

A Global View of Public Health

As president of an international nonprofit that fights avoidable blindness, Barbara DeBuono '76, '80M (MD) takes on a new mission in public health.

By Husna Haq

BARBARA DEBUONO '76, '80M (MD) CREDITS literature with sparking her lifelong interest in medicine and public health.

She was just 14 when she read *Microbe Hunters*, the Paul de Kruif classic detailing science's advances against infectious diseases over the previous several centuries.

"It was such a great book, I thought, 'Wow, I want to save the world,'" says DeBuono. "That started me on my journey toward public health and medicine."

DeBuono's latest stop on that three-decade journey is her role as president and CEO of ORBIS International, a world-

A biology major at Rochester, DeBuono earned her MD from the School of Medicine and Dentistry, followed by a master's in public health from Harvard University. Specializing in infectious disease and epidemiology, she's built a three-decade career in both the public and private sectors.

Her leadership positions include appointments as director of health of the state of Rhode Island, where she established a comprehensive breast cancer-screening program and authored AIDS legislation. She also served as the commissioner of health for New York state under Gov. George Pataki, where she shaped a health care reform agenda that included develop-

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wide nonprofit organization that supports hands-on public health education and training for local ophthalmologists in more than 85 countries. Based in New York City, the organization and its global commitment are symbolized by its state-of-the-art Flying Eye Hospital and through its permanent country offices in Bangladesh, China, Ethiopia, India, Vietnam, and South Africa.

"What interested me was its mission, the idea of working in the developing world to address blindness," says DeBuono. "I frankly didn't know anything about eye health, and this gave me the opportunity to learn something completely new and different, and to work on a global level, with an NGO with an interesting mission."

ing the state's Medicaid managed care program and implementing the Child Health Insurance Program.

In the private sector, she has served as chief executive at the New York Presbyterian Healthcare Network, executive director of public health and government at Pfizer, and chief medical officer and global director of public health and social marketing at Porter Novelli.

Her work as a physician and public health professional has been guided by another important lesson learned from literature. In high school, DeBuono read Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, a play about a doctor who discovers that the baths in his coastal Norwegian town are being contami-



nated by a nearby tannery. When he tries to persuade the town to close the baths, a source of pride and tourism, the doctor is denounced as a lunatic.

"That was very powerful and I've learned a tremendous amount from reading it," says DeBuono. She adds that a central tenet of public health is not simply determining appropriate actions, but taking into consideration your audience, environment, and politics to most effectively communicate information and influence change.



WORLDWIDE APPROACH:
As president and CEO of ORBIS International, DeBuono oversees an organization that helps treat and prevent blindness in more than 85 countries.

“I am a public health physician at heart,” DeBuono says. “I’m one of those people who likes to roll up my sleeves and solve problems, and at the end of the day come up with solutions that work, that make a difference, and that have an impact. That is what has always motivated me.”

Her sister, Lauren DeBuono, an attorney and business executive who has worked with DeBuono to establish the MAIA Foundation—a public charity that strives to improve the health and health literacy of

women in sub-Saharan Africa with a focus on reducing maternal mortality—says her sister “has been very driven, persistent, and focused from a relatively early age.”

DeBuono has traveled to Uganda and Rwanda for MAIA and to Africa and Asia with ORBIS. In February, she plans to travel to the Philippines for the first time with the Flying Eye Hospital and its volunteer faculty.

“It’s good to get out and actually roll up your sleeves and see what’s going on

firsthand,” she says. “You understand so much more about what’s the right strategy to approach a public health issue if you get out there and embed yourself in the environment.”

It’s a lesson she learned in the pages of Ibsen, and one she’s taken to heart ever since. **R**

Husna Haq is a Rochester-based freelance writer. For more about ORBIS, visit www.orbis.org; for the MAIA Foundation, visit www.themaiafoundation.org.

Finding the ‘Wei’ of Chocolate

Lisa Reinhardt '85 infuses her chocolate business with the lessons of her spiritual journey.

By Husna Haq

A SELF-DESCRIBED “SMALL TOWN GIRL” from western New York, **Lisa Reinhardt '85** has traveled far to become a meditation-advocating, socially responsible chocolatier.

Like the path to Nirvana, her journey to vegan chocolate-making was long and winding, characterized by an open mind and a fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants philosophy.

