

The Element

March 2026



▲ BRASS scholars celebrate with Judi and Jack Johnson, Dean Carolyn Smith and Dr. Pedro A. Piedra the BRASS Annual Holiday Party.

inside

- ▶ 2025-2026 BRASS Scholars
Four Outstanding Scientists
- ▶ BRASS Events
Highlights and Photos
- ▶ BRASS Highlights
BRASS Scholar Awards



◀ Myra Wilson presented Joseph R. Zoeller and Juan Romero framed certificates plus \$500 awards as our HL&R 2025 Outstanding Community BRASS Scholars of the Year.



▲ Judi and Jack Johnson presented BRASS Scholar Jennifer Deger (2020) MD/PhD with the newly conceived Judi and Jack Johnson Super Star Award of Excellence. Jennifer was awarded a framed certificate along with a \$500 award. This will become an annual award to honor the Johnsons.

A Message from the BRASS President

Dear BRASS Members and Supporters:

As we entered our 31st anniversary year, I reflected on all that BRASS has accomplished, thanks to your ongoing support and belief in our mission. Each year, our BRASS scholars achieve remarkable breakthroughs in medical research—work that holds the promise of improving and saving lives, made possible by your steadfast mentoring and encouragement. I hope you enjoy seeing some of the highlights and accomplishments from BRASS scholars that helped make 2025 a truly enjoyable and memorable year.

In September, the Scholarship Committee selected our four new 2025-2026 BRASS Scholars from a total of 38 applicants. They were officially welcomed into the BRASS family on October 21, at the annual Scholars’ reception held at The St. Regis Houston. We have now awarded a total of 95 scholarships since our founding in 1995. Please see page two for more about these four new impressive young scientists whose fields of research in microbial genomics, immunology and cancer research, represent distinct areas of hope for the future of healthcare.

On December 2, more than 100 guests, scholars and their mentors gathered at the Four-Leaf Tower party room, arranged for by BRASS member **Chris Kase**, for our annual Holiday party. Guests graciously brought gift cards for all the scholars, which always adds fun and some shopping cheer to their holidays. There was added fun this year with entertainment by renowned musician Ray Rogers. A Big THANK YOU **Jo Ann Petersen** and **Edna Meyer-Nelson** for underwriting these fall events.

A BIG SHOUT OUT to **Michele Collins**, our **BRASS Mentor Events Liaison** who organized and underwrote two great mentoring dinners for the BRASS Scholars and the BRASS Board. On March 31, 2025, **Start-ups: What It Takes, Fund Raising, Regulatory Constraints and Work-Life Balance**. It was a fun and informative evening presented by Graham Randall and Char Hu, 2 BCM graduates, that started their own biomedical businesses. And on March 24, 2026 we heard **AI and The World of Medicine: What are the Opportunities, Rewards and Risks; How it Will Affect the Future of Medicine** by Dr. Nabil Mansour, an Associate Professor and Medical Director of Baylor Medicine Gastroenterology. Both were held at GROTTO restaurant, with 26 board members and BRASS Scholars attending.

Mark your calendars for **May 6**, for our **Annual Tea & Toddies** fundraiser celebrating our 31st Anniversary, hosted and underwritten by **Sidney Faust**. Look for your invitation to arrive in early April.

Your dedication and willingness to always show up truly make a difference. Thank you.



▲ Elsie Eckert with Emmy

BRASS Welcomes Four New 2025-2026 Scholars



▲ **Ángel Adrián Garcés**
Don Sykora Scholar

Ángel Adrián Garcés was raised outside of Allen, TX and moved to Houston in 2014 to pursue a B.S. in chemistry at Rice University, where he became fascinated by the complexity of cancer biology through undergraduate research projects on gold nanoparticle melanoma vaccines and chemotherapy-induced DNA changes in breast cancer. The discovery of new knowledge that might one day

improve outcomes for patients with cancer led Ángel to pursue an M.S. in therapeutics and pharmacology at MD Anderson Cancer Center from 2018–2021.

