

The Element

May 2023



◀ Dr. Kelly Larkin and Fernando Parra graciously welcomed more than 130 guests to their beautiful home and gardens for the 2022 BRASS Scholars Reception. It was the 10th Annual Judi and Jack Johnson BRASS Super Star Day and the perfect setting to welcome our four new BRASS Scholars into the BRASS family.

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Four Outstanding Scientists
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Past Scholars Join BRASS Leadership



▲ Dean Carolyn Smith welcomed the four 2022-2023 BRASS Scholars Emily Schultz, Maryshe Zietsman, Joe Zoeller and Kat Kobotyanski, at the October 18, Scholars' Reception.



▲ BRASS Scholars and member Les Eckert at the 2022 BRASS Holiday party that was hosted and generously underwritten by BRASS member Carolyn Faulk.

A Message from the BRASS President

Dear BRASS Members and Friends,

BRASS ended 2022, our 27th year, with many highlights and fun events.

In September, the Scholarship Committee selected four outstanding 2022-2023 scholars from a total of 48 applicants and ten interviews. This brings us to a total of 90 scholarships awarded since our founding in 1995. Please see page two for more about the four impressive young scientists we selected whose fields of research represent distinct areas of hope for the future of healthcare – global health, neuroscience and cancer research.

October found us in the beautiful home of Dr. Kelly Larkin and Fernando Parra, as they once again graciously underwrote and hosted our annual Scholars Reception. More than 120 BRASS members had the opportunity to visit with the four new scholars, as well as with 20 of our previous scholars and several of their Baylor College of Medicine mentors. More highlights from this incredible evening can be found on pages four and five.

On September 29, Michele Collins generously underwrote a mentoring dinner at La Griglia restaurant for 24 BRASS Scholars and board members. Featured speaker Dr. Rinki Ratnapriya, a PI at BCM, shared the details of her post doc work at the NIH, as well as her many hands-on experiences and the career opportunities available with the National Institute of Health.

Carolyn Faulk once again generously hosted and underwrote our annual BRASS Holiday Party on December 1. The festively decorated Montebello Highrise was the perfect setting for more than 100 BRASS members, scholars and Baylor affiliates, to welcome in the season. Guests brought gift cards for all the BRASS scholars, which always adds fun and some shopping cheer to their holidays.

In February, we started off the new year, with a Super Bowl party at Jeanie and Marshall Smith's home. More than 45 BRASS scholars, spouses, friends and members gathered to enjoy the camaraderie and cheer on their favorite team.

On March 14, the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo (HLS&R) hosted all the BRASS scholars and board members to the Tejas Room Reception where BRASS was recognized as a recipient of the generous funding, we receive from the rodeo every year. A big thank you to our Executive Committee Members Don D. Jordan and Ed McMahon, as Rodeo Committee Members their belief in the BRASS mission has helped BRASS consistently receive valuable funding for our BRASS scholars' research, lab equipment and academic travel

2023 definitely promises to be an exciting year for the BRASS Scholars and our wonderful BRASS members. As always the BRASS board and I are grateful for your continued support.

~ Elsie



▲ Elsie Eckert with Stella

BRASS Scholar Spotlight

BRASS Welcomes Four New 2022-2023 Scholars



▲ **Kat Kabotyanski**
Don Sykora Scholar

Kat Kabotyanski grew up in Houston, TX and spent much of her childhood in the Texas Medical Center where her parents worked as scientists or at the gym where she trained as a Junior Olympic gymnast. She then attended Duke University, where she completed the pre-medical curriculum and graduated with distinction in neuroscience. She completed a thesis with Professor Ahmad Hariri in the

Duke NeuroGenetics Laboratory, looking at how self- versus informant-reported neuroticism moderates variability in amygdala reactivity to threat-related stimuli.

After graduation, she moved to New York City to work on the Healthy Brain Network study with Michael Milham, an M.D./Ph.D. who specializes in child and adolescent psychiatry. She continued her work in systems neuroscience at Harvard University as Research Manager for the Human Connectome Project in Development. Now, as an M.D./Ph.D. student at Baylor, she is grateful to have found a mentor in Dr. Sameer Sheth, a functional neurosurgeon and M.D./Ph.D. himself whose work focuses on using real-time brain recordings to inform our basic understanding of complex neurocircuitry and develop novel therapies for neuropsychiatric disorders. In her future work, Kat hopes to fill the gaps in our knowledge of human brain circuitry.

After a long day of studying, she loves to crank up her favorite music and dance it out, go for a run, or lift some weights. She loves spending time with friends, being outside, traveling to new places, meeting new people, and trying new things.



