

NEW YORK INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

The Quest to Achieve R2 Status



PLUS

Beyond the Classroom:
Students and Faculty
Making a Positive Impact
on Our Communities



Dear Friends,

New York Tech has set out on a journey to become a high-research activity institution—or R2 institution as defined by the Carnegie Classification, which officially designates such colleges and universities in the United States. The criteria for inclusion into the R2 realm of schools is that annual research expenditures must exceed \$5 million and that New York Tech graduates more than 20 Ph.D. students per year. We firmly believe that our university can achieve these goals in five years or less.

There are several reasons for us to move in this direction. Firstly, there is a looming nationwide shortage of high school graduates predicted across the next decade. Looking for ways to expand beyond four-year undergraduate programs is a must to ensure New York Tech's longevity and growth. Fortunately, we are not a purely undergraduate-driven institution since we offer graduate degrees as well as doctoral programs in medicine and the allied health professions. In fact, at our May 2023 commencement, 70 percent of our graduates were postbaccalaureate degree recipients, while the remaining 30 percent earned bachelor's degrees. In addition, there is a strong desire among New York Tech faculty researchers and scholars to offer Ph.D.-level degrees. I am happy to note that we have added such doctoral programs in biomedical science, engineering, and computer science, with an additional Ph.D. degree in anatomy on the way soon.

Lastly, looking toward the future, it is paramount that institutions like ours create new knowledge through research and scholarship and not just transfer knowledge to our students. We want our faculty and students of all levels collaborating to push forward the frontiers of science, technology, medicine, engineering, and other key disciplines. These are the reasons why New York Tech seeks to achieve R2 status as we continue our transformation from a teaching institution to one that also serves as a valuable research institute.

We look forward to sharing more news with you as we progress toward achieving this distinction for our beloved university.

Sincerely,

Hank Foley, Ph.D.
President, New York Institute of Technology

Magazine Staff

Associate Director, Editorial:
Bessie Nestoras Knoblauch
Vice President, Enrollment Management and Strategic Communications: Joseph Posillico, Ed.D.
Senior Director, Strategic Communications: Libby Sullivan
Senior Director, Digital Marketing and Creative Services: Erica Pennant
Contributors: Allison Eichler, Renée Gearhart Levy, Casey Pearce, Sabrina Polidoro, Denice Rackley, Alix Sobler, Libby Sullivan, Kim Tucker Campo
Copy Editor: Kathleen Scheiner
Art Director: Lixia Guo

Alumni Relations

Vice President, Development, Alumni Relations, and External Affairs: Patrick Minson, Ed.D.
Director, Alumni Relations: Sabrina Polidoro
Alumni Coordinator: Kelly Imperial (M.B.A. '19)
Alumni Coordinator, New York Tech-Vancouver: Alexandria Smith

NYITCOM Alumni Relations

Director, Alumni Relations:
Esther Pagan (B.A. '94, M.P.S. '04)
Specialist, Alumni Relations:
Kathryn Karwoski

Contact Us

New York Institute of Technology Magazine welcomes submissions, story ideas, and feedback. Unsolicited manuscripts, related materials, photography, and artwork will not be returned. Please include your year of graduation, degree completed, and major or program of study. Visit nyit.edu/magazine/submissions, email magazine@nyit.edu, or write to: Bessie Nestoras Knoblauch, New York Institute of Technology, P.O. Box 8000, Old Westbury, NY 11586-8000.

Update your contact information or mailing address: alumni@nyit.edu or 516.686.7800.

New York Institute of Technology Magazine is published by Strategic Communications, New York Institute of Technology, P.O. Box 8000, Old Westbury, NY 11568-8000.

The publication is distributed to alumni and other members of the New York Institute of Technology community. Copyright ©2023 NYIT. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited without written permission.

LET'S BE FRIENDS

Like what you see? Share your updates and feedback at nyit.edu/magazine/contact and connect at @NYITalumni, nyit.edu/linkedin, and facebook.com/nyit.alumni.

ALEXANDER BERG

CONTENTS

10

Taking a Bold Step ▶

New York Tech is striving to achieve high research activity by 2028. With faculty and students increasing cutting-edge research, the university is well on its way.

BY RENÉE GEARHART LEVY

16

Putting Knowledge and Skill Into Action

Faculty and students from schools and colleges across the university come together to address the challenges of people living with Parkinson's disease and autism spectrum disorder, allowing students to grow beyond their traditional paths.

BY DENICE RACKLEY

2

CAMPUS BUZZ

New York Tech Joins KEEN

The College of Engineering and Computing Sciences has become a member of KEEN, the Kern Entrepreneurial Engineering Network—a national partnership of engineering faculty focused on developing and promoting innovation in engineering education for the good of society.

New High-Tech Research Center Coming to Long Island Campus

The Biomedical Research, Innovation, and Imaging Center is anticipated to expand the institution's research footprint and further its strategy to become a Carnegie-classified Research 2 university by 2028.

Wisser Gets a New Name and Look

The Wisser building on the Long Island campus was officially renamed the Barbara and Peter Ferentinos Health Science Building, honoring Peter and the late Barbara Ferentinos for their continued support of New York Tech.

Delivering Care and Compassion Abroad

Students from the College of Osteopathic Medicine embarked on service-learning trips to the Dominican Republic and Ghana that showed them medical school is more than lectures, laboratories, and clinical rotations.

New Insights Into Breast Cancer Risk

Research by the College of Arts and Sciences' William Letsou, Ph.D., could change how scientists and physicians understand genetic predisposition to breast cancer.



Maria Perbellini and Adele Rakower

Celebrating 15 Years of FRIENDS

On October 25, the School of Architecture and Design celebrated its 15th Annual Alumni and FRIENDS Reception, raising a record-breaking \$401,300.

22

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Meet: Erica Ayisi (B.F.A. '03, M.A. '10), Arianna Armelli (B.Arch. '12), Karen Florio (D.O. '07), Gustavo Penengo (B.Arch. '96), Philip Rossillo (B.Arch. '97), and ▼ Tim Baty (D.O. '20).

28

ALUMNI AUTHORS

Check out the latest books by your fellow Bears.



Tim Baty

30

ALUMNI NOTES

Connections and Notes:
Catch up with classmates.

Cover illustration by Mike McQuade

CAMPUS BUZZ

Stay up to date on the latest New York Tech news. Check out our alumni and student profiles, research updates, campus happenings, and more. [👉](#)



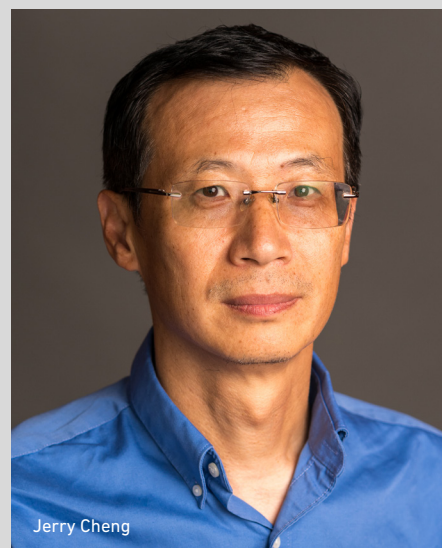
Yusui Chen



Eve Armstrong



Weikang Cai



Jerry Cheng



Sophia Domokos

Faculty Awarded a Collective \$1.6 Million in Grants

In recent weeks, five research projects led by New York Tech faculty have collectively secured more than \$1.6 million in federal funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

The funding will support projects spanning physics, computer science, and bio-

medical science, captained by faculty from the College of Arts and Sciences, College of Osteopathic Medicine (NYITCOM), and College of Engineering and Computing Sciences. Findings from these studies could help to advance quantum computing, lead to new Alzheimer's disease treatments, explain how heavy elements first formed,

enable mobile devices to detect cardiovascular disease, and offer insight that could revolutionize magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and magnetic levitation (maglev) technologies.

The research projects will also engage undergraduate, graduate, and medical students, providing excellent opportunities for

them to gain a deeper understanding of the scientific process and mentorship from some of the university's brightest minds.

Advancing Understanding of Physics by Quantum Leaps

A research team led by Assistant Professor of Physics Yusui Chen, Ph.D., has secured an NSF grant totaling \$650,000 for a three-year project that could enhance understanding of quantum physics within real environments—a necessary step to advancing the field of quantum computing.

Many scientists and experts believe that quantum computing could provide the necessary insight to help solve some of society's biggest issues, including climate change and deadly diseases. However, much remains unknown about how these systems operate, and uncovering their full potential first requires an advanced understanding of the physics principles that provide their theoretical framework.

Quantum computers, which are made of information storage units called qubits, are inherently subject to environmental influences. Some multi-qubit systems are influenced by a memory of past interactions with the environment, thereby affecting their future behavior (non-Markovian systems). However, few mathematical tools exist to study these dynamics, and as systems grow larger and more complex, modeling them on classic, binary computers is unfeasible.

Chen and his research team—which includes undergraduate and graduate physics, computer science, and engineering students, as well as a researcher from Rutgers University—will establish a comprehensive method to investigate these dynamics while improving the accuracy of existing quantum simulation algorithms. Their insights could deepen understanding of the fundamental physics in which quantum computers operate.

The project also includes efforts to build a pipeline of diverse talent and researchers, a critical factor in helping to advance the field of quantum information science and engineering (QISE). As such, Chen will mentor undergraduate New York Tech

students, particularly female students and those from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds. He will also conduct outreach to K-12 schools with the aim of introducing STEM concepts and sparking younger students' interest in QISE.

Solving the Mystery of How Heavy Elements Formed

A project led by Assistant Professor of Physics Eve Armstrong, Ph.D., has received a three-year NSF grant totaling \$360,000 in support of her continued research into one of science's greatest mysteries: how the universe formed from stardust.

The research will build on Armstrong's earlier NSF-funded project, which received a two-year \$299,998 EAGER grant in 2021.

While the big bang created the first and lightest elements (hydrogen and helium), the next heavier elements (up to iron on the periodic table) formed later inside ancient, massive stars. When these stars exploded, their matter catapulted into space, seeding that space with elements. Eventually, their stardust matter formed the sun and planets, and over billions of years, Earth's matter coalesced into the first life-forms. However, the origins of elements heavier than iron, like gold and copper, remain unknown. While they may have formed during a supernova explosion, current computational techniques render it difficult to comprehensively study the physics of these events. In addition, supernovae are rare, occurring about once every 50 years, and the only existing data is from the last explosion in 1987.

Armstrong posits that a weather prediction technique called data assimilation may enhance understanding of these events. The technique relies on limited information to sequentially estimate weather changes over time, which may make it conducive to modeling supernovae conditions. With simulated data, in preparation for the next supernova event, Armstrong and undergraduate New York Tech students will use data assimilation to predict whether the supernova environment could have given rise to some heavy elements. If successful, these "forecasts"

may allow scientists to determine which elements formed from supernova stardust.

Since receiving her EAGER grant in 2021, Armstrong and her students have begun using the technique for the first time with real data from the sun's neutrinos (tiny, nearly massless particles that travel at near light speeds). This is an important test to assess the technique's performance with real data, which is significantly more challenging than simulation. Their most recent paper was published in the journal *Physical Review D*.

Improving Alzheimer's Disease Understanding

Assistant Professor of Biomedical Sciences Weikang Cai, Ph.D., has received a \$306,000 NIH grant to lead a two-year research project that will investigate how certain molecules may play a role in the progression of Alzheimer's disease.

Adenosine triphosphate (ATP) is a small molecule within cells that fuels nearly all biochemical and cellular processes in living organisms. Under specific scenarios, both neurons and non-neuronal cells in the brain can release ATP outside of cells. Consequently, ATP can serve as a signaling molecule to communicate with nearby brain cells and regulate their functions. In addition, growing evidence demonstrates that astrocytes, the most abundant non-neuronal cells in the brain, may contribute to the development of Alzheimer's disease.

Using a mouse model, the researchers will assess how ATP released from astrocytes is regulated with Alzheimer's disease and whether eliminating astrocyte-released ATP could alter disease progression. Their findings may lead to the development of new strategies to treat or alleviate Alzheimer's disease and its related symptoms.

Other members of the research team include Biomedical Sciences Instructor Qian Huang, Ph.D., and Senior Research Associate Hiu Ham Lee, M.S., who initially spearheaded the project, as well as NYITCOM students.

Continued on next page →

YUSUI CHEN: ANDRE KOPINSKI; EVE ARMSTRONG: ANDRE KOPINSKI; WEIKANG CAI: COURTESY OF WEIKANG CAI; JERRY CHENG: ANDRE KOPINSKI; SOPHIA DOMOKOS: ANDRE KOPINSKI

(Continued)

In 2021, Cai also received an NIH grant to research how chronic stress inhibits ATP release, thereby reducing dopamine activity and potentially contributing to clinical depression.

