke, PhD,** and their **colleagues** report on a video project that reveals **the intersectional nature of stressful factors affecting young people's mental health, including education, social media, cultural expectations, politics and COVID-19.** The team suggests policy level and systemic action to counter mental health concerns among youth.

2023

Eric Roberts, PhD, and colleagues report that **low-income Black and Hispanic older adults are more likely than their white peers to face cost-related barriers to accessing health care and filling medications for chronic conditions.** Being just above the federal poverty threshold, and therefore ineligible for Medicaid, was associated with a 21% drop in annual outpatient visits and a 15% drop in prescriptions filled for Black and Hispanic Medicare beneficiaries, but barely any change for white beneficiaries.

A team led by **George Tsang, ScD,** **develops a biostatistical framework to determine how much congruence and discordance laboratory animals have with specific human diseases.** The tool removes potential bias from scientific interpretation of how translational animal data are for human conditions.



I learned personally that when accepting a leadership role, you never know what may happen in the world around you to test you and the ability of your organization to respond.

[Reflections]

A. Everette James, JD, MBA

Interim Dean, Graduate School of Public Health
(2019–2020)

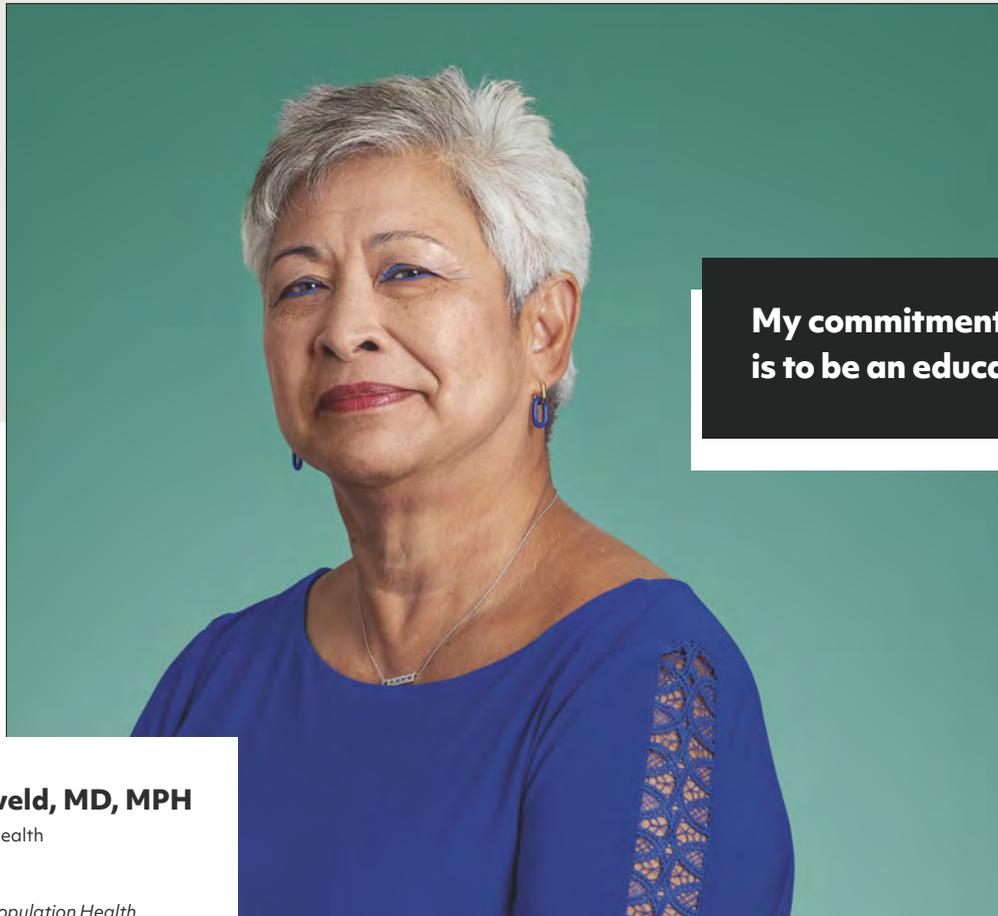
*M. Allen Pond Professor of Health Policy
and Management*

I learned personally that when accepting a leadership role, you never know what may happen in the world around you to test you and the ability of your organization to respond.

My goal when I started the interim dean position was to apply a purpose-driven leadership approach and good management principles to organize the school for long-term success. My focus was on supporting the foundation of Pitt Public Health—the seven departments that teach our students, conduct groundbreaking research and serve our community. I believe that our collective success depends upon the strength of each department to contribute to the sustainability and growth of the entire school.

Less than a year into my role, the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the death of George Floyd tested us all and forced us to act to slow the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and to address racial inequity and social injustice. I'm so proud of how our school responded and am confident that we will continue to be a force for good for at least the next 75 years.

It was an honor to represent our faculty, staff and students as interim dean.



**My commitment, always,
is to be an educator.**

[Reflections]

Maureen Lichtveld, MD, MPH

Dean, School of Public Health
(2021–present)

Jonas Salk Professor in Population Health

In accepting the position as dean, I could see that Pitt had all the ingredients not only to be nationally recognized as a top school, which it is, but also to be an even better recognized school globally. And while all the ingredients were here, they were not necessarily connected. My prime motivation was to make that happen to get the maximum visibility that we could have. I felt we were the best-kept secret, as public health often is.

My commitment, always, is to be an educator. We need to create a cadre of public health professionals, beginning at the lowest possible level. I'm especially proud of our new programs, beginning with the Bachelor of Science in Public Health. We had over 2,000 applicants in our very first year. Secondly, we have the Public Health Science Academy, which gives high school students a trajectory into public health. Thirdly, we have a grant from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to support a program for minority and disadvantaged college students, graduates of two-year community colleges, and juniors and seniors in four-year programs. These students were embedded with us over this past summer in areas that are high priority not only to me, but across the world—maternal/child health, environmental justice and climate and health.

Collectively, the scientific community is putting a lot of emphasis on precision medicine—how to tailor care to the individual. What we need to do is find ways to maximally advance the health of our communities—precision public health.

I also want to strengthen our emphasis on diversity, equity and inclusion. To me, this goes beyond race and ethnicity to include LGBTQIA individuals, people with physical or learning disabilities, first-generation minority graduate students, and indigenous populations and communities.