▲ **Emily Schultz**
*Sidney Broadfoot
Faust Scholar*

Emily grew up in Plano, TX, and working as a certified nursing assistant in high school sparked her interest in human health and biology. She attended Baylor University in Waco, TX where she pursued a B.S. in biology with a minor in anthropology. After a summer internship at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln studying swine influenza, she merged her interests in human health with virology research. She researched viral pathogens as she

conducted projects on viruses transmitted by mosquitos, such as Zika virus. After graduating, she was selected as a Churchill Scholar to complete her Master of Philosophy in Pathology from The University of Cambridge in Cambridge, UK. There, her passion for researching emerging viral pathogens deepened as she studied Coronaviruses during the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

She is in the Immunology and Microbiology Ph.D. program at BCM. She uses novel complex model systems, called organoids, to better understand how viruses are causing disease in different tissue types. Ultimately, she wants to combine her skills in molecular virology with her interest in the cultural factors affecting populations to find solutions to reduce disease.

Emily enjoys spending her time with friends outdoors, whether kayaking, hiking, or cycling. She is an avid baker, having perfected her chocolate chip cookie recipe after many trial runs with her friends as taste testers. Emily also enjoys traveling and has the life goal of traveling to every US state. Her favorite place that she has traveled to outside of the US is the Cliffs of Dover in England, although Porto, Portugal is a close second.



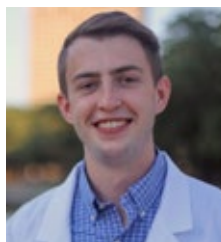
▲ **Maryshe Zietsman**
Don D. Jordan Scholar

Maryshe Zietsman is a first-year graduate student in the Medical Scientist Training Program (MSTP). Born in South Africa, she grew up in College Station, TX and attended the University of Texas at Austin where she earned a B.A. in Biology, with a minor in Spanish and a Health Professions Certificate. She then spent six months conducting research in the School of Public Health at the University of Illinois at Chicago, initiating her

passion for research. Maryshe's desire to be a part of the world of scientific discovery for the rest of her career was confirmed after a year of dedicated research in Dr. Kjersti Agaard's lab.

Through her clinical rotations and her women's health advocacy work with asylum-seekers, Maryshe developed a love of obstetrics and gynecology. Her research focuses on the unique relationship between mother and fetus, exemplified by the placental barrier and the genetic basis of diseases acquired during development. She is studying how this information can be translated to clinical therapeutics that can traverse the placenta to target disease in utero. She became a part of the Development, Disease Models, and Therapeutics (DDMT) graduate program for her Ph.D. work.

Outside of her studies, Maryshe is one of the Executive Directors of the BCM Human Rights and Asylum Clinic. She enjoys spending her free time with family and friends, drawing, painting, traveling and dancing. She is dedicated to taking care of her beloved chihuahua-dachshund mix dog, Charlotte, who has been her constant companion since undergrad.



▲ **Joseph R. Zoeller**
*Myra Brannum Wilson
Scholar*

Joseph R. Zoeller was born in Chicago, IL. While studying for his B.S. in Biochemistry at Washington and Lee University, he discovered a passion for scientific discovery while conducting imaging research in art conservation. To better explore his early passion for medicine and new intrigue with research, he enveloped himself in both fields during a fellowship at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). He worked with numerous scientists and physician

scientists to better understand the pathophysiology of disease, particularly through the lens of genomics. This work solidified his desire to pursue combined MD/PhD training.

Joe then matriculated in the Medical Scientist Training Program at Baylor College of Medicine in 2020. He joined the Quantitative and Computational Biosciences Program for graduate training, where he studies cancer biology using functional genomics and systems biology tools. Eventually, he plans to treat patients as an oncologist while working to better understand their disease in the laboratory.

In his free time, Joe enjoys struggling through home improvement projects and yelling over friends when playing intramural sports or board games. He is passionate about cooking despite the occasional cast iron burn. For exercise, he enjoys riding his road bike, which he uses for daily work commutes and weekend rides. He has found a community as warm as Houston's climate within BRASS, and he looks forward to meeting more of the accomplished Houston community members found therein.

2022 BRASS Scholar Reception



BRASS Celebrates 10th Annual Judi & Jack Johnson Day

On October 17, our four 2022-2023 BRASS Scholars were introduced to the BRASS family. They were welcomed by 120 guests at this annual event that once again this year was graciously underwritten and hosted in the beautiful Bellaire home of Dr. Kelly Larkin and Fernando Parra.