Preparing Mobile Devices to Detect Cardiovascular Disease

Assistant Professor of Computer Science Jerry Cheng, Ph.D., has received an NSF grant totaling \$159,979 for a three-year project to establish a data analytics and machine learning (artificial intelligence) framework that could allow at-home mobile devices like smartphones to detect biomarkers for early symptoms of cardiovascular disease.

Mobile devices usually have restrictions in memory, computing power, and battery capacity for complex computations. To address this, Cheng and his research team will develop software deep learning accelerators, which will allow mobile devices to perform AI modeling. They will also develop security measures to mitigate attacks on cloud systems (computationally efficient trusted execution environment), as well as time-dependent models to ana-

lyze sensing data, such as respiratory rate, blood pressure, heart rate, etc. Graduate and undergraduate students from the College of Engineering and Computing Sciences will be recruited to assist in the project, which will also focus on promoting female engineering student participation.

Cheng has secured multiple NSF awards since arriving at New York Tech in 2019. In 2021, he received funding for mobile edge research to help ensure that smart device computing advancements do not outpace experiments in the field; in 2020, he received an award to design more efficient and secure deep learning processing machines that can reliably process and interpret extremely large-scale sets of data with little delay.

Shedding Light on the Inner Workings of Matter

Associate Professor of Physics Sophia Domokos, Ph.D., has secured an NSF grant totaling \$135,000 for a three-year research project to explore the inner workings of matter. Domokos seeks to uncover how tiny elementary particles (quarks and gluons) interact to create new orders, like

clumping together to form protons and neutrons in an atom's nucleus.

While scientists have a relatively useful mathematical explanation regarding how these tiny elementary particles behave, these models do not account for particles interacting frequently and forcefully. To address this, Domokos and her research team will use holographic duality, a string theory concept, and a mathematical structure called supersymmetry to categorize and classify the clumps of elementary particles that emerge in strongly interacting systems.

The insights they gain could shed light on the inner workings of protons and neutrons, as well as other strongly coupled systems such as high-temperature superconductors, special materials that could revolutionize key technologies like MRIs and maglev trains.

Domokos has recruited undergraduate students to assist in her previous NSF grant-funded research and will continue to do so for this latest study. Students will gain a deeper understanding of theoretical physics, as well as skills like solving differential equations and using scientific computation software, and firsthand experience drafting physics research papers. [↗](#)

Helping to Fill the Gap

New York Institute of Technology will use a \$250,000 grant from the New York State Department of Labor and the Long Island Regional Economic Development Council (LIREDC) to train individuals to become health-care workers prepared to answer Long Island's need for physical therapy aides, personal trainers, and healthcare workers with Spanish language skills. Additionally, to address the widespread nursing shortage, New York Tech will provide a registered nurse (R.N.) refresher course for R.N.s absent from the acute care setting for at least one year, providing those trainees with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to re-enter clinical practice.

This is the second workforce development grant New York Tech has received as part of New York State's Workforce Development Initiative launched in May 2019.

The School of Health Professions will recruit participants who are currently under- or unemployed, including people with disabilities, veterans, and other Long Islanders eager to pursue careers in the healthcare industry. It will leverage its established expertise in healthcare and workforce development and its extensive industry partnerships on Long Island and in New York City to help transition trainees from the classroom to meaningful employment.

"Numerous individuals in New York are grappling with unemployment or underemployment. They need access to opportunities to lift them up and assist them in embarking on a new life-changing path. I consider it an honor to be a part of their journey," says Corri Wolf, Ph.D., associate professor in the Department of Physician Assistant Studies. [↗](#)



The Valorant team after competing at a tournament in Philadelphia, Pa. FROM LEFT: David Sotomay, Patric Gudel, Mohammed Alam, Hadi Khan, Ethan Yan

Cybears Win Big

Under the leadership of **Eric Marinaccio (B.S. '21)**, manager of esports operations, the Cybears' spring 2023 season saw the Valorant team crowned winners of the National Esports Collegiate Conference, which includes more than 300 college teams. Based on this critical win, the Cybears Valorant team is now eligible to move up the ranks to the Champions division for the fall 2023 season. The Valorant, Overwatch, and Super Smash Brothers Ultimate teams also competed this spring at in-person finals

for the East Coast Conference in Brooklyn, and the aforementioned, plus Rocket League, teams are practicing to qualify next year for the Collegiate Esports Commissioners Cup—a large in-person tournament to host the best teams in the United States and Canada.

"For the Cybears, our word of the season for 2023–2024 is 'growth,'" Marinaccio says. "This upcoming season is about creating an environment that can foster the growth of our students both in game and out of game." [↗](#)

New York Tech Joins KEEN



The College of Engineering and Computing Sciences has become a member of KEEN (the Kern Entrepreneurial Engineering Network), a national partnership of engineering faculty focused on developing and promoting innovation in engineering education for the good of society.

KEEN is an expanding network of more than 55 current partner institutions across the United States with a shared vision of equipping engineering students with not only technical skills but an "entrepreneurial mindset" so that when students graduate, they are prepared to create personal, economic, and societal value through a lifetime of meaningful work.

As a partner in this university network, New York Tech will participate in shared KEEN curriculum resources, develop and implement programs on its campuses in New York City and on Long Island, and commit to advancing "the three C's" of an entrepreneurial mindset (curiosity, connections to integrate information from many sources, and creating value) to the broader engineering education community. [↗](#)



New, High-Tech Research Center Coming to Long Island Campus

On September 15, members of the New York Tech community—including trustees, university leaders, deans, faculty, and staff, as well as elected officials—gathered on the Long Island campus for a demolition ceremony at the site of the former 500 Building to officially kick off the construction of the Biomedical Research, Innovation, and Imaging Center (BRIIC). The state-of-the-art facility is anticipated to expand the institution’s research footprint and further its strategy to become a Carnegie-classified Research 2 university by 2028.

The project, which is expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2025, will transform the building into a reimagined 20,000-square-foot research center with collaborative laboratories and cutting-edge imaging equipment. In turn, New York Tech faculty and students, as well as researchers from other institutions, will have new opportunities to advance discoveries and potential treatments for pressing health conditions and biomedical challenges,

including heart disease, cancer, and Parkinson’s disease, among many others.

Serving as New York Tech’s primary microscopy center, the BRIIC will house a multicolor 3-D STED (stimulated emission depletion) microscope secured by the College of Osteopathic Medicine with the support of a \$1.05 million grant from New York State’s Regional Economic Development Councils. STED microscopes have a resolution approximately 10 times higher than standard confocal microscopes, providing a more precise view of cell structure. Given this, they offer greater possibilities to understand how cancers, multiple sclerosis, and other diseases develop. In addition, microscopy equipment currently located in NYITCOM facilities will be relocated to the BRIIC upon its completion.

The new facility will also feature a 2,000-square-foot functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) suite dedicated solely for research purposes. The fMRI technology will offer a noninvasive solution to map and measure human brain activity,

allowing for better analysis of brain abnormalities, cognitive function, and treatment efficacy. It may also advance studies previously limited to animal models by allowing scientists to observe conditions in human subjects, thereby opening the door for innovative research into Parkinson’s disease, Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, autism spectrum disorder, clinical depression, brain injuries, and other critical conditions.

“The BRIIC will fill a need for high-resolution microscopy in the Long Island region, thereby creating the opportunity to invite researchers from other institutions to utilize our advanced visualization technologies. At the same time, while the BRIIC will centralize our research instruments, it will also propel New York Tech’s research into the future,” said President Hank Foley, Ph.D., who took the honorary sledgehammer swing. [↗](#)

Learn more about New York Tech’s quest to become an R2 university in “Taking a Bold Step” on p. 10.

Wisser Gets a New Name and Look

At a dedication ceremony on June 20, the Wisser building on the Long Island campus was officially renamed the Barbara and Peter Ferentinos Health Science Building, honoring Peter and the late Barbara Ferentinos for their continued support of New York Tech. The building, which once housed the university’s library, is the new home of the School of Health Professions.

“Thanks to their generous support of the mission and scholarship at New York Tech, we are thrilled to officially rename the Wisser building in their honor,” said Jerry Balentine, D.O., provost and executive vice president, at a

ribbon-cutting event attended by Peter Ferentinos and several members of his family, as well as other members of the Board of Trustees, faculty, and staff.

Ferentinos, an honorary degree recipient in 2013, is a longtime supporter of the university. He has been a Board of Trustees member since 1987. To date, he has donated nearly \$2 million to the university. As part of their most recent commitment, Peter’s late wife, Barbara, who passed away in 2022, named New York Tech as her beneficiary. [↗](#)



Delivering Care and Compassion Abroad



SAMMY GIORGIO

This summer, 24 students from the College of Osteopathic Medicine embarked on service-learning trips that showed them medical school is more than lectures, laboratories, and clinical rotations.

Two groups of future physicians traveled to Ghana and the Dominican Republic, where they worked alongside local health providers and saw firsthand how medicine is practiced in low-resource environments. The service trips are offered annually by the Center for Global Health. They provide students with the opportunity to learn about healthcare systems in other countries, assist with treating patients in medically underserved areas, and develop cross-cultural skills to care for future patients at home and abroad.

“These trips are transformational,” says Center for Global Health Director Lillian Niwagaba, Ph.D. “They change how students think and practice and will stay with them throughout their careers.” [↗](#)



Rising in the Ranks

New York Institute of Technology is again ranked among the top 25 universities in the North, improving its position to No. 21 in the regional ranking, and for the 13th consecutive year is ranked among the top 50 universities in the North in the *U.S. News & World Report 2024 Best Colleges* ranking.

In addition to the university's ongoing efforts to enhance the student experience and improve overall graduation and retention rates, New York Tech's strong ranking position is supported by increases in its peer assessment and Pell Grant graduation rate ranks.

New York Tech's 2024 rankings include:

<p>#21 Best Regional Universities (North) up from #22 in the 2022-2023 ranking</p>	<p>#5 Best Colleges for Veterans (Regional Universities North) up from #9 last year</p>
<p>#50 Top Performer in Social Mobility (Regional Universities North) maintaining last year's position</p>	<p>#49 Best Undergraduate Engineering (National, no doctorate) maintaining last year's position</p>

In the Regional Universities North group, New York Tech also was ranked above all other private universities on Long Island and was the second most highly ranked private university in the New York metropolitan area. Among all public and private universities in the state, it was ranked 10th.

New Insights Into Breast Cancer Risk

Knowing a patient's genetic predisposition to breast cancer can help clinicians predict the likelihood of disease development and select the most effective treatment options.

While 27 percent of all breast cancers may be caused by inherited genetic mutations, not all mutations have the same impact. For example, BRCA gene mutations are found in only 10 percent of breast cancer patients. Yet these patients can be up to six times more likely to develop the disease. On the other hand, some studies suggest that having many commonly occurring variations in DNA building blocks can impact one's chances of developing the disease.

A new study led by William Letsou, Ph.D., assistant professor of biological and chemical sciences, suggests another scenario: Having a certain rare combination of common variants could increase one's risk significantly.

Using an algorithm Letsou developed with his co-authors, including researchers from St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, they examined the genetic makeup of 9,000 women with breast cancer. Within this group, the researchers singled out women who carry the same variant of a single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP)—a variation of one DNA base in a gene sequence—previously linked to breast cancer risk.

The team discovered that the women with this SNP could be further categorized into subgroups based on other nearby variants they had inherited. Although these inheritance patterns were rare, they occurred more frequently in those diagnosed with breast cancer—in fact, four times as often.

The researchers hope their method will uncover additional rare combinations of SNPs in other genes, which may, in the long term, allow clinicians to assess breast cancer risk better and inform targeted therapies for different subsets of patients.



Celebrating 15 Years of FRIENDS

On October 25, the School of Architecture and Design celebrated its 15th Annual Alumni and FRIENDS Reception, raising a record-breaking \$401,300 in support of student scholarships, new initiatives, capital improvements, travel, and lectures. More than 360 alumni, faculty, staff, students, and friends gathered at the historic Gotham Hall in New York City to honor alumni who have made significant impacts in architecture, design, and construction and celebrate the achievements of School of Architecture and Design faculty and students.

The FRIENDS executive committee, chaired by [Tom Scerbo, AIA \(B.Arch. '98\)](#), recognized alumni with a combined 145 years of experience.