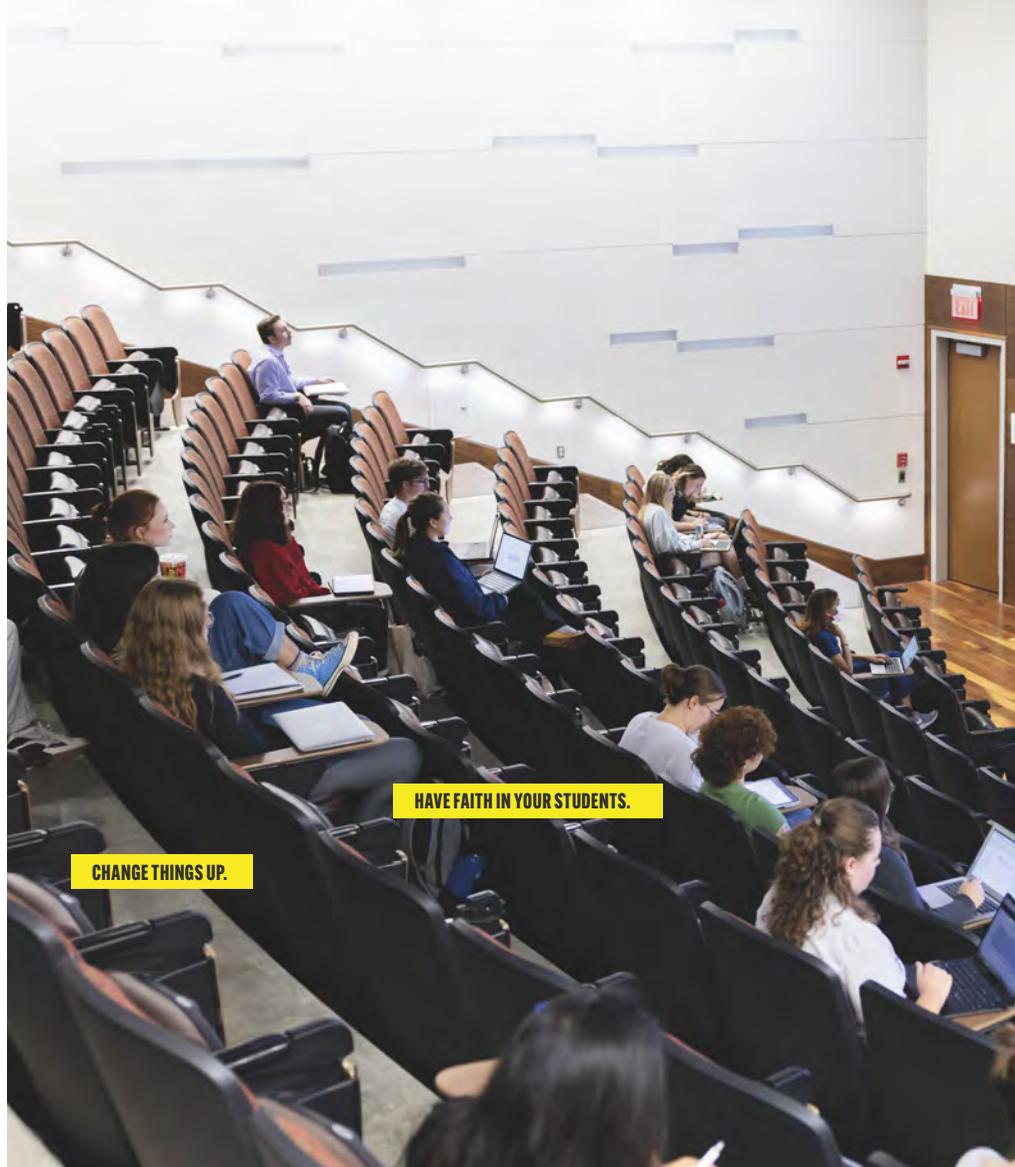
Our research within the departments is high quality and rich, but we need to do more. I want to strengthen our transdisciplinary efforts to encourage more collaboration across departments, among schools and in partnership with our communities.



MISSION: INSPIRE

By Michele Dula Baum

THE ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES AND MICROBIOLOGY HAS A **SIMPLE APPROACH** TO TEACHING STUDENTS COMPLEX IDEAS.



Jeremy Martinson, DPhil, winner of the 2023 Chancellor’s Distinguished Teaching Award, believes the essence of teaching is having faith in your students.

Given annually since 1984, the Chancellor’s Distinguished Teaching Award includes a \$2,000 cash prize and \$3,000 grant to support teaching activities. It’s the second such award in two years for Martinson, assistant professor of infectious diseases and microbiology. He is also a recipient of the James L. Craig Excellence in Education Award given by the School of Public Health, where he has been a faculty member since 2002.

Martinson began developing his teaching philosophy as a graduate student in genetics at the University of Oxford in England, where mentors “treated you almost as peers,” he recalls. “They communicated excitement and explained concepts, but they assumed you were able to understand things if they were explained properly.”

The realization ignited his desire to master ways to explain complicated subject matter that “gives everybody a chance to show what they can do.”

In practice, this means Martinson often changes things up. For example, he includes multiple choice and writing-based exam questions—giving students with different strengths and learning styles an equal chance to succeed.

AT OXFORD, MENTORS “TREATED YOU ALMOST AS PEERS.” THEIR JOB WAS TO COMMUNICATE THE EXCITEMENT AND EXPLAIN THE CONCEPTS, “BUT THEY ASSUMED THAT YOU WERE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND THINGS IF THEY WERE EXPLAINED PROPERLY.”



PUT SOMETHING IN THERE TO INTEREST EVERYONE.



He is program director of the Master of Public Health degree, with a concentration in infectious disease pathogenesis, eradication and laboratory practice, in addition to serving as course director and primary instructor for a plethora of biology and human genetics classes from small seminars to lecture courses of 100 students or more.

Seeking creative approaches across the many classes he teaches can be a challenge, but what makes his job easier is that Pitt Public Health “has incredibly smart students,” he says.

Each new public health biology class, for example, finds a blank spot in the course syllabus as the semester begins—but it’s no oversight.

“I don’t know what I’m going to teach in that week because you students haven’t told me yet,” he grins, explaining that their choice of current events will determine his lecture content.

This past summer, students discussed the biology of opioid dependence.

“Nearly all MPH students take that class so many should remember voting on a topic,” he adds.

Martinson recognizes that some students are taking his courses to fulfill a requirement, but he tries to make sure to “put something in there to interest everyone.”