Scholars Emily Schultz PhD, Kat Kabotyanski MD/PhD, Maryshe Zietsman MD/PhD, and Joseph Zoeller MD/PhD were introduced by BRASS Scholar selection committee members, Dr. James Bonar, Robin Simon, Dr. Matthew Baker, and Myra Wilson respectively.

This event celebrates Judi and Jack Johnson for their continued generous research support through the Wintermann Foundation which, each year, provides our 16 BRASS scholars in the Baylor College of Medicine Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences a \$3,000 stipend to help fund their research during years two to five of their graduate studies. Scholars use these discretionary funds for research supplies, lab equipment, and other needed agents to perfect their research process.

BRASS Scholars Ashley Hayden (2019-2020) PhD and Sarah Waldgovel (2020-2021) MD/PhD spoke of the impact of this financial support from the Wintermann foundation and how profoundly it has advanced their research efforts and results. .

Myra Wilson and Ed McMahon presented a certificate and \$500 award with congratulations to BRASS scholars Ashley Hayden, Jennifer Deger and Mariah Berner, for being honored as the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo 2022 Outstanding Community Leaders.

This award is in recognition of their outstanding service to the community, society, and humanity through their personal involvement and leadership.



2022 BRASS Holiday Party



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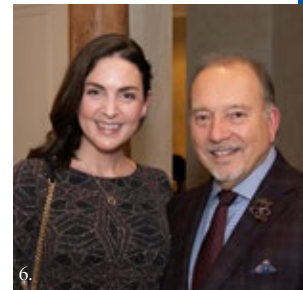
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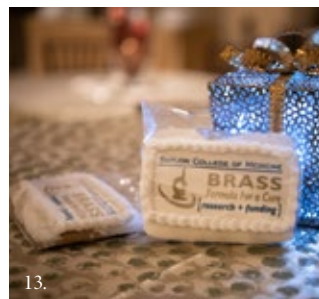
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15.

1. Jack and Judi Johnson
2. Carolyn Faulk, Ed McMahon and Elsie Eckert
3. Betty and Jesse Tutor
4. Françoise Marks, Peter and Celine VanDerlofske
5. Dr. David Wright, Marcia and Steve Brown
6. Laura Owen Pio and Dr. James Bonar
7. Jesse and Dr. Shelly Buffington and Judi Johnson
8. Linda Kuykendall
9. Mary Ann and David McKeithan and Joni Baird
10. Ed McMahon, Mary Ellen and Rod Crosby
11. Drs. Coralia Miho and John Gomez
12. Lily, Juliette and Dr. Matthew Baker
13. Special signature cookies courtesy of Carolyn Faulk
14. Chandler Fielder and Kali Deans Fielder and Les Eckert
15. Ann Richardson
16. Edna Meyer Nelson and Jody Merritt
17. Dr. Shelly Buffington, Dr. David Wright and Elsie Eckert
18. Ed McMahon and Myra Wilson

2022 BRASS Holiday Party



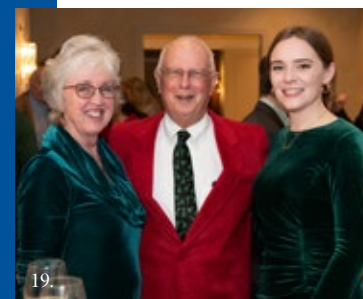
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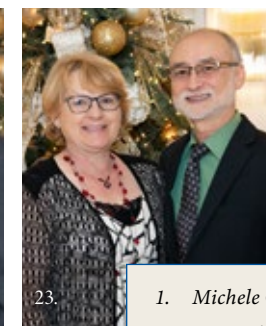
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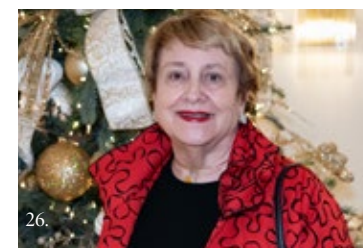
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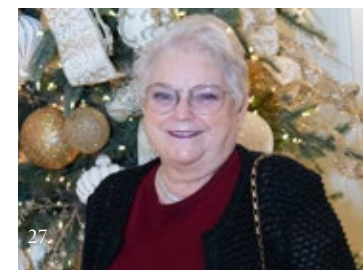
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27.