The result? A unique, Phoenix-based business that turns out chocolates infused with Reinhardt's Eastern philosophy and global sensibility. It's an approach that she hopes will give those immersed in the hustle and bustle of Western culture food for thought.

“I realized that if you put an exquisite piece of chocolate in someone's mouth and tell them to just let it melt, not to chew, they would do the same thing they would do if meditating—rest in the present moment in rich mindfulness,” Reinhardt says. “Chocolate works in this culture; everyone speaks the language of chocolate.”

Founded in 2007, Wei of Chocolate—“wei” is a Chinese character that means “transformative action”—specializes in dark chocolate made from organic, vegan, and fair-trade ingredients. Featuring an assortment of chocolates infused with homeopathic flower, spice, and herb essences, including favorites such as “Wei Gratitude,” “Wei Love,” and “Wei Inspired,” the company is guided by Reinhardt's philosophy of balancing mind and body.

“I didn't want to make something bad for people,” she says. “For me, it had to be clean and healthy on every level: Good for the body, good for the mind, good for the environment, as well as karmically clean.”

An English and history major at Rochester, Reinhardt says French classes with the late professor Charles Carlton helped launch her journey as an entrepreneur.

“It was Professor Carlton who got me started on the whole odyssey,” she says, ex-



plaining that he encouraged her to apply for a fellowship to teach English in France. “I was just a small town girl,” Reinhardt says, “So when I got the fellowship, it turned my whole life upside down.”

Reinhardt worked in France for two years. One day she found herself in a Parisian park, knocking at the door of a Tibetan temple. There, a teacher began schooling her in Tibetan meditation practices. Reinhardt, who had practiced Zen Buddhism, but never the more colorful Tibetan meditation, says she was immediately intrigued.

▲ **SUCCESSFUL “WEI”:** Reinhardt is guided by the idea that her chocolate works on several levels: “Good for the body, good for the mind, good for the environment, as well as karmically clean.”

“I didn't want to just get a secondhand version, I really wanted to hear it straight from the source,” she says. “At the end of my time in Paris, I left for Asia.”

There, Reinhardt spent the next 11 years in Nepal, Tibet, and India, working in a monastery, meditating, living at times in a cave, and learning the Tibetan language. She adopted the Tibetan philosophy that everything should be done for the benefit of all living beings, a worldview that would later guide her entrepreneurial ventures.

When Reinhardt returned to the United States, in part to be near her aging parents, she experienced a case of culture shock.

“I missed a whole generation, and a lot had changed,” Reinhardt says, recalling how surprised she was by the frenetic pace of life in the U.S. She wanted to teach

Americans meditation, “but everyone was too busy,” she says. “No one wanted to hear about it.” So Reinhardt worked in publishing, advertising, and marketing as she decided her next move.

When friend Katie Hess, owner of Lotus Wei, an Arizona-based company that specializes in flower essences and oils, brought herb- and spice-infused chocolate truffles for a tea ceremony one afternoon, Reinhardt says, a light bulb went off.

Before she had even cooked up a plan, Reinhardt quit her job and began researching chocolate, researching the health literature, attending food shows, and talking to chocolatiers and suppliers.


Agreeing to participate at a local farmers’ market the same week that important pieces of her equipment arrived in the mail, Reinhardt launched Wei of Chocolate. Today, Reinhardt sells chocolate at 10 area farmers’ markets every week, as well as online and to spas nationwide.

For reviewers such as the online outlet the Mother Nature Network, the company is hitting a sweet spot. “Even flower essence skeptics will love the taste of Wei of Chocolate—deliciously creamy organic, vegan, and fair trade dark chocolates in decadent flavors. My favorite? Wei Love—chocolate with a kick of cayenne, plus cinnamon, ginger, mace, and maca, all of which give this treat a creamy yet grainy texture,” blogger Siel Ju wrote last summer.

And in December, Reinhardt was invited to showcase her chocolate at the ABC Home Store in Manhattan for a holiday shopping event.

“Lisa has been fearless about changing the paradigm of chocolate,” says Hess, who has worked closely with Reinhardt in founding and growing Wei of Chocolate. “She’s not afraid to try new things and innovate, and is especially talented at educating people about the more profound side of her business.”

Like the Chinese character her business is named after, Reinhardt is amazed at how Wei of Chocolate has transformed her life—and those of others.