Of course, when infectious diseases make news—like, every day for the past three years—“sometimes courses do just write themselves,” he admits. Martinson also welcomes sidebar discussions and encourages students to have a say in what they learn.

Marina Levochkina (MPH, IDM, ’21) calls Martinson “the best mentor ever” for his guidance during completion of her thesis on cellular mechanisms in health care-associated infections. Levochkina is currently a second-year student at Virginia Tech’s Carilion School of Medicine.

In addition to his classroom teaching, Martinson also trains students in his

MARTINSON’S RESEARCH INTERESTS FOCUS ON HOW GENETIC VARIATIONS AFFECT THE SEVERITY OF INFECTIONS SUCH AS HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS (HIV).

lab. His research interests focus on how genetic variations affect the severity of infections such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Understanding how different genes affect response to infection, he explains, can help predict whether a treatment will be effective and what side effects may be expected.

For example, a common anti-HIV drug, abacavir, can cause “catastrophically bad” side effects if a patient has a specific genetic variant in the major histocompatibility complex, a key component of the adaptive immune system. Individuals with the HLA-B*5701 allele are more likely to have a hypersensitivity reaction to abacavir, which can lead to severe rash, fatigue and diarrhea.

“You need to test people to make sure they aren’t going to respond poorly to that drug,” says Martinson. Those with the mutation can receive a different antiretroviral compound.

Other individuals may have a genetic makeup that supercharges their drug metabolization to the point that anti-HIV treatments break down before they can have any effect on the disease, he says, adding “You wouldn’t want to waste months giving them a drug that turned out not to work right.”

Martinson’s research already has implications for medical practice. In the future, his studies could inform the development of precision medicine treatments based on a person’s unique genetics.

“A lot of students want to come into the lab and learn how to do this,” he continues, adding that even though the Bachelor of Science in Public Health program is new, he already has an undergraduate student working in his lab. Martinson is training her to use genome sequencing to predict why cognitive decline is more common among older adults living with HIV.

Even though “sometimes there aren’t enough hours in the day,” Martinson continues to seek balance while maintaining high standards for excellence and genuine enthusiasm for sharing knowledge.

“I DON’T KNOW WHAT I’M GOING TO TEACH IN THAT WEEK BECAUSE YOU STUDENTS HAVEN’T TOLD ME YET.”

Jeremy Martinson during a public health biology lecture.

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RESEARCHERS
GET DOWN TO
PARTICULATES,
POLLUTION AND
OUR HEALTH.

By Michele Dula Baum

N

early 200 years of heavy industry has left its mark on the Monongahela River valley and generations of the people who live there. From the opening of the first glass manufacturing plants in 1840 to the current operations of U.S. Steel's Clairton Coke Works—by far the largest emitter of particle pollution in Allegheny County—valley commerce has offered prosperity in one hand and pollution in the other.

It's a history repeated in countless places—and one that brings Pitt researchers together with public health-minded colleagues across the University, the region and the world.

FROM STEELMAKING TO FOSSIL FUELS

"We've been doing research on the legacy of the steel industry for some time," says Sally Wenzel, MD, chair of the Department of Environmental and Occupational Health (EOH) at Pitt Public Health and Rachel Carson Professor in Environmental Health in Pitt's School of Medicine. "There's also the impact of the fracking industry, which has a large presence in southwestern Pennsylvania."

Studies and initiatives that focus on the influence of air pollution on quality of health have "only increased over the past five years" at the school, she adds.

"We've had a fairly large state investment in trying to understand the health consequences of fracking for the people living near these pads, particularly from a respiratory disease perspective," says Wenzel, who also directs the University of Pittsburgh Asthma and Environmental Health Institute, a joint program of the Schools of Public Health and Medicine.

"We have an asthma registry that has over 2,000 people in it from the Allegheny County area," she continues. "We know where they live and what their asthma severity and lung function look like in relation to what they've been exposed to. We're working now to expand the registry into the Mon Valley."

WHEN POLLUTION CONTROLS FAIL

Soon after a disastrous Christmas Eve fire shut pollution controls down at the Clairton Coke Works in 2018, public health officials were on the ground, working to address repercussions to community health in the Mon Valley.

The plant released an unprecedented amount of sulfur dioxide (SO₂) into the atmosphere for 102 days after the fire. A known pollutant, SO₂ is monitored and regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Atmospheric biochemical interactions can form particulates small enough to penetrate deeply into the lungs and contribute to health problems like asthma. SO₂ can also oxidize into several acids and chemical compounds known to be respiratory system irritants.

An analysis conducted by Pitt, Carnegie Mellon University and Allegheny County Health Department colleagues found that during the pollution-control breach, participants who lived closest to the plant had an 80% greater risk of worsened asthma symptoms compared with those farther away. The difference normalized after the plant controls were repaired. And despite news reports and alerts urging people to take precautions, 44% of study participants were unaware of the excessive pollution.

“Our study reveals a need for a more robust notification system that uses many modes of communication so people can make informed, timely decisions to protect their health,” says James Fabisiak, PhD, associate professor of

DURING THE 2018 CLAIRTON COKE WORKS POLLUTION-CONTROL BREACH, PARTICIPANTS WHO LIVED CLOSEST TO THE PLANT HAD AN 80% GREATER RISK OF WORSENERD ASTHMA SYMPTOMS COMPARED WITH THOSE FARTHER AWAY. 44% OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS WERE UNAWARE OF THE EXCESSIVE POLLUTION.

“ONE OF THE KEY TENETS OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IS THAT FOLKS WHO ARE IMPACTED HAVE A SEAT AT THE DECISION-MAKING TABLE.”

CHRISTINA NDOH

environmental and occupational health and director of the Center for Healthy Environments and Communities at Pitt Public Health.

PROXIMITY AND POLLUTION

It may be no big surprise that air pollution can worsen respiratory illness—but there are more wide-ranging health effects.

For example, Fabisiak and many of the same colleagues who conducted the Clairton study designed a model for heart disease risk by mapping exposure data for black carbon and nitrogen dioxide air pollutants and census tracts deemed by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection to have higher environmental justice burdens. Pollutant levels were found to be four to 25 times more likely to reach the highest levels of exposure in areas that were home to historically marginalized populations than those elsewhere.

Although people living in environmental justice areas represented just 28% of Allegheny County residents, they accounted for about 40% of the risk for cardiovascular heart disease deaths associated with black carbon and nitrogen dioxide, Fabisiak and colleagues wrote in the open-access journal *Environmental Health*. Asthma severity and control are similarly affected in environmental justice areas, studies show.