2023 HONOREES Distinguished Alumni Awards

[Ted Moudis, AIA \(B.S.A.T. '80\)](#)
Founder and Senior Principal, Ted Moudis Associates
Member, New York Tech Board of Trustees

Christopher Savoglou, Assoc. AIA (B.S.A.T. '78)
Senior Principal, Ted Moudis Associates

Emerging Alumni Award
Adele Rakower (B.Arch. '11)
Principal, Adele Rakower Interiors

Legacy Award
[Peter J. Romano \(B.Arch. '76\)](#)
President, Peter J. Romano & Company
Chair, New York Tech Board of Trustees

BOB HANDELMAN

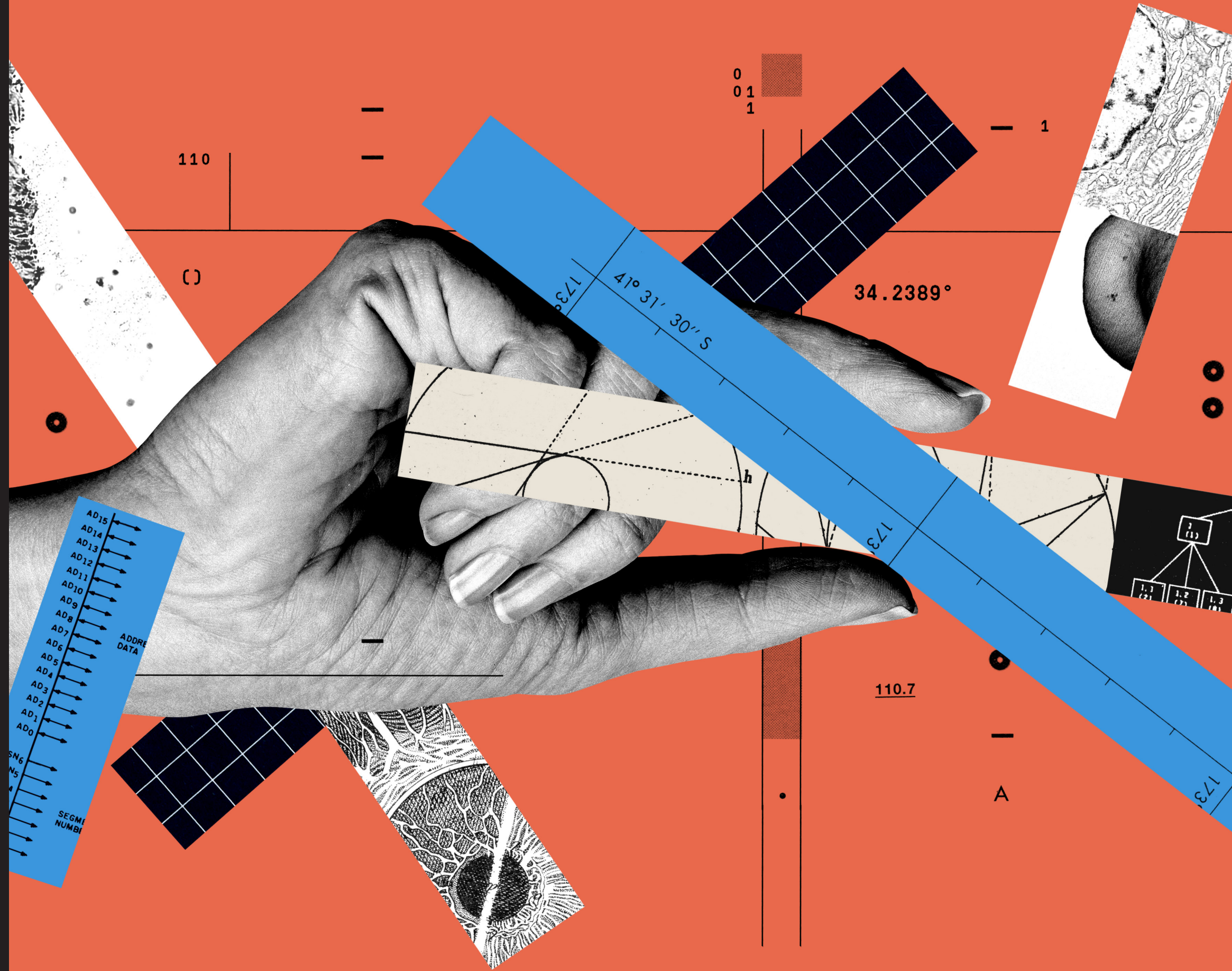
MICHAEL LEBRECHT II

TAKING A BOLD STEP

New York Tech is striving to achieve high research activity status by 2028. With faculty and students increasing cutting-edge research, the university is well on its way.

By Renée Gearhart Levy

Illustrations by Mike McQuade



As a D.O./Ph.D. student at the NYIT College of Osteopathic Medicine (NYITCOM), Kelly Borges has focused her dissertation research on the role of vascular calcification in the development of Alzheimer's disease.

"As we age, our vessels are calcifying somewhere in our bodies. Atherosclerosis or heart disease will add to that calcification burden," she says. "My hypothesis is that if you have a higher burden, you may be more predisposed to Alzheimer's."

Borges came to NYITCOM to pursue her dual degrees after working in clinical research at both the University of Pennsylvania and Yale University, experiences that solidified her interest in clinically relevant research and her desire to serve as a principal investigator on major studies. Now beginning the second year of her doctoral study, she is in the process of applying for a National Institutes of Health (NIH) fellowship to fund her research—the first student in the history of New York Tech to submit this type of grant proposal.

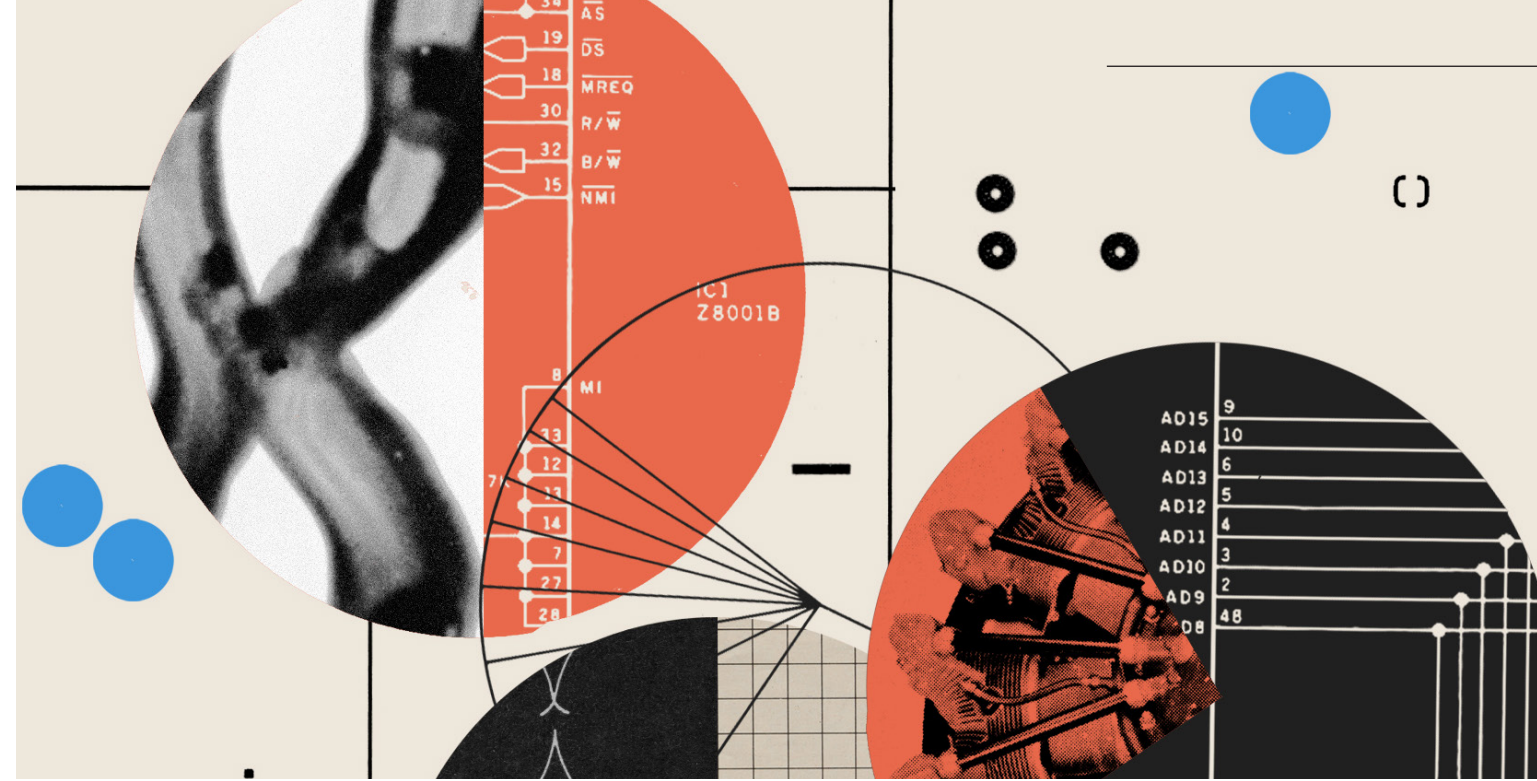
She has an excellent role model in her doctoral advisor Olga Savinova, Ph.D., assistant professor of biomedical sciences whose research to improve the understanding of atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) and deliver a new treatment for heart disease is supported by a five-year \$1.8 million grant from the NIH National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.

Borges and Savinova exemplify New York Tech's efforts to support and increase cutting-edge research by students and faculty, efforts that have grown organically over the last 15 years and more formally under the leadership of President Hank Foley, Ph.D., who announced last year a goal for the university to achieve Research 2 (R2) status by 2028.

"Academia is changing at an astonishing rate," says President Foley. "For many institutions, the simple transfer of knowledge has not been sustainable. To survive and thrive, we need to not only be in the business of transferring knowledge but of creating new knowledge."

Throughout history, universities have been the hub for the advancement of discovery, innovation, and creation of new knowledge. In the United States, that activity and the scholars behind that drive are concentrated at research universities.

But colleges and universities differ in the priority they place on research activity. In the United States, the leading measure of an insti-



tution's research activity and output has been through independent assessment by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. The assessment, conducted every three years, uses empirical data—primarily the number of doctoral students graduated and the university's research expenditures—to confer an institution's classification, ranging from those that are teaching colleges only to those with the highest research activity.

Currently, New York Tech is classified as doctoral/professional (formerly known as R3), grouped among schools with moderate research activity and those that have medical schools. R2 is designated to higher education institutions with "high research activity." In general, this requires graduating at least 20 doctoral students each year and spending more than \$5 million each year on research.

Those efforts are underway.

A ROAD MAP TO R2

A chemist who holds 16 patents, President Foley says his own 40-year research career was sparked by assisting a professor with research as an undergraduate. "It had a profound impact on my college experience," he says.

When he took the helm of New York Tech, one of his first priorities was to ensure there was enough research activity among faculty to provide those types of experiences to students.

During his tenure, three doctoral programs were launched, including D.O./Ph.D. in osteopathic medicine/biological sciences, engineering, and computer science.

"It became very evident to me early on that there was a drive among our best faculty to move toward doing more research and to providing the highest level of graduate education," he says. "Once I realized we had a critical mass of people who wanted to pursue this, I was 100 percent behind committing resources to move the institution forward in this direction."

In 2023, Jerry Balentine, D.O., was promoted from executive vice president, interim provost, and chief operating officer to provost and executive vice president, a position created to evaluate new opportunities for university growth and expansion and oversee resource allocation, especially in the area of faculty research. Prior to that, one of his initiatives was to hire an outside consulting firm, which interviewed faculty, administrators, and staff to develop a road map to achieve R2 status. The report, issued in summer 2022, resulted in the hiring of New York Tech's first vice provost for research, Jared E. Littman, Ph.D., who joined the university in June 2023 and will lead research efforts (see sidebar on p. 14).

In June 2022, Michael Hadjiargyrou, Ph.D., chair of biological and chemical sciences and director of the D.O./Ph.D. program, was named New York Tech's [first distinguished professor](#). And in July 2023, Anthony (Martin) Gerdes, Ph.D., chair of biomedical sciences at NYITCOM, was named New York Tech's first university professor (see sidebar). "These are designations bestowed at top research universities to recognize outstanding faculty who have accomplished an extraordinary scope of scholarly research and are highly regarded in their fields," says Balentine. "Establishing these professorships supports our goals of becoming an R2 university."

Another important step is evaluating and adjusting existing processes and policies to support research. For instance, the university's standard laptop provided to faculty would not be adequate for someone engaged in advanced mathematical modeling. "Those are the kinds of things we're looking at," says Balentine.

An inventory and assessment of current research space is also underway. Renovation of engineering labs on the New York City campus is already in progress. In September, construction began on the Biomedical Research Innovation and Imaging Center (BRIIC), a 20,000-square-foot basic science and microscopy laboratory that will support medical and interdisciplinary microscopy research. The project will provide a 2,880-square-foot open lab space with 48 lab

New York Tech's First University Professor

Professor Anthony (Martin) Gerdes, Ph.D., chair of biomedical sciences at the College of Osteopathic Medicine (NYITCOM), was named New York Institute of Technology's first university professor in July.