“I created something where there was nothing before, and found a really creative way to accomplish something of meaning,” she says, “Something that could actually make people’s lives better.” 

Husna Haq is a Rochester-based freelance writer. For more about Wei of Chocolate, visit www.weiofchocolate.com.

In the News



AND THE GRAMMY NOMINEES ARE . . .

Nominees for the 54th annual Grammy Awards, which will be presented in Los Angeles on Feb. 12, include several Eastman alumni. Among this year’s nominees are:

Ron Carter ’59E, bassist. Best Improvised Jazz Solo for “You Are My Sunshine” on the album *This Is Jazz* (Half Note Records).

Renée Fleming ’83E (MM), soprano. Fleming performs the role of Violetta in the Royal Opera House production of Giuseppe Verdi’s *La Traviata*, which is up for Best Opera Recording.

John Hollenbeck ’90E, ’91E (MM), percussionist and composer. Best Instrumental Composition for “Falling Men” on the album *Shut Up and Dance* (Bee Jazz).

Christopher Lamb ’81E, percussionist. Best Classical Instrumental Solo for his performance in Joseph Schwanter’s *Concerto for Percussion and Orchestra*, recorded with the Nashville Symphony, on *Schwantner: Chasing Light . . .* (Naxos American Classics).

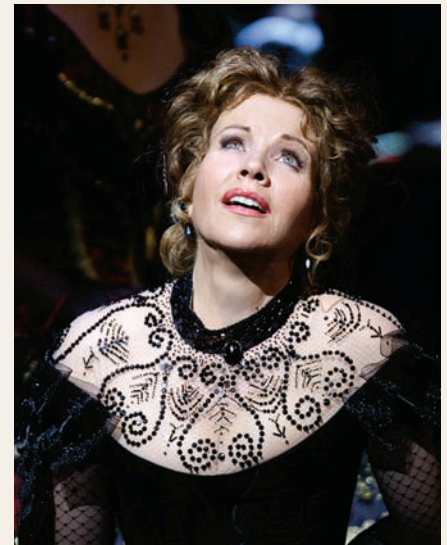
Alias Chamber Ensemble, including founder and violinist **Zeneba Bowers** ’94E, ’96E (MM), percussionist **Christopher Norton** ’83E, ’86E (MA), hornist **Leslie Norton** ’84E, harpist **Licia Jaskunas Vercruyse** ’94E, ’96E (MM), and eight other musicians. Best Small Ensemble Performance for *Hilos* (Naxos American Classics).

Robert Ludwig ’66E, ’01E (MM), mastering engineer. Best Engineered Album, Non-Classical for *Music is Better than Words* (Universal Republic), performed by Seth McFarlane.

ARCHAEOLOGIST DISCOVERS ICE AGE ART

A discovery made by a team led by University of Tübingen archaeologist and paleoanthropologist **Nicholas Conard** ’83, ’86 (MS) has turned out to be the earliest example of cave painting ever to be found in Central Europe. Archaeologists have long known about Ice Age cave paintings in France and Spain, but Conard’s discovery of the 15,000-year-old paintings in southern Germany’s Hohle Fels Cave, near the city of Ulm, is considered a breakthrough. The paintings consist of parallel rows of red dots, made from mixing hematite with calciferous drops of water, on limestone fragments.

The paintings aren’t the only groundbreaking discovery Conard and his team have made in the Hohle Fels Cave. They also found a flute made from bone and fragments of flutes carved from mammoth ivory dating from approximately 35,000 years ago, and a female figurine, dating from the same period (“Finding a New ‘Venus,’” *Rochester Review*, July-August 2009).



NOMINEE: Renée Fleming as Violetta in the Royal Opera’s production of *La Traviata*

Unglaublich! Er ist Pop Star!

Incredible!—Chris Aguilar '10, an alumnus of the a cappella group the Midnight Ramblers, is an Austrian pop sensation.

By Karen McCally '02 (PhD)

“IT’S HARD ENOUGH TO GET A MASTER’S DEGREE, but to be a pop star on top of that? That’s even harder,” says **Chris Aguilar** '10, over Skype, from his apartment in Vienna, Austria.

And one more thing: He’s really, really glad to be doing an interview in English. “You have no idea how frustrating it is to give an interview in a language you’re not so good at,” says Aguilar, who has been in Austria for a year.