“People living in affected areas may not know about the environmental hazards in their communities,” says Fabisiak, adding that policies engendered by the 50-year-old U.S. Clean Air Act have had little effect on social and economic health disparities. Mapping these areas closely aligns with the discriminatory legacy of redlining.

Environmental justice is an increasing area of research at Pitt Public Health, agrees Christina “Tina” Ndoh, PhD, associate dean for public health practice.

BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

“One of the key tenets of environmental justice is that folks who are impacted must have a seat at the decision-making table,” says Ndoh, who is also associate professor of environmental and occupational health.

“We’re really looking at regulatory efforts and seeing how stakeholder engagement influences environmental policy development,” she adds.

Among Pitt’s community partner organizations are Women for a Healthy Environment, Valley Clean Air and the Breathe Collaborative.

“The people of southwestern Pennsylvania should feel confident that the air we breathe won’t make us sick,” says Matt Mehalik, a Mon Valley native and executive director of the Breathe Collaborative. “We have the right to live and work in clean, safe and healthy environments.”



EAST PALESTINE TRAIN DERAILMENT

COMMUNITY MATTERS: PUBLIC HEALTH IN PRACTICE

Not long after a Norfolk-Southern train carrying hazardous chemicals derailed about 50 miles northwest of Pittsburgh in early February 2023, Pitt researchers James Fabisiak, PhD, and Carla Ng, PhD, went to East Palestine, Ohio, to see how they could help.

Fabisiak, associate professor of environmental and occupational health, and Ng, associate professor of civil and environmental engineering, Swanson School of Engineering, were there to meet Erika Kinkead, an East Palestine resident who wasn't sure whom to believe about what.

Twenty of the 38 cars that derailed contained industrial chemicals, including vinyl chloride, benzene and other combustible liquids used to make paint and adhesives. Chemicals on board caught fire, contaminating the air, water and soil. Days later, following a mandatory evacuation of nearly half the community's 5,000 residents, officials conducted

a controlled burn to avoid an even more disastrous explosion of vinyl chloride, a volatile chemical used to make plastics that has been linked to liver disease.

The burn sent a plume of black smoke towering over the area, leading to concerns about potential negative health consequences that linger to this day.

"We spent the afternoon sitting in the kitchen and exchanging ideas," says Fabisiak. "I realized this could be the nucleus of a group that could work with us at Pitt on a community-centered research project there."

Kinkead and her family had resettled in East Palestine in part due to concerns about emissions from the Shell Pennsylvania Petrochemicals Complex — locally known as the cracker plant — near their former home just across the state line in Beaver County, Pennsylvania.

"The people at Pitt were really helpful when everything first happened because there was a lot of misinformation," says Kinkead, a registered nurse with the New

Brighton Area School District in Pennsylvania and a member of the East Palestine City Board of Education. "You might say there was also some distrust."

Fabisiak, Ng and other University researchers offered useful advice about questions residents should ask as the situation progressed, she says. "They wouldn't comment on things they didn't have data about but were really good at letting us know what

"THE PEOPLE AT PITT WERE REALLY HELPFUL WHEN EVERYTHING FIRST HAPPENED BECAUSE THERE WAS A LOT OF MISINFORMATION. YOU MIGHT SAY THERE WAS ALSO SOME DISTRUST."

ERIKA KINKEAD

we could expect in the initial phases when we didn't have information."

The train derailed near a small creek less than a mile from the Pennsylvania state line. "Luckily, people don't use the stream for drinking water but, over time, some chemicals could find their way into groundwater and wells," says Fabisiak.

The Pitt team has applied for National Institutes of Health funding to launch a project currently being organized with community partners like Kinkead to engage "citizen scientists" to help monitor air and water quality going forward.

Common Bonds

SUMMER PROGRAMS SPARK PUBLIC HEALTH PASSION
IN YOUNGER GENERATIONS

By Clare Collins and Roberta Zeff

“Dear Sam,

I am trying not to cry as I write this,”

began high school student Layla Johnson’s handwritten note to her mentor, Samantha Toton, PhD, MPH, a postdoctoral associate in the Department of Environmental and Occupational Health (EOH) at Pitt’s School of Public Health. Johnson was thanking Toton for the month they worked together in the Public Health Science Academy, a summer program that matches teenagers from Pittsburgh-area high schools with faculty to introduce them to public health and other scientific fields.

Johnson, who began her senior year at Pittsburgh CAPA this fall, was especially grateful to Toton for “...listening to my many stories and experiences as we walked around campus and talked about the future” while they measured outdoor particle pollution for her project.

At a symposium held at the school on July 21, Johnson and eight other Academy graduates presented their research projects to an audience of family members, mentors and educators. A Braddock



CAPA student Layla Johnson

resident, Johnson chose to address air pollution and preterm birth, particularly related to health disparities, as her project. She shared Criseena's story, a Black woman in Pittsburgh whose first child was born at 26 weeks and weighed only 1 pound and 11 ounces. After playing a recorded interview she conducted with Criseena, Johnson revealed, "I was that baby."

Working closely with faculty mentors at the School of Public Health, Academy students from high schools across the city presented on a range of public health topics—the effects of climate change on kidney disease and antibiotic resistance, the spread of misinformation about nicotine and tobacco on social media, environmental factors and brain aging, and genetic and social contributors to complex diseases.

Only a day before the Academy research symposium took place, the Commons area of the Public Health Building was crowded with another group of young scholars focused on public health—this time, undergraduate students eager to show off posters explaining the research they had done as part of their internships through the Public Health Undergraduate Scholars Program.

The event was the culmination of an eight-week summer program designed to advance health equity by increasing diversity in the public health workforce. A highlight for the 38 students participating—six of whom are Pitt undergraduates—was traveling to Atlanta to present



The program helped me understand public health as “a holistic approach to looking at things.”

YAA KORNE

their research at a poster showcase at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Funded by the Office of Health Equity at the CDC as part of the John R. Lewis Undergraduate Public Health Scholars Program, the program aims to encourage historically underserved college students to consider careers in public health.

Hannah Covert, PhD, research assistant professor in EOH, who manages the internship program, said students focused on maternal and child health, environmental justice, and climate and health and had faculty mentors from the School of Public Health or UPMC. Participant Francisca Centron Seguel, a student at the University of Texas at Austin, was chosen to receive the Williams-Hutchins Health Equity Award in recognition of her work to develop an evaluation tool to inform gun violence prevention efforts in Pittsburgh.