1. Michele Collins, Craig Moffatt and Emily Schultz
2. Dr. Michael Mann
3. Janet Hansen
4. Araly and Chuck Simmons
5. Tracy and Dr. Fred Pereira
6. Dr. Rashieda Hatcher and Jo Ann Petersen
7. Dominique Armstrong, Dr. William Decker and Sharon Amanya
8. Lynn Averett
9. Dr. Gayle Slaughter

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1. Jack and Judi Johnson with 24 BRASS Scholars
2. Maryshe Zietsman, Drs. Coralia Miho and John Gomez
3. Janet Hansen, Elsie Eckert and Kali Deans
4. Judi and Jack Johnson and Linda Kuykendall
5. Mike Taylor, Marcia and Steve Brown
6. Myra Wilson and Joe Zoeller
7. Kathleen and Tom Mach
8. Ed McMahon and Jo Ann Petersen
9. Fernando Parra and Dr. James Bonar
10. Robin Simon, John Maguire and Chandler Fielder
11. Tamara Bonar, Mary Ann and David McKeithan and Dr. Kelly Larkin

BRASS Highlights

Past Scholars Join BRASS Leadership



▲ **Dr. Verena Kallhoff** After five years in Austin, BRASS scholar and now member, Dr. Verena Kallhoff recently returned to Houston. A native of Germany, Verena became the Don D. Jordan scholar upon matriculation in 2003. With numerous publications covering her work on Alzheimer's Disease, Dr. Kallhoff graduated with a PhD in Molecular and Human Genetics in 2008. Passionate about science and its potential to improve human lives, her work at the intersection of research, innovation and entrepreneurship took her from Houston Methodist Research Institute to Austin in late 2017. There she joined the innovation team at the newly formed Dell Medical School working with numerous innovators and entrepreneurs to translate their technology into a company and was instrumental in supporting a vibrant innovation ecosystem in the region. Returning to Houston, Verena will leverage her broad experiences to bolster the Houston life science ecosystem as Sr. Director, Global Life Science with the Greater Houston Partnership. In addition, working closely with BRASS leadership, she will foster appreciation, love and support for BRASS and its scholars through supporting the establishment of a young professionals group.



▲ **Dr. Shelly Buffington** Doctor Buffington, 2007 Don D. Jordan BRASS Scholar, was recently appointed to the faculty of the Baylor College of Medicine Department of Neuroscience and Center for Precision Environmental Health as a McNair Scholar. She is returning to BCM after a very successful four years founding her independent laboratory at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston. Buffington graduated Summa cum laude from the University of Arkansas with a degree in chemistry in 2007. She performed her doctoral research in neuroscience with Matt Rasband at BCM, where she went on to postdoc with Mauro Costa-Mattioli. Here, she pioneered a new research direction in the lab, investigating the relationship between maternal diet-induced obesity and heightened risk for neurodevelopmental disorders in offspring. Now, she and her NIH R01-funded research team study the mechanisms by which environmentally-induced disruption of the maternal gut microbiome and its remodeling during pregnancy influence fetal programming of brain development and behavior and are working to harness the potential for therapeutic targeting of the maternal gut microbiome to improve long-term neuropsychiatric outcomes in descendant generations. She is eager to contribute to the BRASS mission in her new role as a BCM faculty member.

BRASS to Form Young Professionals Group

Working with the BRASS Board, the mission of the BRASS Young Professionals is to foster relationship-building, career development, entrepreneurial endeavors and civic involvement among 20 to 40 year old professionals with an interest in "the pursuit of excellence in biomedical research." The BYP vision is to empower members to become leaders in the BRASS organization and our medical community. BRASS members Nikki Rosenberg, Laura Owen Pio, Dr. Verena Kalkoff and Dr. Shelly Buffington are organizing and reaching out to peers to bring BYP to fruition.

BRASS Scholars Receive Awards

▼ BRASS Scholar (2019-2020) Ashley Hayden, Ph.D. candidate and Sarah Waldvogel (2020-2021) MD/PhD candidate (below) spoke at the scholar's reception about how impactful the financial support provided by the Wintermann Foundation has been to her research's advancement and results. Linda Zhang, M.D./Ph.D. candidate (2018-2019) also shared her gratitude for the Foundation's support.



◀ Myra Wilson and Ed McMahon presented Ashley Hayden, Jennifer Deger and Mariah Berner with framed certificates and a \$500 award for being selected as the 2022 HLS&R Outstanding Community BRASS Scholars of the year. This award is in recognition of their outstanding service to the community, society, and humanity through their personal involvement and leadership.

BRASS Officers 2023-2024

Founder Myra Wilson [†]	Recording Secretary Jo Ann Petersen	Social Correspondent Robin Simon [†]
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Event/Membership Chair Linda Kuykendall	Research Grants & Scholarship Liaison/Advisor Dr. James Bonar	[†] Scholar Selection Committee Member
Second Vice President Don D. Jordan	Scholar Selection & Research Grant Advisor Dr. Matthew Baker [†]	

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