



Milestones



A Lasting Tribute: Riggio Gift Advances Care for Patients with Dementia

Louise Riggio and Dr. Matthew Fink

JOHN ABBOTT

Inspired to help patients and their families who are dealing with dementia, donor Louise Riggio has made a generous \$6 million gift to expand memory and cognitive care programs at Weill Cornell Medicine. The contribution honors her late husband, Leonard Riggio, founder and former executive chair of Barnes & Noble, who struggled with a severe cognitive illness before his passing in 2024.

The Riggio Foundation's generous gift will support the establishment of brain health and cognitive care resources at the Midtown Clinical Care Center, currently under construction at 575 Lexington Avenue. The gift will also endow the Leonard Riggio Clinical Scholar Award and support the recruitment of faculty who specialize in working with dementia patients and their families.

"Len was the man who fixed everything, and he was determined to fix his illness, but he couldn't," explains Mrs. Riggio. "Dementia is a terrible disease, beyond cruel."

Research aimed at curing Alzheimer's and Lewy body dementia (LBD), the form of cognitive illness that affected Mr. Riggio, is vital, she says, but so, too, is the need for compassionate care and support. Mrs. Riggio's gift focuses on helping Weill Cornell Medicine provide enhanced clinical care and support.

The new midtown center will provide interdisciplinary treatment and support for memory disorders

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**We're
Changing
Medicine.**

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and dementia, movement disorders like Parkinson's disease and women's brain health initiatives. It will also house a specialized psychiatry care practice, which is often essential for caring for those with dementia.

This dynamic, patient-focused facility will also offer advanced imaging, primary care and specialty services in one central hub. The facility will dramatically accelerate and expand patient access to innovative trials, emerging therapies and supportive programs led by teams of physicians and support staff specially trained in this field.



Leonard and Louise Riggio in 2019

"I am absolutely delighted with this extraordinary and generous gift from Mrs. Riggio," says Dr. Matthew Fink, associate dean for clinical affairs, chair of the Department of Neurology and the Louis and Gertrude Feil Professor in Clinical Neurology, who also treated Mr. Riggio. "Her vital philanthropy will have a tremendous impact on our ability to develop new diagnostic techniques, treatments and support for people with life-altering neurodegenerative disorders and their families."

A Commitment to Serving Others

The couple, who were together for more than 50 years and raised three children, were generous philanthropists who supported a range of causes that promoted social justice and education. In 2021, they pledged \$5.6 million to expand debt-free scholarship funding for Weill Cornell Medicine students in need.

Mr. Riggio, who developed the book retailer Barnes & Noble from a single store in 1971 into one of the largest booksellers in the United States, was a visionary leader and brilliant marketer who cared about his employees and wanted to

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Louise Riggio

ensure the best possible customer experience, his wife says. The couple enjoyed a life filled with art and books.

Mr. Riggio was 80 when Dr. Fink diagnosed him with Alzheimer's disease in 2021. The progression was expected to be slow, but once Mr. Riggio developed Lewy Body Dementia, his health declined quickly.

Born and raised in Manhattan, Mrs. Riggio has relied on Weill Cornell Medicine as

her family's primary source of care since childhood. It was therefore comforting for Mrs. Riggio to turn to Weill Cornell Medicine's Department of Neurology for her husband's care. In addition to Dr. Fink, the couple's Weill Cornell Medicine physicians have included Dr. Michael Cantor, clinical assistant professor of medicine, and Dr. Leonard Girardi, chair of the Department of Cardiothoracic Surgery and the O. Wayne Isom Professor of Cardiothoracic Surgery. Mr. Riggio was especially grateful to Dr. Cantor and Dr. Girardi for their expert cardiac care over the years, Mrs. Riggio says.

The Department of Neurology, led by Dr. Fink, was an important source of support during the three years that Mr. Riggio lived with dementia.

"During severe episodes, the staff met Len's needs with compassion and expertise," says Mrs. Riggio, who hopes her gift ensures that Weill Cornell Medicine can continue providing the same level of treatment for families from all socioeconomic backgrounds. "The emotional and physical challenges of caring for a loved one with dementia are extraordinary, and more needs to be done to support the profound day-to-day needs of patients and their families."

