

9-17-2022

## By the Numbers

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### eCommons Citation

Spina, Eric F., "By the Numbers" (2022). *President's Blog: From the Heart*. 319.  
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# By the Numbers : University of Dayton, Ohio

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Saturday September 17, 2022

## By the Numbers

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By Eric F. Spina

("You're the kind of leaders who don't just imagine a better world. You go about the business of creating it," said University of Dayton President Eric F. Spina at the 2022 Alumni Awards dinner on Sept. 17. Here are his remarks.)

Good evening!

I am thrilled, just thrilled, to be here tonight to honor five outstanding alumni who inspire us to dream big and make a big difference in the world. Congratulations, Jon, Tracy, LaShea, Jim, and Tom! You are so worthy of all the accolades you'll hear tonight.

I also offer a special Flyer welcome to family, friends, and past recipients who are sharing in their joy this evening. And I congratulate our 10 Under 10 honorees in the audience. These young, outstanding alumni have taken the UD motto, "Learn. Lead. Serve." to heart. They're

an inspiration.

Tonight's award recipients represent the best that UD offers to the world. You are the very definition of servant-leaders, molded in the Marianist tradition. You have charted a path of selfless service to your communities, to your alma mater, to the world — and by your very actions are encouraging generations of students to follow in your footsteps.

I describe this pattern as a virtuous circle, but others offer their own take. Molly MacCready, whose nonprofit provides scholarships to street children in Uganda, coined a catchy phrase when she received her Alumni Award a few years ago — and these words still ring true: “Learn. Lead. Serve. Repeat.”

### ***Learn. Lead. Serve. Repeat.***

The more time I spend with our alumni award recipients, the more I deeply admire the way you live out those words. You are people of both high competence and high character. You're the kind of leaders who don't just imagine a better world. You go about the business of creating it.

To be able to celebrate your achievements tonight is truly a blessing. A huge thanks to Jen Weed, president of the Alumni Association, and to the Alumni Awards Committee for shining the spotlight on you.

I'd like to briefly give you a glimpse into the lives of all of our honorees by using numbers. Let's start with one.

## **1**

LaShea Smith Lofton holds the distinction of being the first recipient and graduate of the W.S. McIntosh Scholarship — a joint UD-city of Dayton program now in its 35<sup>th</sup> year of providing a worthy student each year with a full scholarship *and* a four-year internship with the city. With a commitment to social justice and community leadership, LaShea blazed the path for generations of talented local Black students who aspire to civic leadership roles in our community. As deputy city manager, she continues to be an exemplar and inspiration for today's students. Life has come full circle as she now facilitates the internship program for the McIntosh Scholars. See what I mean about virtuous circle?

## **20**

In his dorm room, Jon Dekar developed a prototype of Obi, a revolutionary eating device to help individuals with upper extremity limitations gain independence. He revised the prototype again and again and upon graduation founded a company to develop the first robotic feeding device. His invention, which sprung out of a desire to help his grandfather and a young girl named Hope, is now available in some 20 countries. “My personal end game,” he says, “is all

about being useful to others. I want to do everything in my power to be a force for good within my family, community and, to the extent possible, society at large.” In a word, Jon’s work is transformative. It’s research for the common good.

## **36**

Beyond Jim Stitt’s extraordinary career achievements, strong work ethic and commitment to community service, he and his wife, Carol, have an amazing track record of philanthropy. For 36 consecutive years, they have made gifts to the University of Dayton. They established the Altha P. and John F. Stitt Endowed Scholarship in honor of his parents and the Stitt Scholars Program that provides paid internships to engineering and business students who work with entrepreneurs and start-up companies at The Hub in the Dayton Arcade. That hands-on learning experience is a game changer for our students, who will enter their professions with skills in creativity and collaboration — and the confidence to imagine what might be.

## **8,500**

That’s the number of new beds, cribs and bedding that Tracy Irvine Janess has provided to needy Dayton-area families through the nonprofit Secret Smiles that her late sister Kristy founded. When Kristy died in the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center, Tracy and fellow UD graduate Meredith O’Neill Hassett stepped up to continue Kristy’s legacy. Through their heartbreak, they turned their tears into smiles — and the organization Secret Smiles blossomed. Tracy is caring for our community’s children and families, teaching us all what it means to be our brother and sister’s keeper.

## **1.3 million**

Retired Lieutenant General Tom Seamands provided support to an astounding 1.3 million soldiers and civilians during his nearly 40 years in the U.S. Army in personnel policy and management positions. He’s a people person, a selfless leader and a true patriot who served his nation honorably. Speaking of numbers, I love what he once told a reporter. He said, “I always tell my team that every time they see a number, it’s not just a number; it’s a person who has dreams, aspirations, and goals and who came into the Army to make a difference.” Tom is a difference-maker.

Congratulations — and thank you — to tonight’s honorees. We are so proud of all you’ve accomplished — and the mark you’ve made and will continue to make on the world.  
(Applause)

Before I introduce Father Jim Fitz for the invocation, I would like to remind us all that this past Sunday we commemorated 21 years since the 9/11 terrorist attack, which hit close to home for two of our recipients. Lieutenant General Seamands spent 10 years at the Pentagon, but he was thankfully out of the office that fateful morning. Later, the American

flag draped over his window as a symbol of unity. As you're aware, Tracy lost her sister, Kristy, in the World Trade Center attack. She found a measure of peace through service to others. We will always honor those we lost and the heroic first responders.

Please enjoy dinner and conversation at your tables. During dessert, we will present the awards, and then Jen will moderate a panel discussion with our honorees.

Thank you!