Ángel's research experience combined with volunteering as a medical interpreter for Spanish-speaking patients at San Jose Clinic in downtown Houston are what developed his motivation to become a physician-scientist. Ángel joined the M.D./Ph.D. program at Baylor College of Medicine in 2022. After three years of medical training, he entered the Cancer and Cell Biology Ph.D. program. His research interests are in understanding how cancer cells develop resistance to current treatments and in designing new treatment strategies to overcome these resistance mechanisms.

Outside of school, Ángel enjoys traveling with his wife—they have visited over 15 countries across Europe, Asia, and South America. A lifelong musician, Ángel has played the saxophone for 17 years and has performed with various Houston bands. He is also a self-taught singer-songwriter. Ángel is incredibly grateful for the opportunity to join BRASS and looks forward to engaging with a community dedicated to supporting the next generation of scientists.



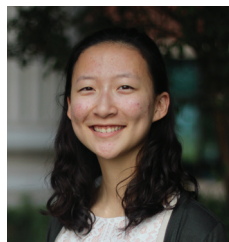
▲ **Ryan King Perez**
Myra Branum Wilson Scholar

Ryan King Perez was raised in Queens, New York, and earned his undergraduate degree in computer science and music from the University of Nevada–Las Vegas. As a first-generation college student, his early fascination with science was nurtured by his mother's encouragement to stay curious and deepened after personal losses during the COVID-19 pandemic—an experience that inspired his commitment to

improving quality of life through biomedical research.

He is now a PhD student in the Quantitative and Computational Biosciences program at Baylor College of Medicine, where his work integrates microbial genomics, wastewater epidemiology, and metagenomics. Ryan's long-term goal is to develop microbial therapeutics that leverage host–microbe interactions and AI-driven tools to combat disease and advance precision medicine.

Outside the lab, Ryan creates science communication content through his YouTube channels, PerezTheDev and Research: Decoded, and volunteers in STEM outreach. In his free time, he enjoys traveling, cooking, playing music, and reading.



▲ **Joelle Kim**
Don D. Jordan Scholar

Joelle Kim is from Huntsville, AL. As a Rocket City native, she grew up with a deep love for space exploration and Appalachian autumns. She then moved to Texas to attend Baylor University, where she was first introduced to the vast world of cancer research. During her immunology class, she became intrigued by the idea of designing potent cancer therapies by

partnering with the human body's strongest defense against disease—the immune system. This idea led her to pursue two research gap years at the University of Pennsylvania and Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre. Through her experiences in Philadelphia and Melbourne, she gained a profound appreciation for the stunning capabilities of novel cancer immunotherapy technologies, as well as the worldwide scope of academic medicine.

Returning to Texas, Joelle joined the Medical Scientist Training Program (M.D./Ph.D.) at Baylor College of Medicine. Through a Ph.D. in the Development, Disease Models & Therapeutics (DDMT) Graduate Program, she hopes to leverage opportunities within the Texas Medical Center to innovate cell and gene therapies. More broadly, she aspires to make novel contributions for cancer medicine as a physician scientist.

Here in Space City, it gives Joelle great joy to meet new people in a spontaneous encounter or to serve greater Houston with her church. Whenever she gets the chance, she enjoys hiking in national parks, singing in car karaoke, and drinking great coffee. Joelle is honored to join the BRASS community and looks forward to getting to know its members in the years ahead.



▲ **Dylan Pfannenstiel**
Sidney Broadfoot Faust Scholar

Dylan Pfannenstiel was adopted from South Korea and grew up in Mesquite, Texas. He earned his Bachelor of Science in Biology from the University of Texas at Austin, where he studied how bacteria evolve resistance to antibiotics. After graduating in 2021, he moved to Bethesda, Maryland to work at the National Cancer Institute. There, he researched how cell death shapes the immune system during infection and autoimmunity.