"I am grateful that I can both honor Len's memory and help Weill Cornell Medicine make a real difference," she adds. "I have no doubt that Len would have been pleased."

From Our Dean

At Weill Cornell Medicine, we are practicing medicine that puts people first. We are driven by a commitment to provide world-class expertise to every person who seeks our care – fueling collaboration, innovation and continual improvement. Our mission is simple: to deliver personalized, compassionate care that makes a difference.

Our patients are at the center of all our work. Whether at the clinician’s bedside, at the lab bench or in the classroom, our efforts are changing lives. People around the world trust us with their care, and through strategic planning and visionary philanthropy – exemplified by Louise Riggio’s gift featured in this issue’s cover story – we are empowered to deliver our very best.

As medicine continues to evolve, we confront challenges that test and shape our institution. Critical funding, once guaranteed, is now less certain, and the public perception of science and health care continues to shift. Yet even in adversity, there is always opportunity. By embracing data and new technologies, harnessing our collective talent, and expanding our local and global reach, we move forward with renewed energy and ambition.

And we do this work with the steadfast support of our donors and friends. You push us to excel, to expand and to imagine what comes next. Even now, as we grow our clinical footprint through the Midtown Clinical Care Center and soon at 1334 York Avenue, we do so with deep gratitude for your generosity and shared commitment to our mission.

We are on the precipice of a new era in health care at Weill Cornell Medicine, and are grateful to embark on this journey with you.

With gratitude,



R. Harrington MD

Robert A. Harrington, M.D.
Stephen and Suzanne Weiss Dean, Weill Cornell Medicine
Provost for Medical Affairs, Cornell University

Q&A: What Inspires Giving?



Meet Jenna Segal

Passionate about conveying women's stories, Jenna Segal brings these projects to life as an Emmy, Tony and Clio-award winning producer, with theatrical credits that include Broadway shows *Hadestown*, *Suffs* and *Six*. Ms. Segal is also CEO and founder of Gatherer Enterprises, a private investment and production company that advances female-focused storytelling and achievement in entertainment and sports.

Deeply committed to the causes she champions, Ms. Segal has served on Weill Cornell Medicine's Board of Fellows since May 2024 and also volunteers her time and talents as a member of the Dean's Council and Women's Health Council. Philanthropy is a vital part of her life and her service to Weill Cornell Medicine reflects both her gratitude for the exceptional care her family has received and her dedication to advancing the organization's goals.

Ms. Segal recently sat down with Lucille M. Ferraro, Weill Cornell Medicine's assistant vice provost for development, to discuss her thoughts around philanthropy and her inspiration for giving to others.

Lucille Ferraro: Thank you for your extraordinary dedication to Weill Cornell Medicine. How did you first become involved with us?

Jenna Segal: My family came in with a clinical issue, and through the process, we met Dr. Francis Lee, chair of the Department of Psychiatry at Weill Cornell Medicine, with whom our whole family started a relationship. Dr. Lee took a genuine interest in my son, welcoming his curiosity and inviting him to ask questions about topics that fascinated him, including how artificial intelligence is being applied in medicine. What stood out most was the extraordinary level of attention and personal investment he offered, engaging my son in thoughtful conversations about science, innovation, and possibility. The care, mentorship, and dedication he extended went far beyond what we ever expected, forging a deep and lasting bond between our family and Weill Cornell Medicine.

We then became incredibly inspired by the work that Dr. Lee was doing, particularly when he and his team were creating Maya, a mobile app-based, therapeutic program designed to support the mental health of young adults. Seeing firsthand the vision and commitment behind that work, we were proud to help fund the program's creation.

LF: You've been so generous with your time in support of Weill Cornell Medicine. Please share what your service to the institution has meant to you?

JS: Since becoming involved with Weill Cornell Medicine, I've been grateful for the opportunity to serve on the Board of Fellows and to host gatherings on behalf of the institution – introducing others to this extraordinary community of supporters and to the premier research and clinical excellence that define it. I especially value my work with the Board's International Affairs Committee, which feels like a natural extension of my degree from the Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University. That perspective has deepened my appreciation for how thoughtfully Weill Cornell Medicine approaches patient care in a multicultural, international environment — and how essential that understanding is to deliver truly effective care.