The title of university professor is often found at many top research universities to recognize select full-time faculty who have accomplished an extraordinary scope of scholarly research and are highly regarded in their fields. At New York Tech, this designation, as appointed by President Hank Foley, Ph.D., is a three-year term.

"Establishing a university professorship supports our goals of becoming a Carnegie-classified Research 2 university within the next six years," says Provost and Executive Vice President Jerry Balentine, D.O.

Gerdes took the helm of the Department of Biomedical Sciences in January 2011. That same year, he received nearly \$1.8 million in funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to investigate the link between heart failure and an underlying thyroid hormone imbalance. Since then, under Gerdes' tutelage, 10 other principal investigators in the department have secured a total of \$7,749,602 in NIH funding, as well as NYITCOM's first grant from the U.S. Department of Defense.

Over his nearly 40-year research career, Gerdes has received more than \$30 million in NIH funding, authored more than 120 papers, and served on the editorial boards of multiple scientific journals. His studies have helped advance the understanding of how heart muscle cells respond to virtually every condition, from normal aging to heart diseases like hypertension and cardiomyopathy.

Leading the Charge

In June, Jared E. Littman, Ph.D., joined New York Tech as vice provost for research, a newly created position. With this appointment, New York Tech has entered an important new phase in its strategic effort to reach a high level of research activity and achieve R2 status. Learn more about his role and strategic vision for the university's Office of Sponsored Programs and Research (OSPAR).

Q: WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR OSPAR, BOTH SHORT- AND LONG-TERM?

OSPAR is an extremely valuable resource for faculty and the institution for its expertise and support in preparing grant proposals and the management of funded grants. My short-term vision is to assess what is working well and where additional support is needed. Then I will be able to strategically update positions, processes, policies, and professional development for the team. Long-term, OSPAR will continue these important functions as well as collaboratively interact with additional units such as research development, compliance, and innovation, which are part of my plans for expanding the research infrastructure.

Q: WHAT ARE THE PLANS TO EXPAND THAT INFRASTRUCTURE?

This will be a multiphase process. The first few months requires assessing what is currently in place, what needs to be updated or changed, and then what we need to build and implement to support research. No stone will be left unturned. Some examples of infrastructure that supports a successful research operation within an institution are policy and process, proposal and award support, graduate programs, research labs, animal care facilities, research development, tech transfer and innovation, and compliance. And that's just tapping the surface.

Q: HOW WILL YOU PLAN TO INCREASE STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN GRANTS?

A focus will be to increase students' involvement by adding them to proposals and grant budgets. Also, I plan to create a research opportunity center at New York Tech, where opportunities will arise for students to work with faculty on research projects. Students will gain experience and knowledge through experiential learning, which is so valuable to their development. There may even be some research scholarship programs created for students down the road.

This interview has been edited and condensed.

benches designed with flexible infrastructure to allow for reconfiguration of the benches as needed to accommodate researchers. Additional research spaces include a 3-D STED (stimulated emission depletion) microscope, core labs, fume hoods, tissue culture rooms, freezer room, and an autoclave.

New faculty are being hired to build areas where New York Tech already has research strength. "Particularly at the nexus of the sciences, engineering, and medicine, we're in a very strong position to grow research, and we're doing everything we can to try to drive that forward," says President Foley.

In addition to the three doctoral programs in place, a doctoral program in anatomy is in the process of certification and additional programs in biology and chemistry are under consideration. "This should get us to the requisite number of doctoral graduates within five years," says Balentine.

THE RESEARCH/CLASSROOM CONNECTION

But research doesn't happen in a silo. In the best scenarios, faculty research informs professors' teaching in a way that excites and engages students. Both undergraduate and graduate students benefit from learning on state-of-the-art equipment, in state-of-the-art laboratories and from those working at the leading edge of their discipline.

"Our strategy as an institution hasn't been just to grow, but to enhance the quality of the experience for the students who are here," says President Foley. "Having research experiences where students can work directly with a mentor and develop a portfolio is part of that."

Eve Armstrong, Ph.D., assistant professor of physics, was one of more than 20 faculty hired in 2019. She has actively engaged undergraduate students to assist in her computational research that explores the death of supermassive stars. "We're inferring the origins of the physics underlying these explosions based on available data we are able to collect here on Earth, using New York Tech's supercomputing cluster to run simulations," she says.

Armand Ahmetaj (B.S. '23) became Armstrong's student research assistant, recruited after taking her introductory physics course. Ahmetaj, who majored in life sciences with a concentration in biomedical engineering and math, says he was attracted to the position for the opportunity to work with the high-performance computing clusters and learn parallel computing—the ability to run many computational tasks or computational processes in parallel so you could have a more efficient process in terms of time and also in terms of memory. "I knew these were skills I could use in other areas of research," he says.

Initially, Ahmetaj helped Armstrong convert computer files from the University of California, San Diego, her previous institution, to the computing software used by New York Tech, which neither were familiar with. "We had to learn it together," he recalls. "I would stay up until 3 a.m. trying to figure things out. When we got our first job to run and got results, we were pretty excited. From that point on, I was able to help her make the process more efficient by writing other Python scripts that allowed her to run multiple experiments in a very short time."

Ahmetaj is co-author with Armstrong on two papers published during his three years working with her. Now beginning a master's program in bioengineering at New York Tech, he will embark on his own research, drawing from his undergraduate experiences.

"You can learn a lot in the classroom—for instance, gain some expertise in using a software," he says. "But when you're using it for research purposes, you get to see the practical application of your skills in real life."

That's not an anomaly. Batu Chalise, Ph.D., associate professor of electrical and computer engineering, researches signal processing for radar and communications and currently has two funded projects, one supported by the Army Research Laboratory and a second funded by the Naval Research Laboratory. "Research on future generation radar systems provides an excellent platform for students to understand principles of modern and future radar technology, develop mathematical modeling and algorithms, conduct simulations, collect data in a realistic radar environment, and implement both hardware- and software-based experiments," he says.

Students who have gained radar experience from assisting on his projects have gone on to get jobs with firms such as Northrop Grumman and Telephonics. "And I have used the outcomes of these research projects to enrich undergraduate and graduate-level courses related to signal processing, digital communications, radars, and probability and stochastic processes," he says.

Chalise believes an increase in the number of graduate students in his department will be a boon to his research. "Ph.D. students are here for a longer period, spending more time on research, and are expected to dive deeper into hard and unsolved research problems as well as take leading roles on the research problems of the current projects," he says. "This frees up primary investigators to submit new grant proposals, and the chances of securing grants will increase if we are a research-intensive R2 university."

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR EXPANSION

In many regards, the effort to expand research at New York Tech grew out of NYITCOM. In 2007 Kurt Amsler, Ph.D., was recruited as associate dean for research charged with growing a research program in the medical school.

At that time, Amsler says the school was primarily focused on teaching. "There was almost no one with external funding," he says. "Facilities and equipment related to research were modest at best, and there wasn't much faculty interest."

It's important to note that research—particularly in STEM fields—is not cheap. Amsler says it was an institutional commitment to purchase the scientific equipment necessary to conduct research on a competitive level that got the ball rolling. "We started virtually from scratch, beginning with the acquisition of our first confocal microscope," he says.

Concurrently, the school began hiring faculty who were interested in research as well as teaching, which has led to significant growth in biomedical research—particularly in areas such as cardiovascular diseases, including heart failure and vascular calcification, and neurological diseases, including in the areas of Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, Parkinson's disease, autism spectrum disorder, Alzheimer's disease, and more.

One of the beneficiaries of the push toward becoming a more research-focused medical school is Joanne Donoghue, Ph.D., professor and director of clinical research. While Donoghue has studied exercise physiology and nutrition for 25 years, she has recently emerged as a national leader in esports medicine, which focuses on the prevention and treatment of repetitive-use injury. That expertise has led to consulting for the U.S. Space Force.

Donoghue is enthusiastic to see institutional priority for research expand. "We are doing great work here and have so much potential to expand," she says. "Becoming an R2 would enable us to attract top researchers to help us grow our areas of strength and to increase external funding. In the grand scheme of things, we are a young institution. This is a bold and exciting step." **N**





Putting Knowledge and Skill into Action

By Denice Rackley
Photographs by Rick Wenner



Faculty and students from schools and colleges across the university come together to address the challenges of people living with Parkinson's disease and autism spectrum disorder, allowing students to grow beyond their traditional career paths.

Alexander Lopez, left, and Jacinda Ayres at Inclusive Sports and Fitness.

New York Institute of Technology reaches far beyond the classroom to positively impact communities. The vast interdisciplinary collaborations supported by New York Tech enable faculty and students to evolve as architects, engineers, therapists, and doctors to advance positive outcomes and grow beyond the traditional career path, turning ideas into innovative solutions to address challenges within the populations they serve.

In 2020, the World Health Organization stated that neurological disorders are the number one cause of disability globally. Leveraging the depth of expertise and breadth of individual passions, New York Tech faculty and students are making strides in advancing the understanding of autism spectrum disorder and Parkinson's disease.

Unparalleled Opportunities

Army veteran, attorney, licensed occupational therapist, and Associate Professor of Occupational Therapy Alexander Lopez, J.D., OT/L, FAOTA, is all about promoting health, wellness, and justice for all communities. He envisions a world where every person is encouraged to develop and use their unique talents for the greater good.

Lopez was attracted to New York Tech because of the university's commitment to collaboration, multidisciplinary research, and deep student involvement. "The collaborations with other professors and students enable us to advance technology and discover innovative solutions beyond what any individual could contribute, leading to lasting change within communities," he says.

One such collaboration that supports the infusion of new ideas from students exists with Inclusive Sports and Fitness (ISF). ISF is a nonprofit gym in Holbrook, N.Y., founded by Lopez that helps children with developmental and intellectual disorders improve their social, emotional, cognitive, and sensorimotor abilities through occupational therapies and targeted exercise interventions.

"Movement drives all performance," he says. "Movement is engagement; it forces us to organize our thoughts, senses, and motor functions and is crucial in helping us navigate the world."

Movement Is Key to Performance

Through a New York Tech Institutional Support for Research and Creativity grant, a clinical trial this fall will monitor and quantify brain performance while ISF athletes with autism perform certain activities. Leveraging state-of-the-art wearable technology and algorithms, Lopez and two faculty members from the College of Engineering and Computing Sciences—Associate Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering Reza Amineh, Ph.D., and Research Assistant Professor of Electrical And Computer Engineering Maryam Ravan, Ph.D.—are researching how occupational therapy interventions improve coordination and neurological processing in children with autism. Lopez hopes the results of this trial will indicate which occupational therapy interventions enhance the athletes' sensory processing and coordination. This information could then be used to personalize a treatment plan.

Also working with Lopez is New York Tech student Jacinda Ayres, who is pursuing her doctorate in occupational therapy. They are



◀ Alexander Lopez, left, and Jacinda Ayres are studying the impact of high-intensity running programs and sensory motor integration with cognition, behavioral, social, and emotional regulation in children with disabilities.

studying the impact of high-intensity running programs and sensory motor integration with cognition, behavioral, social, and emotional regulation in children with disabilities. "We know that physical challenges often inhibit social engagement and negatively impact development," Ayres says. "We can use occupational therapy and movement to help individuals gain independence and improve the quality of their lives."

Ayres notes that the athletes are transformed by participating in ISF's running program. "The kids come in lacking confidence, are often shy and concerned, and may have tantrums and act out. The program and environment are very supportive. Athletes are cheered on by coaches and their peers. They gain strength and endurance with the exercise program, but athletes also make lasting friendships and gain confidence, which spills over into every aspect of their lives." Positive outcomes are noticed at home and school, with parents reporting emotional, behavioral, and cognitive performance improvements.

Reimagining Career Paths

Once unsure if she wanted to pursue occupational or physical therapy, Ayres says, "Seeing the impact on patients' overall health and the increased enjoyment of life from gaining independence, occupational therapy has resonated with me."

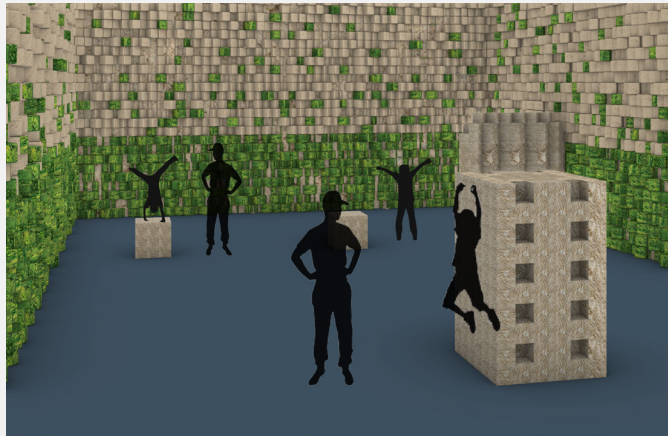
New York Tech offers unique opportunities and experiences that provide students with valuable insights into the vast possibilities to utilize their education in ways not apparent when they first entered college.