Yaa Kornne, a junior at Pitt majoring in rehabilitation science, said the program helped her understand public health as “a holistic approach to looking at things.” Through her internship in community sports in Homewood, she learned that the benefits of sports are not only for physical health but also for “the social and emotional health of the youth.”

And she learned that public health requires data collection to quantify what is being studied. “We need numbers,” she said.

BEHAVIORAL AND COMMUNITY HEALTH SCIENCES

Mary Hawk, DrPH, was appointed chair of the Department of Behavioral and Community Health Sciences, effective Sept. 1, 2022. Hawk is also professor and codirects the school's Evaluation Institute for Public Health and Center for LGBT Health Research.

"Our students, staff and faculty do amazing work and are clearly committed to social justice and improving the health of the public, which are integral to our department's vision,"

says Hawk, who completed her DrPH and MSW at Pitt. "I'm especially excited about work we are currently conducting to update our strategic plan, and specifically operationalizing ways to incorporate diversity, equity and inclusion across our teaching, research and practice."

Among her research interests are the assessment and implementation of interventions to improve health outcomes for underserved populations (including those with substance use issues), enhance the delivery of needed services and develop community-engaged approaches to promote public health. She is principal

investigator of a National Institute on Drug Abuse-funded study to explore stigma and health outcomes for people living with HIV, and a leader on training grants focusing on HIV biobehavioral prevention interventions and mental health research capacity building in India.

Hawk cofounded **The Open Door Inc., a harm reduction housing program**

to improve health outcomes for chronically homeless people living with HIV, and is actively engaged with community organizations locally, nationally and globally. An established mentor, her contributions to research and education have been honored with many awards, including the school's James L. Craig Excellence in Education Award.



BIOSTATISTICS

Yan Ma, PhD, joined the School of Public Health faculty Sept. 1, 2022, as professor and chair of

the Department of Biostatistics. He formerly served as professor and vice chair of the Department of Biostatistics and Bioinformatics at the Milken Institute School of Public Health at George Washington University.

"It's a tremendous honor to be selected to lead this elite department of biostatistics," says Ma, adding that Pitt health sciences also has an international reputation for excellence in research and education.

Ma's theoretical and computational statistical research interests include missing data imputation, machine learning, meta-analysis, methods for assessing interrater reliability, causal inference, complex sample surveys and longitudinal methods. Among others, Ma has collaborated on investigations touching orthopedics, anesthesiology, health

disparities, cancer, HIV/AIDS, psychiatry and emergency medicine.

"We biostatisticians are always looking for collaborations," he says.

Ma is currently principal investigator of a National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities-funded project developing data-driven methods for missing data imputation in surgical outcome disparities. He is a recipient of the Young Investigator Award from the American Statistical Association's Section on Statistics in Epidemiology and the Achievement in Academia Award from the American Public Health Association.

He earned a PhD in statistics from the University of Rochester in New York.



EPIDEMIOLOGY

A study led by infectious diseases epidemiologist **Jean B. Nachega, MD, PhD, MPH,**

finds that pregnant people hospitalized with COVID-19 in sub-Saharan Africa are dying at a rate far greater than pregnant people without COVID-19 and non-pregnant people with COVID-19. The multicenter study was published in May in the journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases*.

"Our findings indicate that hospitalized pregnant women with COVID-19 in sub-Saharan Africa have two- to five-times greater risk of needing intensive

ENVIRONMENTAL AND OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

The **Center for Healthy Environments and Equity Research (CHEER)**

was created in 2022 with the help of a University of Pittsburgh Momentum Fund Scaling grant. CHEER is a multidisciplinary, intersectional and community-based environmental health research center focused on identifying and addressing environmental health disparities (EHD) that disproportionately impact the health and

wellbeing of individuals and communities.

Directed by **Aaron Barchowsky, PhD,** professor of environmental and occupational health, CHEER is made up of a core of forward-thinking and passionate faculty, students and community partners working together to build a research infrastructure around the extensive EHD found across the region and beyond. CHEER investigators focus on cumulative lifetime environmental exposures and

social stressors, known as the "exposome," to determine the social and environmental determinants of EHD. Such studies require large sets of environmental and population data to understand.

CHEER is using Momentum Funds to develop and implement new technologies to capture these data and build capacity in regional population health studies by quantifying environmental stressors that overly affect underserved communities.

Using innovative bioinformatic approaches, investigators seek to identify and better understand the sources of health inequities. A major goal is to obtain a National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences P30 Core Center grant to sustain CHEER's growth.

Ultimately, CHEER will create tools and science-based findings to inspire policies and interventions for more resilient, sustainable and healthy communities.

HUMAN GENETICS

People with a disease characterized by lung scarring that has no obvious cause are more likely to die if they live in areas with higher levels of air pollution composed of chemicals associated with industrial sources and vehicular traffic, according to research led by **Gillian Goobie, MD, PhD** (HUGEN '22). The study, published in

JAMA Internal Medicine, is the first to link the chemical composition of fine particulate air pollution to worsened fibrotic interstitial lung disease (fILD) outcomes. It is also the largest study ever done to evaluate the impact of air pollution on these patients.

“Our study points to air pollution—specifically pollutants from factories

and vehicles—as potentially driving faster disease progression and premature death in these patients,” says Goobie. In addition, the team determined that exposure to pollutants was associated with molecular changes in DNA and shortening of chromosomes.

Goobie and her team obtained data from 6,683 patients with fILDs in the U.S. and Canada and linked their home addresses with satellite and ground-monitoring air pollution data to determine air pollutant composition to an accuracy of less than half a mile.

After pollution leaves a smokestack or tailpipe, Goobie noted that sulfate- and nitrate-containing aerosols can be formed in the atmosphere from those and other gaseous pollutants, and can be acidic, which can be very damaging to the tiny air sacs of the lungs.

care and dying than uninfected, hospitalized pregnant women,”

says Nachege, associate professor of epidemiology and of infectious diseases and microbiology. “We must urgently prioritize pregnant women among at-risk populations in COVID-19 vaccine programs in Africa.”

The study looked at outcomes of over 1,300 female patients of child-bearing age who were hospitalized between March 2020 and March 2021 in six African countries.

Researchers found that the rates of intensive care unit

admission and use of supplemental oxygen were at least two-fold higher, and the death toll increased five-fold in the pregnant women with SARS-CoV-2.

Nachege, who splits his time between Pitt Public Health and a faculty position at Stellenbosch University in South Africa, notes that while progress is being made to increase the COVID-19 vaccine supply in Africa, vaccine hesitancy and misinformation about public health guidance remains a global issue.