LF: How do you think about your nonprofit involvement and the role that altruism and generosity play in your own philosophy toward Weill Cornell Medicine?

JS: Well, the idea of *Tikkun Olam* was something that was ingrained in me from a very early age: "Leave the world in better shape than where you found it and help your neighbors." I feel a strong responsibility to my community. With giving, there becomes a certain point where you look for the places that really can do the best work with the resources that you're providing. So, my ability to create an impact is by

finding the people that I trust the most and feel good about. And in terms of philanthropy, you hear a lot about time, talent, and treasure. I consider that greatly when I decide what to give my time to. Here, I know that my gifts are going to an organization that will steward them well.

And in a world filled with uncertainty and growing stress, the work we've done with Dr. Lee feels even more urgent to me. His vision for expanding access to thoughtful, scalable mental health support reflects exactly why I place my trust in Weill Cornell Medicine — because the need is great, and through leaders like him, we can extend care in ways that truly meet this moment.

LF: What inspires you to give?

JS: I believe it's always important to share what you have with others, whether you have very little or have been truly fortunate in life. And when it comes to health care, it's rewarding to pay your care forward. Paying that gratitude forward — in whatever way you're able — has a way of making both you and someone else feel a little better.

LF: You maintain a strong commitment to women and their empowerment, and your support of women in leadership roles is inspiring, as is your commitment to women's health. In what ways do you hope Weill Cornell Medicine will transform health care for women?

JS: At the new Midtown Clinical Care Center under construction at 575 Lexington Avenue, we have a really good opportunity to welcome more patients to benefit from the stellar care that we provide here. Once the hub for women's health opens at 575 Lexington Avenue, it's going to feel pretty incredible to have a place where people are concerned about the full spectrum of women's health. It positions us to lead the way in defining and delivering the very best care for women. That's deeply inspiring and profoundly important to us — and it matters just as much to men, who care about the health and well-being of their mothers, daughters, sisters and wives.

LF: When you think of Weill Cornell Medicine what are some positives that you've experienced, whether as a receiver of care for yourself or your family, or as a volunteer?

JS: Through my connection to Weill Cornell, I've learned so much about myself and my family and our health. The doctors who work here actually care — I haven't encountered a dismissive doctor yet. They listen and they genuinely hear me. For those of us who have the good fortune to receive care here, you become part of a community of professionals who support not just the patient, but actually the entire family. Being involved with Weill Cornell Medicine has been a remarkable journey, and I'm deeply grateful to be a part of this.

Alumni Bequest Creates Lasting Opportunity for Students



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Dr. Theresa Rohr-Kirchgraber (M.D. '88) and Dr. Paul Kirchgraber (M.D. '88)

Dr. Theresa Rohr-Kirchgraber (M.D. '88) and her husband, Dr. Paul Kirchgraber (M.D. '88), met at Weill Cornell Medicine as medical students in the 1980s. Both recipients of scholarships to support their education, their early experiences laid the foundation for a lifetime of achievements and, decades later, the chance to support the next generation of promising students.

The couple recently established a generous planned gift to endow a Weill Cornell Medicine scholarship fund – assuring that future generations of students benefit from the same elite medical education they received. The Kirchgrabers were drawn to making a \$50,000 pledge, along with creating a six-figure planned gift because it enables them to create a lasting legacy without impacting their financial security today.

“We’ve come to a point in our careers where we’re able to focus on others,” says Dr. Kirchgraber, a retired pharmaceutical executive who, like his wife, teaches at the AU/UGA Medical Partnership, a medical school jointly run by the University of Georgia and Augusta University. “We were both beneficiaries of grants and scholarships, which made a huge difference to us when we were attending Weill Cornell Medicine, and we are very grateful to the donors who helped us.”

For Dr. Rohr-Kirchgraber, the decision to attend Weill Cornell Medicine was eased by her scholarship package. A California native, she was all set to go to a state medical school near her home when she realized that Weill Cornell Medicine’s generous financial aid reduced the cost to about the same as the public option.

Dr. Rohr-Kirchgraber, the daughter of a construction worker and a stay-at-home mom, was the first in her family to attend college and medical school. She is now a practicing internist and professor of medicine at the AU/UGA Medical Partnership, which is seeking accreditation to become the independent University of Georgia School of Medicine.