Joel Stuart (B.Arch. '22, M.S. '23), who graduated with a master's in architecture, health and design, sees architecture as a much broader field than when he first came to New York Tech. "Architecture can be much more than nuts and bolts of designing buildings and interiors," he says.

Assistant Professor of Architecture Athina Papadopoulou, Ph.D., sees design in reference to its impact on people's lives. Along with Christian Pongratz, M.Arch., director of the master's in architecture, health and design program, they bring their students to ISF to help them understand how inclusive areas are designed to meet the needs of those using the space and how traditional healthcare facilities can be reimagined and redesigned.

"The ability to see the space used and meet children with autism opens up the students' minds to everyday needs and challenges individuals face," says Papadopoulou. "Architecture is about sensory information. We can take advantage of the sensory properties of materials and the environment, adding knowledge of design to create spaces that contribute to our health and well-being."

Papadopoulou and Pongratz's graduate students are first asked to observe and analyze the ISF space and understand its functions. "Neurotypical individuals and atypical individuals perceive and react very differently to stimuli. Students have the opportunity to know



▲ Rendering shows what a lifelike space made from clay walls could possibly look like in commonly occupied spaces.

some of the athletes and understand the space from their perspective,” Papadopoulou explains. “Joel was interested in utilizing eco-friendly biomaterials to decrease the noise within ISF.”

“Looking at the large space with various activities happening at once—many individuals talking, treadmills with people running, and other athletes cycling—I was struck by the noise level. My research revealed that we are all subconsciously impacted by noise, but those with autism can be greatly affected by noise. I wondered if decreasing the noise level could improve athletic performance,” Stuart says. “Architects look at spaces and decide what is needed in that space, but this project taught me we only know by interacting with those using the space.”

Stuart discovered that a construction site averages 120 decibels, and the noise level in ISF averaged 107 decibels. “To say it was quite loud is an understatement,” he says. With the rising interest in utilizing natural and recyclable planet-friendly materials, Stuart learned commercial buildings were successfully employing alternatives. “Clay- and moss-covered clay walls have been used in offices and hotels. Moss doesn’t need sunlight and naturally cleans the air bringing another benefit to using it indoors.”

Stuart chose moss, clay, and mycelia to explore bio-friendly materials that could be added to the space to absorb sound. His research found that clay walls decrease sound by 8 decibels. “Creating walls of clay that aren’t flat but have differing depths resembling an imperfect egg carton breaks up the sound waves and further reduces noise. Adding moss to these walls can decrease sound by another 12 decibels,” Stuart says.

He also explored if furniture could be reimagined to accommodate multiple functions. “I found furniture made from mycelium; mushrooms might address the noise and be adaptable for other activities.” Stuart designed large stackable blocks, which he named bio-blocks, that could be used as portable partitions reducing the noise echoing off the concrete walls. “The athletes also enjoyed creating things from these life-size LEGOs.

“My concept of architecture has totally changed while at New York Tech. The professors helped me enjoy working with natural materials, and I now see design as a path to address problems and find solutions,” Stuart says.

Improving Lives One Step and Conversation at a Time

Spearheading Parkinson’s research at New York Tech’s Adele Smithers Parkinson’s Disease Treatment Center is Director of the Parkinson’s Program **Adena Leder (D.O. ’99)**. As a clinical neurologist, she is expanding the scientific understanding of the disease through her research. Leder is committed to supporting individuals with Parkinson’s and offering New York Tech students the opportunity to experience the life-altering journey of a medical professional.

She manages an on-campus exercise program, Rock Steady Boxing, for those with the disease and moderates a Zoom support group for young women diagnosed with early-onset Parkinson’s.

Parkinson’s is a neurodegenerative disease typically thought to impact older white men and manifesting in motor symptoms such as slowness, shaking, and stiffness. But Leder points out that the disease can be seen in young women and can manifest with different nonmotor symptoms.

While the incidence of Parkinson’s is on the rise, women presenting to their general physician are often not taken seriously or misdiagnosed, particularly if they have nonmotor symptoms, she notes. Research on young women with Parkinson’s is scant. Leder is on a mission to bring young women from the fringes of research and discussions regarding Parkinson’s to the forefront.

Bringing together women with Parkinson’s from around the world, the support group allows them to share their

“Having the opportunity to truly impact the lives of these young women beyond a clinical setting is incredibly rewarding.”

– Kelsey Fisher, NYITCOM student

unique journey, including struggles, issues, challenges, and triumphs. The group provides the women a safe, encouraging space to gather and benefit from community support.

With an interest in neurology and psychology and a commitment to utilizing a hands-on approach to medicine, Kelsey Fisher was attracted to the College of Osteopathic Medicine. The campus location on Long Island was ideal, bringing her back home to New York from Clemson University in South Carolina, where she would have family support. But just as important, Fisher discovered that the faculty were committed to bringing innovative solutions to the medical community and equally invested in students’ success in the classroom and beyond.

A mandatory assembly in her first week of school had a lasting impression on Fisher. Witnessing Leder’s presentation on Parkinson’s disease and the Rock Steady Boxing program, she felt compelled to participate.

“The boxing program is based on the fact that exercise improves both motor and cognitive disease symptoms,” Fisher says. “Participants memorize boxing combinations and learn to box while medical students volunteer to be sparring partners.” Intrigued by the program and Leder, Fisher signed up for Rock Steady that very day. “Hearing Dr. Leder speak inspired me. First, she is a woman in medicine, but it was more than that. I’ve never seen or heard a physician taking time out of their day to exercise with their patients,” Fisher recalls.

Seeing that a doctor can have a remarkable impact on patients’ overall well-being outside of a clinical setting resonated with Fisher. Hands-on holistic medical intervention that offers solutions to patients is the type of medicine she aspires to practice one day.

Fisher actively participates in Leder’s Zoom support group and research centered on young women with Parkinson’s. Being a part of this group and hearing women sharing their struggles, these discussions shape the trajectory of Leder’s research, giving her ideas to explore further.

Women in the group began discussing alopecia, which hadn’t been addressed in the research. This led to Leder and Fisher taking a closer look. They traveled to Barcelona, Spain, to present their findings at the World Parkinson Congress in July 2023. This gathering is unique, bringing together researchers, physicians, advocates, and people and families living with the disease.

“Having the opportunity to truly impact the lives of these young women beyond a clinical setting is incredibly rewarding,” Fisher notes.

Through research opportunities, mentoring, and the examples set by New York Tech faculty, students come to understand that their knowledge and skills put into action can impact communities and help individuals navigate everyday challenges, making the world a better place for everyone. **N**

◀ Kelsey Fisher, right, actively participates in Adena Leder’s Zoom support group and research centered on young women with Parkinson’s disease.



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

New York Tech graduates are going places. In every issue, we look at alumni who are making an impact on their professions, communities, and beyond. Read on to find out how your fellow Bears are doing, making, innovating, healing, and reinventing the future.



▼ Erica Ayisi in Senegal during the early days of Akosua's Closet.



Erica Ayisi

(B.F.A. '03, M.A. '10)

While at New York Tech, Erica Ayisi did not predict a future as a long-form writer. She spent her time as an undergraduate and graduate student building an impressive portfolio of television experience—most of it in front of the camera as an on-air reporter. But since graduating, her career has taken her in some fascinating directions, allowing her to tell stories from around the world in a variety of media.

Now more focused on writing, Ayisi appreciates the flexibility that being a freelancer affords her to pursue stories that speak to her interests. “Whenever I can, I choose underreported stories that people are not really talking about or that could use a new angle or a fresh take,” she says. No matter what story she lands on, it is always a deep sense of curiosity that has led her there. “I am interested as to why people have made certain decisions in their lives. That’s usually where I begin.”

Ayisi’s passion for reporting and storytelling has not gone unnoticed, landing her work in some of the industry’s most

prestigious outlets and publications, including NBCNews.com, *Mongabay*, *Rhode Island PBS Weekly*, *The Root* magazine, *ESSENCE*, *Lonely Planet*, and others. She is also a Pulitzer Center grantee, receiving funding from the foundation to pursue her work on underreported international human-interest stories. “My first project with them was about the Cambodian hair trade and how that hair ends up in the United States,” she says. “That’s how my relationship with the Pulitzer Center began, and it’s been great ever since.” Another story funded by the nonprofit foundation looks at coastal erosion in Ghana brought on by climate change. It focuses on which part of the population is affected and how the government is addressing the issue.

Ayisi’s stories have spanned history and geography, covering subjects as diverse as surfers in Ghana to Massachusetts native Paul Cuffee, the first Black and Indigenous millionaire in the United States. “Sometimes when I encounter a story I think, ‘This might not get told if I don’t tell it now, and if I don’t, then who knows what will be lost to the world?’ Maybe different ways of

thinking, less judgments,” says Ayisi. “That thought is enough to drive me to pursue it.”

Not satisfied just traveling the world seeking out fascinating stories, Ayisi recently embarked on an adventure of a different kind when she started her own clothing business. Akosua’s Closet is the vehicle through which she brings the latest fashion from countries like Ghana, Senegal, Kenya, Tanzania, and South Africa to American consumers. “While reporting in Ghana and other parts of West Africa, I was drawn to the clothes because the fashion is just so dope and always changing,” she says. “I was just buying stuff for myself and my friends, and people were always asking about my clothes. So I decided one year, I’m just going to buy some clothing and jewelry, and have a party and see how it goes. And that was five years ago!”

Whether through her writing or her fashion business, Ayisi is committed to sharing cultures, customs, and stories with the world. “I love talking about Africa, no matter the vehicle,” she says.

Continued on next page →

FROM LEFT: O&O PHOTOGRAPHY; DAICHI PHOTOGRAPHY

(Continued)

Arianna Armelli

(B.Arch. '12)

Arianna Armelli was always drawn to problem-solving and solution-building. As a high school student, she attended an industry-focused charter school and then went on to study architecture at New York Tech. After graduating, she embarked on her career in architecture—until Mother Nature and the nature of invention changed her course.



“I was working on large-scale development projects that happened to be located in and around flood zones, and I became really interested in disaster planning and mitigation from a structural perspective,” she says. That interest took on a new urgency when Hurricane Sandy hit New York in 2012. Spending time in Far Rockaway, she witnessed people hauling debris out of their own homes without any help from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. “These were people who had insurance but were waiting long periods of time for any payouts,” she says. “I saw how many average families were being affected and not necessarily getting the resources in a timely fashion.”

Over the next few years, Armelli kept an eye on the Far Rockaway rebuild and noticed what government plans were being put in place to handle similar situations. She observed billions of dollars being spent to protect business interests in downtown Manhattan but little support going to the average homeowner. Inspired to do something more hands-on, she went back to school to study landscape architecture and regional planning at the University of Pennsylvania. “I was very interested in starting my own business,” she says. “I didn’t know what it was going to be, but I knew it would be in the realm of disaster, planning, and mitigation.” Armelli worked on projects focused on how to build sustainable economic solutions for individuals and communities facing climate change while utilizing data analysis for climate prediction modeling. From that spark of an idea, her company Dorothy was born.

Dorothy (named after the famous fictional Kansan who got swept up in a tornado) helps expedite the insurance claim process by acting as a liaison between property owners and public adjusters who will process and review their insurance claims. The company also underwrites a short-term cash advancement product using future insurance claim settlements as collateral. The products offered by Dorothy can eliminate the need for people to take out high-interest short-term loans, pay out-of-pocket expenses on a credit card, refinance a mortgage, or any of the other financially risky moves people take to recover from disasters.

“Insurance is something that people are always going to need and have, whether it’s private or government backed. The issue we’ve established with disasters is that insurance takes a really long time to pay out, and insurance carriers fight you on how much they owe because it’s difficult to analyze these situations.” By utilizing climate risk analysis, property characteristic data, historical claim event data, and real-time weather event data,

Dorothy can target areas with the highest probability of experiencing damage and offer services to vulnerable home and business owners.

“Ethically, I think there’s a massive market for us, and there’s a way for us to be incredibly profitable,” she says. “But there’s a way for us to do it without putting the onus on the consumer.”

As an innovative start-up, Dorothy could disrupt the existing insurance industry. Dorothy has gotten a lot of attention in a very short time. Most recently, the company won the 2023 Visa Everywhere Initiative, LGBTQ+ Special Edition competition. And in 2022, Armelli was presented with the Emerging Alumni Award at the School of Architecture and Design’s annual Alumni and FRIENDS Reception.

In her speech she said, “To the students that are here tonight, if you have a passion, I suggest you pursue it because building something from nothing is an unparalleled feeling.”