Inspired by personal experiences within his family, he decided to pursue a career as a physician-scientist to bridge the gap between scientific research and clinical care.

In 2023, Dylan returned to Texas to join the Medical Scientist Training Program (MD/PhD) at Baylor College of Medicine. After completing two years of medical training, he began his PhD in the Immunology and Microbiology (IY) Graduate Program. He is interested in understanding how immune system dysfunction impacts cancer progression and treatment resistance. Dylan plans to pursue a career as an ENT head & neck surgeon, combining his laboratory discoveries with surgical patient care to improve therapies and outcomes for cancer patients.

Outside of science, Dylan enjoys weight lifting, exploring the outdoors, and searching for vintage and antique finds. He also enjoys the highs and lows of Longhorn football, exploring Houston's restaurant scene, and spending time with his friends, family, and girlfriend. Dylan is honored to join the BRASS family and looks forward to sharing science, building friendships, and giving back to the Houston community.

2025 BRASS Scholar Reception

2025 BRASS Scholar Reception



1. Ed McMahon and Hershey Grace
2. James Craig and Dr. Jacquie Baly
3. Astrid Van Dyke and Jim Adams
4. Robin Simon and Leisa Holland Bowman
5. Elsie Eckert, Ed McMahon, Judi and Jack Johnson
6. Kathleen and Tom Mach
7. Edna Meyer-Nelson, Jody Merritt, English Laserna and Ali Ghada
8. Paola and Saula Valente
9. Donna Stokes and Dr. Mike Mann
10. Cheryl Byington
11. Larry and Cindy Burns and Daniel Irion
12. Lisa Chandler Brown
13. Dean Carolyn Smith
14. Lisa O'Leary, Elsie Eckert and Tamara Klosz Bonar
15. Mike and Lisa O'Leary and Linda Kuykendall
16. Marina and Dr. Mark Hamilton and Peter VanDerlofske



17. Elsie and Les Eckert and Saula Valente
18. Jeanie Smith
19. Kenny Rogers and Dr. David Wright
20. Mariah Berner and Dr. Matthew Baker
21. Michele Collins, Sharon Bright and Craig Moffatt
22. Dr. Richard Finnell, Julia Rosales and Dr. Bruna Corradetti
23. Jody Merritt, Edna Meyer-Nelson and Steve Spencer
24. Dr. Fred Pereira and Tracy Pereira
25. Peter VanDerlofske describes the Scholar selection process
26. Christine and Steve Johnson
27. The delicious St. Regis buffet
28. Maryshe Zietsman and Daniel Irion
29. Jennifer Deger, Michal Trylik and Eric Garcia
30. Debby Leighton, Dionne Breen and Andy Delery
- PAGE 5
31. Jack and Judi Johnson
32. Dr. David Wright and Kenny Rogers
33. Jeanie Smith and Buck Toney
34. James Craig and Dr. Jacquie Baly
35. Cindy and Larry Burns
36. Janet Hansen and Elsie Eckert
37. Ed McMahon and Hersey Grace
38. Marcia and Steve Brown
39. Billy Harris and Lisa O'Leary
40. Daniel Irion, Dr. Alice Mao Brams and Kirk Kveton
41. Lenny Matuszewski
42. Dan and Lisa Chandler Brown
43. Evelyn Lightman and Beth Wolff
44. Dr. John Gomez and Dr. Coralia Mihu
45. Debra Laws, Raquel Lewis and Elsie Eckert
46. Rosemin Premji and Raquel Lewis
47. Dr. Hsiao-Tuan Chao and Dr. Mingshan Xue
48. Craig Moffatt, Emily Schultz and Michelle Collins

2025 BRASS Holiday Party



31.



32.



33.



34.



35.



36.



37.



38.



39.



40.



41.



42.



43.



44.



45.



46.



47.



48.