HEALTH POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

Much of the department’s research is focused on issues at the top of mind for many—Medicaid, maternal health and health equity. **Marian Jarlenski, PhD, MPH**, is coprincipal investigator for a \$10 million Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute-funded study of doula care as a way to advance health equity and reduce maternal morbidity in partnership with doula organizations across six states, including Pennsylvania.

“By learning from Medicaid patients, doulas and state Medicaid agency stakeholders, **our findings will provide new and much-needed evidence on how doula care can interrupt the structural and interpersonal racism that people experience during pregnancy and postpartum,**” says Jarlenski, who is also department vice chair for practice and associate director of the Center for Innovative Research on Gender Health Equity. “In turn, we hope to

facilitate access to evidence-based and lifesaving care and support.”

About 1 million people of color who are of childbearing age are enrolled in Medicaid programs each year. Increasingly, state Medicaid programs are implementing doula care to address the inequities that underlie systematically worse pregnancy outcomes among African Americans and other people of color.

Enrollment in the study began in late summer 2023.



INFECTIOUS DISEASES AND MICROBIOLOGY

Suresh Kuchipudi, PhD, MVSc, MBA, joined the School of Public Health as professor and chair of the Department of Infectious Diseases and Microbiology (IDM) on July 1, 2023.

“It is truly an exciting opportunity to join the School of Public Health with a strong history of excellence and outstanding research—and, in particular, the IDM department—where groundbreaking

work addressed some of our most devastating diseases like polio and HIV,” says Kuchipudi, who formerly served as Dorothy Foehr Huck and J. Lloyd Huck Professor of Emerging Infectious Diseases at the Huck Institutes of the Life Sciences at Pennsylvania State University. “I’m also looking forward to working with the Center for Vaccine Research and the wider microbiology and health sciences community in Pittsburgh.”

His research interests focus on zoonotic and emerging

viruses, diagnostic virology and serology, viral pathogenesis, immunological responses to viral infection and quantitative-omics approaches to virus-host interactions. Current research in the Kuchipudi lab involves SARS-CoV-2 and a range of other emerging zoonotic viruses that infect humans.

“The unprecedented challenges posed by emerging infectious diseases call for reimagining our approach to studying infectious diseases,”

he says, highlighting the need to leverage the immense potential of recent technological advancements. This, in turn, will foster a multidisciplinary research culture at Pitt Public Health and facilitate collaboration with partners both domestically and internationally.

Kuchipudi earned a PhD in virology at the University of Glasgow, Scotland, and an MBA from Penn State. He is a diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Microbiologists.

NOTEWORTHY

Associate Dean of Finance and Administration **Renae Brinza, MS**, retired from the School of Public Health in June 2023 after more than three decades of dedicated service.

Maria Mori Brooks, PhD, professor of epidemiology and of biostatistics, is a 2023 recipient of the **Provost's Award for Doctoral Mentoring** in recognition of her commitment to mentoring and student support. Brooks teaches advanced epidemiological methods and is codirector of the Epidemiology Data Center.

A study on improved cleaning efforts to prevent endoscope-related infection transmission presented by **Adrian Clifford, MPH**, (IDM '23) was designated a **William A. Rutala Research Award** winner by the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology in June 2023. The award recognizes exemplary scientific merit.

Student **Jorge Antonio Gumucio** (BCHS '24) discussed his work with colleagues to develop a lifesaving skills training program for the homeless at the 2023 annual meeting of the European Resuscitation Council Congress. Gumucio is a cofounder of **Street Medicine at Pitt**, a student-run, interdisciplinary organization that brings health care to the unhoused in Pittsburgh.

Beth Hoffman, PhD, (BCHS '22) assistant professor of behavioral and community health sciences, is a 2023 inductee into the Society of Behavioral Medicine's **Monica Baskin Diversity Institute for Emerging Leaders**. She is one of 25 early-career scientists chosen to participate in the yearlong program to develop thoughtful leaders with a deep understanding of the principles of diversity and inclusion.

Allison Kuipers, PhD, (EPI '11) associate professor of epidemiology, is among five recipients of the University of Pittsburgh's **Ascending Star** awards for 2023. The award recognizes highly productive, creative mid-career faculty members in the health sciences.

Dean **Maureen Lichtveld, MD, MPH**, has been elected chair of the board of directors of the **Consortium of Universities for Global Health** (CUGH). Established in 2008, CUGH membership includes more than 170 academic institutions and organizations from around the world that are working to address global health challenges.

The School of Public Health congratulates **Judy Malenka**, administrative assistant in the Department of Infectious Diseases and Microbiology, who recently marked her 40th year of service at Pitt. Malenka joined the University in 1982.

Christine McClure, EdD, MPPM, MBA, (GSPIA '06, ED '18) senior research scientist in the Department of Health Policy and Management, is a 2023 recipient of a **Lifetime Achievement Educator Excellence Award** from the State of Black Learning Conference. The award recognizes an individual's outstanding contributions to the overall positive educational climate of Black students.

Ryan Minster, PhD, (HUGEN '11) assistant professor of human genetics, is the 2023 **James L. Craig Excellence in Education Award** recipient. Established by Pitt Public Health alumnus James L. Craig (EOH '63), the award recognizes faculty who have excelled in educating and mentoring graduate students.

Evelyn Talbott, DrPH, (EPI '76) professor of epidemiology, received the 2022 John Snow Award from the American Public Health Association (APHA) and the Royal Society for Public Health in England. Talbott received the prestigious award, which recognizes an outstanding scientist for excellence in epidemiologic practice or research, at APHA's 150th anniversary annual meeting.

Ada Youk, PhD, (BIOS '96) associate dean for academic affairs and director of the Bachelor of Science in Public Health (BSPH) degree program, is the inaugural **Bernard D. Goldstein Undergraduate Public Health Teaching Award** recipient. Established by Dean Emeritus Bernard D. Goldstein, MD, the award recognizes classroom teaching excellence in the BSPH program.



“The city reminds me of Havana, where I was born. I see texture in a gray sky and history in the buildings and roads.” Hillside offer vantage points that reveal “a city sewn by houses—like a big quilt.”

RAFAEL MIGOYO



Pittsburgh Days, Havana Nights

By day, **Rafael Migoyo** manages a National Institutes of Health-funded T32 grant program in the Department of Epidemiology that funds training for graduate students and postdoctoral researchers. When the workday ends, Migoyo focuses on a different kind of education—one that involves paintings, sculptures, textiles and photography created by artists in his native Cuba.