Karen Florio

(D.O. '07)

Karen Florio, D.O., M.P.H., was already deeply entrenched in the study of high-risk pregnancies when the work suddenly hit very close to home. “In the second year of my fellowship, I got pregnant and developed preeclampsia,” she says. “Even though I already knew so much about it, it changed my perspective a bit. I spend more time with my patients now. I have a lot more empathy for what they’re going through. And ultimately, it drew me to the cardiovascular aspect of maternal healthcare.” Preeclampsia is a serious health condition that can occur after the 20th week of pregnancy, resulting in high blood pressure. It can also cause the kidneys and liver not to work normally.

Florio says one of the biggest problems in the United States is a lack of evidence on how to care for population-specific high-risk pregnancies. “There are really good registries in Europe and Canada, but we don’t have anything similar here, so that is something we’re working on,” she says. “It was through registries that we found out that heart disease in women presents very differently, and we can get a lot more information about who is affected in pregnancy and how to treat them with more data collection.”

Cardiovascular disease has become the leading

cause of death for women in America, and it is especially dangerous among women of color. “That is why my heart lies in cardiology and obstetrics, no pun intended,” says Florio. “I was a near miss, and I feel like I owe it to other women.”

Florio served as the director of the Heart Disease in Pregnancy clinic at Saint Luke’s Hospital of Kansas City from 2014 to 2022, a program she developed in collaboration with the obstetrics department and the Saint Luke’s Mid America Heart Institute. She was the assistant fellowship director for the maternal-fetal medicine fellowship at University of Missouri-Kansas City before moving to the University of Missouri in Columbia in 2023, where she serves as the vice chair for patient safety and quality. She is also the chair of the Missouri Perinatal Mortality Board and is the maternal section lead for the state of Missouri Perinatal Quality Collaborative.

After growing up in a small town in Michigan and going to college in Missouri, Florio wanted to experience what it was like to live in a big city. When it came time to apply to medical school, she seized the opportunity and enrolled at the College of Osteopathic Medicine in a concurrent degree program, getting her Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine and Master of Science in Nutrition. Throughout the rest of her schooling, she became increasingly interested in maternal-fetal medicine, leading her to her current career path.

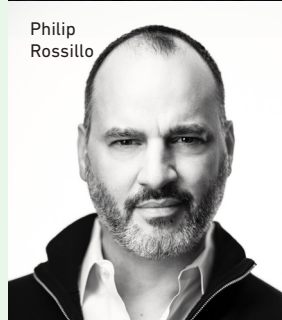
In addition to being a New York Tech success story, Florio also has a New York Tech love story—she married fellow student **Rocco Florio (D.O. '07)**. “We became friends the first week of medical school but didn’t start dating until the beginning of our fourth year. We got engaged about six months later and got married our first year of residency,” she says. “I think it was great that we could share in both our successes and failures as residents of OB-GYN together. And it’s helpful to have somebody who understands how demanding the lifestyle is.”

Continued on next page →





Gustavo Penengo



Philip Rossillo



◀ When a client asked for a regulation tennis court on a property with a lot of restrictions, Gustavo Penengo and Philip Rossillo got creative. Instead of installing it on the grounds, they placed it on the roof of the home.

(Continued)

Gustavo Penengo

(B.Arch. '96) and

Philip Rossillo

(B.Arch. '97)

Gustavo Penengo and Philip Rossillo met as architecture students at New York Tech and have remained close ever since. However, they are not always physically close, as they now live on opposite sides of the country, but the two formed a bond through their studies, which has served them well in their 20-year partnership. “Architectural education was rough back then,” says Rossillo. “It was long nights in the studio, a lot of physical model making and drawing bent over a table for hours and hours. You tend to form bonds with other students, and Gustavo and I became good friends.”

“Through New York Tech, we both spent a summer in Europe. I was in Italy, and Phil was in France, but we got together [in Europe] for two weeks and worked on stuff together. We had a good time,” remembers Penengo. Rossillo also recalls that experience as standing out in their development as architects and partners. “When you’re in the studio, in school, you’re looking

at buildings and analyzing what went into it, what the architect was thinking. But when you see it in person, especially the architecture in Europe, it surpasses anything you see in a book.”

Once they graduated, they continued to help each other, each getting the other work and consulting on each other’s projects. They collaborated on a proposal for a 9/11 memorial in Eisenhower Park on Long Island. The proposal wasn’t successful, but the partnership was—they decided to make it official and go into business together. Twenty years later, their firm PRDG architecture + design is bicoastal, with offices in New York, where Rossillo lives, and Seattle, where Penengo is based. The boutique firm specializes in custom luxury homes and has become known nationwide for designs that combine a modern aesthetic with natural surroundings. “We really spend time analyzing the site, studying it, and finding the best opportunities it offers,” says Penengo. “We’re not just dropping down some modern things somewhere. There are always very strong connections to the site that drive us and our designs.”

The two credit their successful collaboration to their mutual laid-back manner and shared taste. “Our aesthetic is about open space, about bringing a lot of light and air—especially to the communal parts of the homes, the ‘public spaces’ like living rooms and kitchens,” says Rossillo. “We touch on all the essentials of modernism, the pure parts of it,” Penengo adds.

That harmonious style of working comes in handy,

especially when faced with problems requiring out-of-the-box solutions. “We were working on a very complex project in the Hamptons. There were a lot of restrictions on the space, and the client really wanted a regulation professional tennis court,” remembers Penengo. “We were scratching our heads because there was no way we could fit it on the site. One of us said, ‘What if we put it on the roof?’ And we looked at each other and thought, ‘That might be the answer.’ And it was, which was pretty wild.”

Tim Baty

(D.O. '20)

When Tim Baty opens the door to the Wynne Medical Clinic each morning, he often stops to pinch himself as he prepares for his workday.

“It’s surreal,” says Baty. “This has been my dream for a long time. It’s something I worked toward for over a decade. There were tons of late nights and stress. I don’t think reality has set in quite yet that I’m back home and I’ve finally fulfilled the dream.”

Baty was a member of the inaugural class at NYITCOM-Arkansas, and now he’s among the first to begin fulfilling the mission of the school, which opened in 2016 to train physicians to serve in rural and medically underserved communities in Arkansas and the Mississippi Delta region.

Wynne, Ark., has a population of roughly 8,000 and sits 50 miles west of Memphis, Tenn. According to the Arkansas Department of Health Manpower statistics released in January 2023, there were just 11 primary care physicians practicing in Cross County.

Make that 12.

In August 2023, Baty began practicing family medicine at the clinic where his dream began.

“It’s humbling,” Baty says. “I’m just so grateful for a chance to come back home and practice with the physicians who mentored me and helped me get here.”

Of all places, Baty’s journey to medicine began in a pizza parlor. As a junior in high school, Baty worked at a local pizza restaurant and casually mentioned to a coworker that he wanted to become a doctor.

“My friend told me that his uncle was a family physician, and he’d ask if I could shadow him,” Baty recalls. “His uncle agreed. It started out as one day a week, and eventually, I was there every day he was in the clinic.”

Baty developed a deep appreciation for James Cathey, M.D., who continued to give his protégé more and more responsibility. When the clinic transitioned from paper charts to a new electronic medical records system, Cathey needed someone who was comfortable with the technology. Baty stepped up and became Cathey’s medical scribe. Later, during his fourth year of medical school, Baty did a rotation under Cathey.

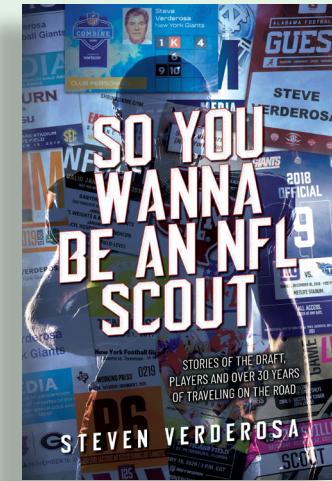
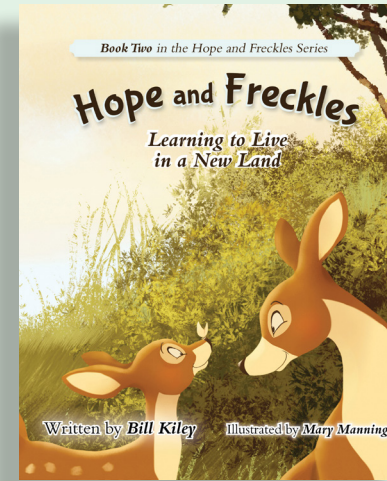
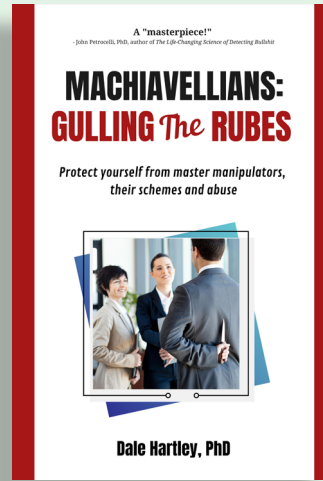
“I learned so much from Dr. Cathey, and I can’t thank him enough for all that he’s done for me,” Baty says. “Being able to sit there and talk with him as a partner now is literally a dream come true.”

Baty left home in 2010 to attend the University of Central Arkansas and then joined the NYITCOM-Arkansas inaugural class in 2016. After earning his medical degree in 2020, Baty completed his family medicine residency at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences North Central campus in Batesville, Ark., where he was chief resident during his final two years.

Now the circle is complete. He’s in Wynne, practicing medicine, serving his community, and expressing a great deal of gratitude for the path that brought him home.

“I was blessed that NYITCOM opened the Jonesboro campus when it did,” Baty says. “I’m very grateful for the opportunity to attend medical school so close to home and train with the patient population I’m working with now as a physician: hardworking people of the Delta. It was a godsend for me and a blessing. I received an awesome education, and I take a lot of pride in being an alumnus. I’m just so appreciative of everyone who’s helped me get here.”





New York Tech alumni have recently published a handful of new books, ranging in topic from a mother deer and her fawn trying to navigate life in a new forest and a Hollywood director's all-access look at the industry to an investigation into universities' use of social media platforms and one doctor's advice to help readers naturally channel their "feel good" hormones.

Daedalusian Legends: Twisted Reunion, a novella by **Bader Alsadeqi (B.S. '13)**, tells the tale of barbarian mercenary leader, Hogan. While he is accepting a job involving the protection of a caravan and a hunt for the bandits planning to plunder its goods, a weapon-wielding madman suddenly storms the area in a frenzy. Hogan soon learns that this seemingly random event has uncanny connections to his lover and lieutenant, Sarah.

In *Fifty Movies Made: Lessons Learned on a Filmmaker's Journey*, **Jared Cohn (B.F.A. '10)** recounts his journey as a director in Hollywood. With 50 films to his name, Cohn has seen the good and bad of Hollywood, and he shares with readers his stories of behind-the-scenes adventures, missteps, and hard-learned lessons to help aspiring filmmakers find success.

Surgeon **Scott Fried (D.O. '81)** has devoted his medical career to teaching patients that there are simple and effective alternatives to drugs and surgery. Now he puts his words of wisdom on paper in *The Opioid Alternative: Medical*

Meditation for Surgery—for Pain—for Life. Offering insights and simple, effective techniques, Fried teaches readers how to enhance their body's innate ability to produce "feel good" hormones naturally.

In *Machiavellians: Gulling the Rubes*, **Dale Hartley, Ph.D. (M.A. '09)**, explores the psychology of Machiavellians, or "master manipulators," and teaches readers how to identify and beat those with this personality trait at their own game. Take the Mach-20 test and learn Machiavellian Advance Detection and Resistance (MADAR), a set of skills and tactics to outwit schemers, swindlers, pathological liars, con artists, and more.

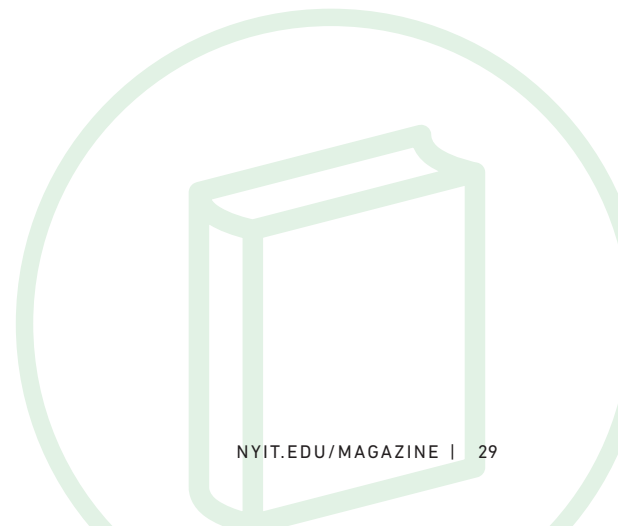
Social Media and Genre Studies: An Investigation of Facebook and Twitter Higher Education Web Pages by **Thomas Kenny, Ph.D. (M.A. '10)**, investigates whether the two social media platforms have become a genre of media for institutes of higher education. Through content analysis and interviews with social media employees, Kenny argues that

while universities' web pages on these platforms do constitute a genre, they each work separately to achieve varying goals.