Back in 1984, Paul Kirchgraber, a student at Manhattan University in the Bronx, knew he wanted to become a doctor but was also concerned about the cost. Generous financial aid from Weill Cornell Medicine helped him afford four years of school and the expense of living on the Upper East Side, close to campus.

The couple took the same classes, got to know one another and fell in love. They married after graduation and later raised three children.

“Weill Cornell Medicine provided a special experience for us at a very important time in our lives,” says Dr. Rohr-Kirchgraber. “We learned how to become thorough, expert physicians, and we learned that medicine has global implications. In fact, Weill Cornell Medicine funding helped me study in Peru during my fourth year.”

“We believe that supporting medical education is important if you have the resources and are looking for a way to impact society.”

Dr. Paul Kirchgraber

Years later, the two physicians remain active alumni and serve in leadership roles on the board of the Weill Cornell Medical College Alumni Association, and on its Student Engagement Committee. Dr. Rohr-Kirchgraber also serves on the board’s Awards Selection Committee.

“We believe that supporting medical education is important if you have the resources and are looking for a way to impact society,” says Dr. Kirchgraber. “Weill Cornell Medicine, through its educational, clinical and research mission, has such a profound global reach. We are grateful to help the next generation succeed in their careers as physicians, researchers or in industry.”

Events

Inaugural Alumni Giving Society Reception

Weill Cornell Medicine's new Feil Family and Weill Family Residence Hall was the site of the Alumni Giving Society's inaugural Reception on November 3rd. The reception honored the generosity of alumni and featured a panel discussion with Dean Harrington and three students who are beneficiaries of alumni philanthropy. The Weill Cornell Medicine Alumni Giving Society recognizes alumni who make an annual contribution of \$1,000 or more to the institution.



From left: Students Kwadwo Amoako-Boadu, Anisah Alladeen and Molly Monge, Dean Robert A. Harrington M.D., Dr. Edwin Su (M.D. '97), vice president, Weill Cornell Medical College Alumni Association, and Dr. Anthony Rossi (M.D. '08), president, Weill Cornell Medical College Alumni Association

STUDIO BROOKE



From left: Dr. Mitchell Blatt, Dr. Roy "Trip" Gulick and Debra Gelband

Dean's Council Fall Cocktail Reception

Dean's Council members Debra and Michael Gelband hosted a cocktail reception for the Council at their home on October 8th. The evening featured an engaging fireside chat with Dr. Roy "Trip" Gulick, chief of infectious diseases at Weill Cornell Medicine, and Dean's Council Co-Chair and Board of Fellows member Dr. Mitchell Blatt. Dr. Gulick shared insights on vaccines, the respiratory virus season, and Weill Cornell Medicine's efforts to prevent future pandemics. The Dean's Council brings together dedicated philanthropists whose generosity is recognized through unique opportunities to engage with world-renowned physicians, researchers, and health care leaders at events and gatherings throughout the year.

2025 Gale and Ira Drukier Prize and Lecture

The 2025 Gale and Ira Drukier Prize and Lecture, held October 16th, honored the work of Dr. Lauren Henderson, a physician-scientist whose research focuses on children with difficult-to-treat juvenile idiopathic arthritis and other autoimmune disorders. Dr. Henderson, winner of the 2025 Drukier Prize, is an associate professor of pediatrics at Harvard Medical School and a pediatric rheumatologist at Boston Children's Hospital. Dr. Crystal Mackall, the Ernest and Amelia Gallo Family Professor and a professor of pediatrics and medicine at Stanford University School of Medicine, delivered the Gale and Ira Drukier Lecture in Children's Health. The Drukier Prize, which recognizes the work of an early-career researcher, and the Drukier Lecture, which provides exposure to a senior researcher who has had lasting impact on children's health, were established in 2014 as part of a \$25 million gift to Weill Cornell Medicine from Dr. Gale Drukier and Weill Cornell Medicine Board of Fellows member Ira Drukier.



From left: Dr. Lauren Henderson, Dr. Crystal Mackall, Dr. Gale Drukier, Ira Drukier, Dr. Virginia Pascual and Dean Robert A. Harrington, M.D.

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