In March 2023, he led a pair of collectors on a weeklong tour of the island, including old Havana and the Ernest Hemingway estate, introducing them to the vibrant culture and rich artistic heritage of the island. A December trip is planned that includes a unique New Year’s celebration.

“I show my collectors what it’s like to live in a home surrounded and enhanced by art,” says Migoyo, whose gallery and business, Del Caimán, is based in his Lawrenceville residence. “To wake up, look at your wall, and think ‘Wow, someone spent 40 years learning to create that line, or thousands of hours instilling emotion into those brushstrokes or that sculpture.’”

In many ways, Del Caimán, named for the smallest species of freshwater crocodile-like reptile, is also a love letter to Migoyo’s father, Rafael Sr., who managed public art projects in Havana. The elder Migoyo settled the family in Florida shortly after first making the dangerous ocean crossing from Cuba himself in 1994.

“When I was little, I thought the shape of the island looked like a crocodile and I would visualize this giant Godzilla kind of thing floating through the Caribbean with people on its back, dancing, cooking, painting—just living their lives,” he says. “And so, the idea of the name is that no matter where we are in the world, as a Cuban person, we’re all from—or of—the Caimán.”

Now three years old, the company represents artists who work in a variety of media, including paint, prints, photography, sculpture, sketches and mixed materials. Pieces range in price from hundreds to many thousands of dollars, depending on size, elements and the artist’s prominence in the field.

“Ever since we got back from our spring trip, it’s like the business has been hit by this massive headwind,” says Migoyo, adding that December’s tour, coordinated through the Pittsburgh-based Tolve Travel, is completely booked. Additional trips are being planned for 2024. But it’s clear that Migoyo views Pittsburgh as home.

He sees art everywhere—in the city’s streets, hillsides, and even its often-cloudy skies. “The city reminds me of Havana, where I was born,” says Migoyo. “I see texture in a gray sky and history in the buildings and roads.” Hillside offer vantage points that reveal “a city sewn by houses—like a big quilt,” he adds.

What could be homier than a quilt? Well, maybe a quilt, a fresh, fragrant Cubano, and some rice and beans.

More information about the artists represented by Migoyo’s company is available at delcaiman.org. —MICHELE DULA BAUM



Rafael Migoyo at his Del Caimán art gallery in Lawrenceville.

CLASS NOTES

1980s

Lucile Adams-Campbell (PhD, EPI '83) is professor of oncology and associate director of minority health and health disparities research at Georgetown University. She is an internationally recognized expert on health disparities, with particular emphasis on cancers that disproportionately affect Black people.

1990s

After an early career as a medical physicist, **Scott Simons** (MS, EOH '90) became a software development entrepreneur. He is president of SRS Computing in Wexford near Pittsburgh, a company he founded in 1999, and of Mijourney, LLC, which he cofounded in 2016.

Robin E. Grubs (MS, HUGEN '91, PhD '01) is a faculty member in the Department of Human Genetics at the University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health. She is co-editing the *Oxford Handbook of Genetic Counseling* (Oxford University Press) with colleagues in Pittsburgh and Kansas City.

Christa Lese Martin (PhD, HUGEN '96) is vice dean for research and chief scientific officer at Geisinger Health System in Central Pennsylvania. Martin leads systemwide clinical research initiatives in precision health, genomics, data science, population health, implementation science and clinical trials.

Kuo-Cherh Huang (DrPH, HPM '98) is associate dean of the College of Management at Taipei Medical University in Taiwan, where he is also professor of health care administration. Huang is a member of the editorial boards of open-access science journal PLOS ONE and the Journal of International Cooperation in Taipei.

2000s

Rajesh Pandav (MPH, EPI '01), World Health Organization representative for Nepal, has been awarded the Order of Timor Leste—the country's highest honor in recognition of an awardee's contributions to national peace and stability—in recognition of his outstanding service in East Timor.

Johannes John-Langba (MPH, BCHS '04) has been named in the Global Top 100 List of the Most Influential People of African Descent of 2023. John-Langba is regional vice president of the World Federation for Mental Health.

Sunaina Kumar-Giebel (MPH, HPM '06) has been appointed director of the Veterans Affairs Rocky Mountain Network headquartered in Glendale, Colo. She oversees delivery of health care services to more than 1 million eligible veterans at eight VA Medical Centers and more than 100 clinics in 10 states.

2010s

Clarice Edwards Decker (MPH, BCHS '16) is a prevention, outreach and education coordinator at Children's Hospital Colorado in Denver. Her work focuses on trauma injury prevention.

Danielle Connor (MPH, IDM '16) has started a new position as a monitoring, evaluation and learning officer with PATH, a Seattle-based global nonprofit dedicated to health equity. In this role, Connor works to increase the availability of supplemental oxygen to low-income countries.

2020s

Daniel Evans (MPH, IDM '21) is using his expertise in microbial genomics and bioinformatics as an environmental science officer with the Defense Centers for Public Health in Aberdeen, Md. Evans, who previously served with the Pennsylvania National Guard, has been assigned to support the U.S. Army Reserve's missions in infectious disease surveillance.

Nicholas Tedesco (MS, BIOST '22) is a statistician at the University of Michigan School of Medicine, where he uses statistical and graphical tools to conduct analyses of genetic data relevant to liver-related outcomes.

Xinjun Wang (PhD, BIOST '22) is an assistant attending biostatistician at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York, with a focus on single-cell multi-omics and subgroup analysis with differential treatment effects.

Pattra Chun-On (MPH, EOH '18, PhD '23) is a postdoctoral research fellow in the Department of Medicine at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. She successfully defended her dissertation, "Recurrent TPP1 Promoter Mutations Drive Telomere Maintenance in Melanoma," in April 2023.

Send your news for Class Notes to phmag@pitt.edu.



“He is a world-class epidemiologist and champion of women’s health issues. There is no topic too controversial for Dr. Kuller to address. He personifies the very best of what public health is all about.”

EVELYN TALBOTT, DRPH

**Lewis “Lew” H.
Kuller, MD, DrPH**

Jan. 9, 1934 – Oct. 25, 2022

Professor Emeritus Lew Kuller was a superb epidemiologist and visionary who built a world-class Department of Epidemiology at the School of Public Health, serving as chair from 1972 until 2002.