William (Bill) Kiley (B.S. '76) continues the children's story of Hope, a white-tailed deer, and her spotted fawn, Freckles, in *Hope and Freckles: Learning to Live in a New Land*. In the first installment of this series, Hope and Freckles were forced out of their forest home due to threats of hunger and danger. In this latest tale, the four-legged refugees adjust to life in their new sanctuary, the Big Pine Forest, where they must adapt to a different language and a new way of life.

Patricia Mavros Brexel (B.F.A. '82) has added to her collection of short educational children's biblical stories with *Jesus Celebrates Hanukkah*. Illustrated with vibrant and colorful artwork, *Jesus Celebrates Hanukkah* is a tool for parents and guardians alike to connect with young readers and help teach them about the meaning behind Hanukkah and how it is celebrated.

So You Wanna Be an NFL Scout: Stories of the Draft, Players and Over 30 Years of Traveling on the Road chronicles the football-centric life of **Steven Verderosa (B.S. '87)**, a former New York Giants scout and three-time Super Bowl champion. Football fans will enjoy the book's behind-the-scenes look at life as an NFL scout, as well as stories of players, games, drafts, and all that goes into putting a football team together.



1960s

Joseph Lapicki (B.S.A.T. '68) was elected to the Council of the Renaissance Institute (RI) at the Notre Dame of Maryland University. RI is a lifelong learning organization founded 30 years ago and has weathered the pandemic with expanded course offerings conducted on Zoom as well as on campus.

Robert Wagner (B.F.A. '69) took a still photography course at New York Tech, which inspired him and set his career path. Wagner worked as a cameraman in the film industry for more than 50 years. "For the last 12 years or so, in a labor of love, I have been conducting on-camera interviews with jazz musicians, focusing on their reminiscences of a life in jazz," he says.

1970s

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture has added three books by **Ronald Daniels (B.S. '70)** to its Research and Reference division: *See Us From Whence We Come; Igniting the Fire, Brings the Light, From Invisibility to Academic Viability and Excellence;* and *Truth Awakens: Daring to Dream of Past Glory in Order to Envision Future Greatness.*

Michael Hatten (B.S. '70) is the chairman and chief executive officer of the New York Automotive and Diesel Institute, the College of Transportation Technology, located in Jamaica, Queens.

After working in cable television for more than 40 years, **Michael Bertolino (B.F.A. '79)** retired. In June, the Society of Cable Telecommunications Engineers awarded him emeritus status.

1980s

Thomas Fowler IV (B.Arch. '84) is a licensed architect and a distinguished

professor of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA). He is the director of the California Polytechnic State University Graduate Architecture Program. He continues his architecture practice, collaborating with the industry and selected clients. He also teaches and trains undergraduate architecture students in the comprehensive building design studio. He is also co-teaching along with a structural engineer in an interdisciplinary graduate building design studio.

Virginia Gambale (B.S. '84) has been appointed an independent director of the Board of Directors of EVERTEC, Inc. She is the founder and managing partner of Azimuth Partners, a strategic advisory firm that develops growth, innovation and transformation strategies, and planning for technology companies. Prior to founding Azimuth in 2003, she worked at Deutsche Bank and was chief information officer, managing director, and partner at Bankers Trust, Alex, Brown, among other roles. She currently serves as a director for Jamf software, Nutanix, Virtu Financial, and First Derivatives.

Edward Grunwald (B.S. '84) is celebrating 25 years as senior vice president at Atria Builders, LLC.

Frank Mallozzi (B.S. '84) is an experienced executive in the imaging technology industry. He is known for his leadership roles at EFI (Electronics for Imaging), a global provider of digital imaging and printing solutions, as well as at Ricoh Corporation and Canon U.S.A.

The San Joaquin (Calif.) Regional Transit District has announced the appointment of **Curtis Moses (B.T. '85)** as its director of safety and security.

Gary Price (B.S. '85) assumed the role of vice president of quality at Tyra Biosciences, a clinical-stage biotechnology company focused on drug development based in Carlsbad, Calif.

Thomas Cilmi (B.S. '86) was promoted to vice president of local governments practice at McBride Consulting and Business Development Group, a government relations firm based in Melville, N.Y. The firm works with clients in a variety of sectors, including, but not limited to, multiunit housing development, energy and

renewables, wastewater, water delivery, information technology, transportation, and healthcare. Previously, he was a member of the Suffolk County Legislature.

David Schwartz (D.O. '86) worked in private practice on Long Island from 1990 to 2020. He moved to West Palm Beach,

Fla., where he practices internal medicine at the Cleveland Clinic Florida.

David Broder (D.O. '87) was re-elected as vice speaker of the American Osteopathic Association's (AOA) House of Delegates. The house is the legislative body of the AOA, setting policy, amending the

Continued on next page →



Alum Returns to His Long Island Roots

When **Adam Pascal (B.F.A. '92)** graduated from the communication arts program at the Long Island campus, Broadway was the furthest thing from his mind. "When I was at New York Tech, I wasn't doing theater. It wasn't part of my life. I was playing in rock bands," says Pascal. Growing up in Syosset, N.Y., he sang in various rock bands from the age of 12. For many years as a student and postgraduation, he played the local New York club scene looking to catch a break. Fast-forward to 1996, when he landed the role of Roger Davis in the then-unknown, off-Broadway production of *Rent*, changing his career trajectory forever.

After many years, Long Island and *Rent* called Pascal back home as he returned to his roots to direct a four-performance run of the Pulitzer Prize-winning musical with

Gene Forman's *From Stage to Screen* productions based in Huntington, N.Y. Pascal made his directorial debut on July 28. Prior to the opening night performance, Pascal met with members of the New York Tech community for conversation and photos.

"I didn't know it then, but my time at New York Tech has become invaluable to this new part of my career," says Pascal. "Tech offered this great communications program where I studied TV, radio, and film production. I spent my days in the radio station and the TV station, learning all of the behind-the-scenes stuff. It was really interesting to me, and it has become very beneficial." 📍



EDDIE COLLINS

(Continued)

constitution and bylaws, and electing the officers and Board of Trustees. The AOA is the representative member organization for more than 178,000 osteopathic physicians and medical students. It works to advance the distinctive philosophy and practice of osteopathic medicine.

Jose Rivera, PE, FPE, LEED AP (B.S. '87), is an associate principal and director of plumbing and fire protection with Lilker Associates Consulting Engineers. He has more than 20 years of experience in the design of plumbing and fire protection systems for commercial, institutional, residential, and transportation facilities.

Rivera has worked on many high-profile projects in the New York metropolitan area. He is also a licensed professional engineer in the state of New York and is a member of the American Society of Plumbing Engineers and the National Fire Protection Association.

Thomas Stallone (B.P.S. '87) is retired and living in Texas.

Eileen Kosieracki (D.O. '88) retired after working more than 31 years in a solo private family practice in Albion, N.Y. Kosieracki provided prenatal care and delivery, pediatric care, well woman care,

preventive and acute outpatient care, hospital and nursing home visits. "I thank NYITCOM for my training," she says.

Constance Gist Guindo (B.S. '89) has been elected to serve as co-chair of the Board of Directors of SpeakEasy Stage, the award-winning, nonprofit theater company in residence at the Calderwood Pavilion at the Boston Center for the Arts.

Christopher Vagnone (B.F.A. '89) started a new position as a systems administrator at Felician University.

Matthew Zoffer (D.O. '89) is a physician, researcher, performance nutritionist, and former athlete who is passionate about sports. He is the founder of the performance nutrition business Nutrytics. He has 30 years of experience in competitive judo and other combat sports and 15 years as a coach, trainer, and instructor.

1990s

Elizabeth Uzzo (B.P.S. '85, M.S. '95) was featured in *The Island 360's* Women of Distinction. The story talked about her background and career journey to her current role as chief human resources officer and executive vice president at H2M architects + engineers, where she has worked since 1987.

Sanjay Chopra, Ph.D. (B.S. '92, M.S. '98), is a senior engineering manager at GE Aerospace. He was elected as a fellow of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers.

Darek Wojnar (B.S. '91) is executive vice president and head of funds and managed accounts at Northern Trust Asset Management and FlexShares Exchange Traded Funds.

Joseph Romandetto (B.S.A.T. '92) is a construction manager for environmental consulting company WSP, working on

a project for the New York City School Construction Authority on a new building in South Ozone in Queens, N.Y.

Ronald Januchowski, FACOFP (D.O. '93), was named dean of the Virginia campus of Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine.

Dennis Bailey (B.F.A. '95) graduated with a degree in graphic design. While he didn't get a job in that field, he is using his skills as a celebrity hairstylist, working on film and television projects, including *Saturday Night Live*.

Vanessa Botelho (B.F.A. '95), an accomplished journalist with a career spanning nearly three decades, is starting a new chapter at the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at City University of New York. Beginning in fall 2023, she moved into a tenure-track role as associate professor of broadcast journalism after teaching at the school as a broadcast journalist-in-residence since 2019.

Kiran Palla (M.S. '96) was named a Best Member Leader by the Forbes Technology Council. Palla is the founder of AVS Academy, an online academy that helps guide parents and students to academic and professional success.

Kerry Ricker (D.O. '96), medical director for Eddy SeniorCare, is a board-certified family physician whose practice now focuses exclusively on geriatric medicine.

2000s

Haaris Mahmood Chaudhary (M.B.A. '03) has joined Mobilink Bank, Pakistan's largest digital bank, as chief operating officer.

Muhannad Ebwini (M.B.A. '03) is the co-founder and chief executive officer of HyperPay, one of the Middle East's fastest-growing online payment businesses.

Continued on next page →

Alumni Connections



Dear Alumni and Friends,

This time of year evokes thoughts of change and new beginnings. And as New York Tech kicked off a new academic year in September, the Office of Alumni Relations kicked off a new initiative: the [Alumni Travel Program](#) in partnership with tour operator Gohagan & Company. We will offer unique travel opportunities to alumni and friends, helping to maintain and strengthen your connections with one another and the university. Travelers can broaden their historical and cultural knowledge alongside their peers while making memories that will last a lifetime. If you're looking for meaningful experiences in destinations around the globe, please consider our [small group tours](#) curated for New York Tech alumni, family, and friends.

As we embrace the changing of the leaves and temperatures, we know you may have made some personal changes over the year. Did you move recently, change your email address, or start a new job? Help us keep our alumni records current by submitting an [Alumni Information Update Form](#). By updating your contact information, you'll receive the latest university news and discover opportunities for learning, networking, and volunteering with fellow Bears.

Lastly, we are always looking for new and fun ways to engage with our alumni. We will continue to travel across the country to visit with you, and when we do, we want to be sure we are making the most of your experience and time. Please take a moment to complete the [alumni engagement interest form](#) to better inform us on how best to engage with you.

As always, I welcome your suggestions and ideas. Please feel free to reach out to me at spolidoro@nyit.edu.

Go Bears!

Sabrina Polidoro
Director, Alumni Relations

A Great Immigrant Story

Kyriacos Athens Athanasiou, Ph.D. (B.S. '84), was named to the Carnegie Corporation of New York's annual list of Great Immigrants. The philanthropic foundation celebrates the crucial role of naturalized citizens in making the United States a land of opportunity for all and each Fourth of July honors exemplary individuals through its Great Immigrants, Great Americans campaign.



The Class of 2023 includes 35 naturalized citizens from 33 countries with diverse backgrounds and fields. This year's honorees include individuals who have fostered opportunities for others through their work as educators, mentors, philanthropists, job creators, public servants, storytellers, and advocates.

Originally from Cyprus, Athanasiou, a professor of biomedical engineering at the University of California, Irvine, graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering. He has since gone on to become one of the world's foremost thinkers, inventors, and leaders in biomedical engineering.

"I moved to the United States from Cyprus in 1980. I have been working hard throughout the years to contribute back to this nation that opened its doors to me," he says.

As an international student at New York Tech, Athanasiou says he was able to experience and function in a microcosm of the American nation. "The university was an amalgam of many nationalities and ethnicities, all working toward the betterment of not only ourselves but our entire society."

(Continued)

Steve Huntley (M.B.A. '04) founded Resource Logistics Group (RLG) in 2009, which at that time was known as Merclog Holdings, Inc. RLG is a logistics advisory firm; in addition to working with his own direct shipper clients, he has partnered with several logistics and freight audit/payment companies to offer their clients substantial transportation/logistics cost reductions.

Saadia Yunus (B.A. '04) is a licensed marriage and family therapist and trauma specialist trained in eye movement desensitization and reprocessing. She is also a relationship and personal development coach, motivational speaker, and community leader. Yunus has more than 12 years of experience working with individuals, couples, families, and groups.