- 49. Linda Kuykendall and Myra Wilson
- 50. Chris Kase, Robin Simon, **Paige Hall**
- PAGE 6**
- 51. Myra Wilson introduces new scholar **Ryan Perez**
- 52. Myra Wilson introduces new scholar **Ángel Garcés**
- 53. Dr. James Bonar introduces new scholar **Joelle Kim**
- 54. Edna Meyer-Nelson introduces new scholar **Dylan Pfannenstiel**
- 55. **Joseph Zoeller** speaks about the generosity of the Wintermann Fund
- 56. **Katya Katabotyanski** speaks about the generosity of the Wintermann Fund
- 57. Tamara Klosz Bonar and Dr. James Bonar
- 58. **Sharon Bright** and Daniel Irion

**Bolded names denote BRASS Scholars*



49.



50.

2025 BRASS Scholar Reception



BRASS Celebrates 13th Annual Judi & Jack Johnson Day

On October 21 at our annual scholar's reception was held at the St. Regis Houston and was generously underwritten by **Edna Meyer-Nelson** and **Jo Ann Petersen**. Our four 2025-2026 BRASS Scholars were welcomed to the BRASS family and introduced by BRASS Scholar selection committee members **Myra Wilson**, **Edna Meyer-Nelson**, **Dr. James Bonar** and **Peter Vanderlofske**. This event celebrates **Judi and Jack Johnson** and their continued generous research support through the Wintermann Foundation which, each year, provides 16 BRASS scholars in the Baylor College of Medicine Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, a \$7,000 stipend to help fund their research during years two to five of their graduate studies. Our scholars use these discretionary funds for research supplies, lab equipment, and other needed agents to perfect their research process. This year the Johnson's donated an additional million dollars to the fund, allowing us to increase the yearly stipend from \$5,000 to \$7,000. To date, the Wintermann Foundation has given more than \$3 million to help fund the significant accomplishments that are milestones in our BRASS scholars' research success. This BRASS scholar funding is also a tremendous asset to their lab mentors, because these extra funds bring much-needed support when there are not adequate resources available to help our scholars and their labs move forward with their research. **Katya Kabotyanski MD/ Ph.D** candidate and **Joseph Zoeller MD/Ph.D** candidate both (2022-2023) scholars spoke about the impact of the financial support from the Wintermann Foundation and how profoundly it has advanced their research efforts and results.



▲ 25 current and former BRASS scholars celebrate and salute Judi and Jack Johnson and BRASS founder Myra Wilson at the 2025 scholar's reception.

BRASS Executive Officers 2026-2027

Founder *Myra Wilson*[†]
 President *Elsie Eckert*[†]
 Vice President *Peter VanDerlofske*
 Treasurer *Lisa Chandler*
 Event Chair *Linda Kuykendall*
 Second Vice President *Don D. Jordan*

Recording Secretary *Michelle Collins*
 Scholar Liaison *Elsie Eckert*
 Research Award Liaison *Ed McMahon*
 Mentor Events Liaison *Michelle Collins*
 Social Correspondent *Robin Simon*
 Research Grants/Scholarship Advisor
Dr. James Bonar[†]

Scholar Selection & Research Grant Advisor
Dr. Matthew Baker
 Scholar Selection Committee *Marcia Brown*[†]
 Scholar Selection Committee *Joni Baird*[†]
 Member at Large *Edna Meyer Nelson*
 Member at Large *Jo Ann Petersen*
 BCM Liaison/Mentor *Dr. Huda Zoghbi*

[†]Scholar Selection Committee Member

Member Chairs 2026-2027

Sponsorship Chair *Jody Merritt*

Social Media/PR Chair *Jacquie Baly*

Membership Chair *Daniel Irion*

You have the right to decline future education and development communications. If you do not want us to contact you for our fundraising efforts, please contact the Office of Philanthropy and Alumni Relations at 713.798.4714 or opt-out-development@bcm.edu.