Known for his incredible intellect, Kuller took great joy in teaching and mentoring students. Throughout his long academic journey, he had a major influence on the careers of others, particularly the young investigators he tirelessly supported, serving as a role model for the importance of collaboration in the pursuit of science. He “walked the talk,” transmitting his passion for public health to scientists from multiple institutions and disciplines for more than half a century.

A highly influential global figure in the field of epidemiology, especially cardiovascular epidemiology, Kuller earned his MD at George Washington University in 1959 and DrPH at Johns Hopkins University in 1966. In the following years, he established multiple large research programs in aging, women’s health, diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular disease—including the landmark Women’s Health Initiative and the Cardiovascular Health Study—which made significant contributions to the understanding of disease progression and principles of prevention.

Kuller will be remembered internationally as a founder of the field of preventive cardiology who, through major clinical trials, helped to establish cholesterol and blood pressure as risk factors and demonstrate that cardiovascular disease is preventable.



**Ronald E.
LaPorte, PhD**

May 29, 1949 – Oct. 30, 2021

To his many friends and collaborators across the globe, Ronald LaPorte, emeritus professor of epidemiology, was both an inexhaustible investigator who led them down the path of constant enquiry and an instant friend who brought energy and fun to any gathering.

LaPorte was a cognitive psychologist-turned-epidemiologist whose primary interest was the application of internet technology to the prevention of disease. He also focused on building the Library of Alexandria in Egypt into a research methods giant. His teaching prowess led to his receiving both the Lilienfeld Lifetime Achievement in Teaching Award from the American Public Health Association in 2006 and the Distinguished Teaching Award from Pitt Public Health.

LaPorte was a role model to many. He believed deeply in his work and required that his mentees do the same as they went on to develop successful careers. In return, he desired nothing more than that his mentees pay it forward when training their own students.

Along with his wife, Jan Dorman, LaPorte established a \$1 million gift for the Ronald E. LaPorte and Janice S. Dorman Scholarship in Epidemiology to create career pathways for the best and brightest doctoral students in epidemiology.



**Anthony "Tony"
Silvestre, PhD**

Feb. 26, 1946 – Sept. 1, 2022

Professor Emeritus Tony Silvestre joined the Department of Infectious Diseases and Microbiology in 1984 and was a longtime co-investigator of the Pitt Men's Study, which has been characterizing the natural history of HIV/AIDS in gay and bisexual men since 1983.

Silvestre's research focused on advancing the understanding of HIV/AIDS and its prevention at a time when fear and stigmatization was rampant. He founded the HIV Prevention and Care Project in 1993 and cofounded the school's Center for Research on Health and Sexual Orientation (now the Center for LGBT Health Research). His work also extended beyond the school as one of the founders of the Pittsburgh AIDS Task Force (now Allies for Health and Wellbeing).

Silvestre earned his master's degree from Penn State University in 1974 and his PhD in social work from Pitt in 1992. A Buddhist, Silvestre was ordained in the Vietnamese Zen school led by Thich Nhat Hanh and taught "Mindfulness Meditation as a Self-Care Technique" while at Pitt. He was particularly known for his calm, caring and compassionate demeanor.

An extraordinary advocate, mentor, teacher and researcher, Silvestre made a difference in thousands of lives during a long and groundbreaking career. A community organizer, his commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion set the standard for academic-community partnerships.

"Life is what happens to you when you're busy making other plans."

JOHN LENNON,
Beautiful Boy, 1980

When Fate Calls

By Clare Collins



Pitt alumna Janet Stout, PhD, (IDM '81,'92) loves telling the story

about how a simple telephone slip-up serendipitously brought her to the School of Public Health and a full-circle moment years later.

A 1979 biology graduate from the former Clarion State College (now PennWest Clarion) in Pennsylvania, Stout was trying to reach Pitt's Department of Biological Sciences about the status of her application when an operator transferred her to Infectious Diseases and Microbiology (IDM) at Pitt's then-Graduate School of Public Health.

Stout, currently executive vice president and founder of the Pittsburgh-based Special Pathogens Laboratory and research associate professor at Pitt's Swanson School of Engineering, doesn't recall with whom she spoke on that long-ago phone call with IDM, but by the time she hung up, she was intrigued enough to meet with the department's chair Robert Yee, PhD.

"Because of the connection between microbiology and disease and the understanding of disease, I instantly knew [IDM] was a better

fit for me, and where I belonged," she says.

Passionate about the study of bacteria, Stout later met IDM faculty member Victor Yu, MD, who also led the infectious disease section at the Pittsburgh Veterans Hospital, now the Pittsburgh VA Medical Center.

"It just so happened that Dr. Yu was very deep into investigating an ongoing outbreak of the newly discovered Legionnaires' disease," she says. "I came knocking at the time when they were initiating this very intensive multidisciplinary team."

Essentially, Stout walked through the door into what would become her lifelong career—the study of Legionnaires' disease prevention and its ecology and epidemiology. Under her leadership, the Special Pathogens Laboratory has been at the forefront of both Legionnaires' research and advocacy for the last several decades.

When Stout, now an internationally recognized expert in Legionnaires' disease, looks back at her early days at the school, she's particularly thankful for the opportunities provided.

"The faculty taught me how to think critically, which honed my intellectual skills," she says. "My first

publication as an MS microbiologist was in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 1982. I give all the credit to faculty at the school, particularly Dr. Yu, who always worked to elevate students."

Today, Stout is a similar champion of Pitt Public Health students by creating the Dr. Janet E. Stout Endowed Scholarship for Infectious Diseases, a \$1 million graduate scholarship supporting an IDM doctoral student. The award, based on merit and need, provides tuition and other education and research-related expenses throughout the student's entire time at the school. Stout also gives of her time and expertise as a member of the Board of Visitors, a volunteer advisory board that provides guidance on the school's strategic planning efforts and educational objectives.

"My goal is to unburden a student passionate about public health microbiology from the worry of 'How do I fund my work and come out of my graduate studies without a mountain of debt?'" she says. "For me, it's a goose pimple kind of moment and a wonderful opportunity."

And a way to pass on much more than a bit of kismet.

Make a Difference

For three-quarters of a century, the University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health has championed vital initiatives to inform and empower local communities and diverse populations around the world.

Learn how you can make an impact today. Visit publichealth.pitt.edu/giving or use the QR code below.





Another Look

A lot has changed since the earliest classes began enrolling at the School of Public Health starting in 1950. Parking spots in front of the building entrance are long gone, for one thing. What hasn't changed is the school's commitment to education, research and working closely with our communities to advance public health in Pittsburgh and around the world.