Jessica L. Rosati, Ph.D. (M.P.S. '05), Long Island Cares vice president for programs, was recognized among Schneps Media's Dan's Power Women of the East End.

Melissa Rose (M.B.A. '06), vice president at Marketing Works, was recognized among Schneps Media's Dan's Power Women of the East End.

Karen Gayle (M.B.A. '07), an accountant, was selected for a two-year term (2024–2025) as a member of the Institute of Management Accountants Committee on Ethics. Gayle, who earned her enrolled

agent designation from the Internal Revenue Service in 2022, was also selected as a member of the National Association of Enrolled Agents Practice Education Subcommittee.

The American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine selected **Patricia Happel (D.O. '08)** for its 2023–2024 Senior Leadership Development Program (SLDP). The SLDP provides a unique opportunity for one-on-one and group engagement with experienced college of osteopathic medicine deans who serve as mentors. Happel is an associate professor of family medicine and director of inter-professional education at NYITCOM.

John Rafanelli (B.F.A. '08) is co-editor of *Survival of the Thickest*, an eight-episode comedy-drama series on Netflix.

Mohamed Ahmed Al Kayed (B.S. '09) has become the first Bahraini to appear on the Business Elite Awards 40 Under 40 list. This prestigious award program identifies outstanding young executives and entrepreneurs. As a senior hospitality executive in Bahrain, Mohamed Ahmed Al Kayed is a forward-looking and innovative leader with a proven track record of turning organizations into successful business ventures.

Dawn Davis-Reid (B.S. '09) established a coach training academy for new and aspiring professional coaches. She is a

certified mentor and assessor through the International Coaching Federation and a certified mental health coach.

Antoinette DelBel (M.A. '09) is a full-time reporter at WPXI-TV in western Pennsylvania. The Buffalo native most recently worked at WTKR-TV, the CBS affiliate in Norfolk, Va., as a general assignment reporter.

Aaron Franko (M.B.A. '09) is vice president of immersive technology at Saritasa. He has spent more than 20 years working in several areas of technology and has achieved many technical certifications.

Maria O'Connell (M.B.A. '09) is the owner of the Chester County/Main Line, Pennsylvania office of Express Employment Professionals, a franchise that partners with a variety of businesses to provide a full range of staffing services to ensure flexibility and savings. "I enjoy helping people to find a career where they can feel appreciated, thrive for themselves, and also help support their families," she said.

2010s

In addition to entering his 11th year of teaching at Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, **Joseph Brennan, AIA (B.S.A.T. '10)**, started a new role as a senior computational designer at the architecture firm KPF.

Ivan Cornejo (B.P.S. '08, M.B.A. '10) was promoted to assistant director of clinical operations at New York University College of Dentistry. Prior to this position, he was academic coordinator.

Tamarack Technology, Inc., a provider of artificial intelligence-based automation and business intelligence products and software integration services for the equipment finance industry, appointed



A Round of Golf for a Good Cause

On August 7, the College of Osteopathic Medicine (NYITCOM) hosted its second Golf Classic at the Woodside Club in Muttontown, N.Y. More than 90 alumni and friends joined the day's festivities, raising over \$53,000 for NYITCOM. The event, spearheaded by alumnus **Paul Deponte (D.O. '95)**, featured brunch, a round of golf with contests, an on-course barbecue lunch, dinner, and raffles.

◀ FROM LEFT: Keith Hoerning (D.O. '00), Mathew Rutman (D.O. '00), Josh Bozek, D.O., and Jason Golbin (D.O. '00)

Mitch Peterson (M.B.A. '10) as executive vice president of operations. In this role, Peterson will lead the company's professional services team and oversee all information technology and human resources activities.

Leonid Ayzenshtat (M.S. '11) is the founder and president of Orchard Audio, LLC, a boutique audio company selling high-fidelity home audio equipment. The company has won several industry awards.

Adele Rakower (B.Arch. '11) is among the 50 exceptional interior designers in New York, according to *Coveted* magazine. Adele Rakower Interiors is a boutique design firm based in Brooklyn. She began her career working in the Brooklyn high-end residential market and commercial school buildings and structures.

Nujood Al Mahmood (B.F.A. '12) was featured in a story in *Gulf Weekly* about launching a children's book in 2024 that will feature her original artwork. "As an illustrator, I enjoy using digital images

and colors to bring my vision to life and convey stories. Over the years, I have collaborated on books and activities, including coloring books with a few academics and private storytellers. So I'm excited about this. My illustration style is geared toward children's literature, ranging from picture books for young children to young adult fiction," she said.

Jonathan Meneses (B.S. '12) is the director of workplace technology and support at the Michael J. Fox Foundation. The foundation is dedicated to finding a cure for Parkinson's disease through an aggressively funded research agenda and to ensuring the development of improved therapies for those living with Parkinson's.

Hauppauge, N.Y.-based SightMD announced that some of its providers have been named to the 2023 Super Doctor and Super Doctors Rising Stars list, including **Alanna Nattis (D.O. '12)**. She is a cornea, cataract, and refractive surgeon, as well as the director of clinical research at SightMD.

Robert Isme (B.S. '12) has joined the women's basketball coaching staff at Dartmouth as assistant coach and recruiting coordinator.

Jital Patel (M.S. '13) recently launched Coastal Occupational Therapy, a mobile service that brings comprehensive occupational therapy services directly to Brevard County's (Fla.) elder population.

Ricardo Cabret (M.S. '14), an artist and computer engineer, debuted an all-new body of work called Un Nuevo Manglar at Kohn Gallery in Los Angeles. The exhibition consists of several paintings and immersive generative artwork. His practice uses painting and software to unravel the tensions between technology and humans' relationship to the landscape. His layered paintings reference complex computing systems while obscuring depictions of places and references to memories of Puerto Rico.

Continued on next page →

NOTES TAKEN

We welcome all kinds of news for Alumni Notes. Submit your latest accomplishments—and remember to attach the pics!

nyit.edu/magazine/contact or magazine@nyit.edu

(Continued)

Navy Lt. Cmdr. **Eric Serpico (D.O. '14)** was recognized as the Navy Early Career Psychiatrist of the Year for 2023; he

works at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. The award recognizes the contributions made by a junior Navy

psychiatrist and is awarded to a member of Navy psychiatry who has demonstrated dedicated care of patients, outstanding leadership, and novel innovations to Navy psychiatry and Navy medicine.

Eunice A. Asare (D.O. '15) joined Choptank Community Health System's Denton Health Center in Denton, Md.

Edwin Golikov (D.O. '16), a gastroenterologist, joined Holy Cross Medical Group, a multispecialty physician-employed group of more than 130 physicians providing services throughout Broward County, Fla.

DeVonne Jackson Perez (M.A. '15) is an urban farmer and sustainability educator in Brooklyn, N.Y., and the founder of Positive Obsession, Inc., a sustainable fashion collective. She started her career in communications and television production; in 2020, she shifted to a career in food production and sustainability, receiving a New York City Urban Farmer Certificate from Farm School NYC in 2021. She is a founder of Good Ground Growers, an organization that uplifts community development by focusing on food and land equity.

Paul Schulze (D.O. '16) has joined Middletown, N.Y.-based Crystal Run Healthcare. He is a radiologist specializing in diagnostic imaging; his clinical interests include musculoskeletal imaging. He primarily cares for patients in West Nyack, N.Y.

Caterina Sullivan (B.F.A. '16), an interior designer, was profiled in *CanvasRebel* about how artists and others in the creative field learned how to do what they do. She credits residential construction with helping her acquire most of her knowledge and skills. "While working at construction companies, I was exposed to every phase and trade that brings your design to reality," she said.

Fawad Ali Gilani (M.B.A. '17) has joined K-Electric, based in Karachi, Pakistan, as chief distribution officer. He has 20 years of experience in power system planning and operation, policymaking, and regulations.

Thomas Brodie Folino (D.O. '18) has joined Middletown, N.Y.-based Crystal Run Healthcare, specializing in interventional pain. He treats patients in Monroe and West Nyack, N.Y.

Fabian Escobedo (M.S. '18) joined Rye High School in Rye, N.Y., where he teaches English as a New Language. Before that, he taught sixth-grade science and social studies at Bronx Alliance Middle School.

Timothy Park (B.S. '17, D.O. '19) has joined the medical staff of Geneva General Hospital, part of Finger Lakes Health, as a hospitalist. He completed his residency in internal medicine at Nassau University Medical Center and an internship in general surgery at NewYork-Presbyterian Queens.

In August, **Matthew Santamaria (B.F.A. '17, M.A. '18)** was named to *Long Island Business News'* 30 under 30 list. He is a media relations manager at the Alzheimer's Association Long Island Chapter.

Rosi Thorne (M.S. '17) was promoted to human resources business partner at Northwell Health. "Thanks to all the amazing things I learned at New York Tech, this has propelled my career forward."

Singapore Private Wealth Group WRISE appointed **Megan Zhang (M.B.A. '17)** as co-chief executive officer.

2020s

After completing his family medicine residency training at Conway Regional Health System, **Dylan Cruz (D.O. '20)** decided to continue with the health system, joining the Conway Regional Medical Clinic-Prince St. in Arkansas.

Catherine Ellis (B.F.A. '21) is post producer at BBDO Studios, advertising agency BBDO's production company.

The Center for Architecture announced the three residents for the 2023 cycle of the Center for Architecture Lab, including **Karla Andrea Pérez (B.F.A. '21)**. The Lab is a multimonth, multidisciplinary residency program that aims to invite a greater diversity of professionals to participate in the fields of architecture and design; the residents will install their work at an exhibition opening in November 2023. Pérez is a first-generation Mexican American designer, researcher, and folkloric dancer. She is currently pursuing her master's degree in critical curatorial and conceptual studies in architecture at Columbia University. Her work acknowledges the gaps in historic archival representation of overlooked, often misrepresented minority community spaces, with a particular focus on the Mexican immigrant and

Mexican American communities in New York City, drawing from her upbringing in Queens.

Zhenhua Yao (B.S. '22) enrolled in Cornell's hospitality management graduate program in 2022 and completed a co-op course at Marriott's Washington D.C. headquarters. Yao successfully led a group in planning new programs to increase revenue for Marriott's international hotel headquarters. Yao is currently working as a summer intern at Cipriani.

Sarah Johnson (B.S. '22, M.S. '23) is the co-founder and chief operating officer at SpoilSaver, an artificial intelligence-powered food waste management app. She was a Bessemer Fellow in 2021, a program through which aspiring builders and entrepreneurs gain real-life experience interning for growing technology companies, invaluable mentorship from leaders in venture capital and tech, and the peer community that empowers them with confidence to venture into their early careers. She is also pursuing her master's in data science at New York Tech.

Dalton Lackey (M.Arch. '22) started a new position as an architectural designer with engineering company AECOM.

Melissa Knecht (M.S. '23) joined Rye Country Day School in Rye, N.Y., where she will teach science to sixth-grade students and serve on the Grade 6 advising team.



▲ FROM LEFT: Nick Sassone (B.S. '71), Jeff Matlin (B.S. '71), Kevin McElroy (B.S. '70), Joe King (B.S. '77), Lou Mortaro (B.S. '70), Wally Beecroft (B.S. '76), and Sal Bracco (B.S. '70)

Fraternity Brothers Reunite

On August 12, members of the Omicron Sigma Upsilon fraternity visited the Long Island campus for a tour and to catch up before heading to their annual reunion dinner. The fraternity was active from 1966 to 1977 and had more than 150 members. They shared stories and fond memories about their time on campus, faculty, and staff, including former President Alexander Schure, Ph.D., Ed.D., and what New York

Tech meant to them. "If it weren't for our brothers, **Richie Weinblatt (B.S. '70)**, **Marc Cohen (B.S. '70)**, and Lloyd Shuval and New York Tech, I wouldn't be here today," says **Sal Bracco (B.S. '70)**, referencing the college exemption that allowed full-time students to defer from service during the Vietnam War. Weinblatt, Cohen, and Shuval convinced Bracco to stay in school and help start the fraternity. "It saved my life."

MARRIAGES:

Kristin McDonough Lave (M.S. '21) married **Harrison Lave (M.S. '20)**

BIRTHS:

Stephanie Geiger (M.S. '21) and her husband, Scott, welcomed their son, Theodore.

PASSINGS:

Richard (Rick) Michael Weiler (B.S. '70)
James John Wieboldt (B.S. '76)
Frank Gancarz (B.S. '77)
Patrick Biancone (B.S. '97)

**NEW YORK INSTITUTE
OF TECHNOLOGY**

Northern Boulevard, P.O. Box 8000,
Old Westbury, NY 11568-8000

New York Tech
students spotted in
and around New York
City and Long Island
in a new integrated
marketing campaign.



**THERE'S A PLACE FOR YOU AT
NEW YORK TECH**