An environmental studies major and German minor at Rochester, Aguilar has been a master’s student in international relations at Webster University Vienna (his courses

“We’re doing photo shoots, we’re doing autograph signings. We always want to perform at these events, so we often do a cappella. Being with the Ramblers, I learned so much about group dynamics, about leading, about a cappella blending, harmony, and melody.”

are conducted in “English, thank God”), as well as a bartender, a tutor, and an English teacher’s assistant.

Now he’s a member of the three-man band Kilmokit, hailed as Austria’s “first boy band,” whose debut CD, *Atemlos*, rose to No. 4 on iTunes Europe during the first week of its release last December.

It all started last fall, when at the suggestion of a friend, he auditioned for *Popstars Mission Austria*, an Austrian version of *American Idol* and other reality television series. “I don’t usually go to castings,” says



RAMBLE ON: Last fall, Aguilar helped keep an Austrian reality television audience riveted. With his shaky German, would he be able to rise to the top, making it into the final boy band, Kilmokit? As it turned out, “Ja” was the answer.

Aguilar. “But I missed singing so much,” he adds, alluding to his years as a member of the River Campus a cappella group the Midnight Ramblers.

Over two months, *Popstars* judges Fernanda Brandao, a Brazilian-German dancer and pop star, and Detlef D! Soost, a storied German choreographer and street dancer, went on a casting tour, holding auditions in all eight provinces of Austria. Over the course of a television season, 50 callbacks were whittled down to nine women and nine men, shown living, training, and competing against one another at a mountain resort. The object was to make—and then to stay in—either the three-member girl band, BFF, or the boy band counterpart, Kilmokit. Aguilar not only made it into the final Kilmokit, but helped the band prevail over BFF in a season finale contest decided by viewer votes. The victorious trio of “Chris, Flo, and Patrick” came away with a Sony recording contract, a series of promotional gigs on radio and television, and 100,000 Euros.

Each band member had his own challenge. For Aguilar, who was born in Mexico and raised bilingually in the United States, it was singing in his newest language. “Anything with an umlaut is really hard,” says Aguilar, who struggled through his lead vocal role in the band’s single “Keine Träne.” “I sang with a very thick accent, and there was a lot of laughter in the studio.”

Aguilar overcame that challenge in part because he can be a bit of a taskmaster. “They used to call me Mr. Perfect on the show, because I’m very—I want discipline a lot. I want to do a very good job with the choreo, with the voice, with everything.”

The camera-friendly former Rambler is enjoying overnight fame. “When I ride the metro, it’s an adventure. I’ve had people from an older couple to young children recognize me. One little girl was really cute. She didn’t think I was real,” he says, chuckling.

While Kilmokit is a pop group, with a drummer and guitarists, Aguilar says they often sing a cappella. “We’re doing photo shoots, we’re doing autograph signings,” he says. “We always want to perform at these events, so we often do a cappella. Being with the Ramblers, I learned so much about group dynamics, about leading, about a cappella blending, harmony, and melody.”

In fact, says Aguilar, “So many things from Rochester really prepared me. It’s ridiculous. It’s like the best training school for life.” **R**



MELIORA MOMENTS

Kate Gruschow '11S (MS)

Staff member, Simon School Advancement

HOW MANY OF US HAVE THOUGHT TWICE about getting a paper cut? Simply slap a Band-Aid on it, maybe some Neosporin, and off you go. If it were not for the care I received in the Kessler Burn & Trauma Center at Strong Memorial Hospital, a paper cut would have killed me. A paper cut.

While working for the Simon School of Business and staffing an alumni event in Charlotte, N.C., in late January 2011, I received a paper cut while setting out our nametags. A week later, it became infected. A week or so after that, I was in the Kessler Burn & Trauma Center fighting for my life.

I had developed toxic epidermal necrolysis (TENS, also known as Stevens Johnson Syndrome), an incredibly rare and potentially fatal allergic reaction to the antibiotic I was prescribed. I was given a 50 percent chance of survival, and my epidermis “burned” off over 95 percent of my body.

My *Meliora* Moment is threefold.

First, the care I received from Dr. Derek Bell and the staff at the Kessler Burn & Trauma Center literally saved my life. They healed this then 29-year-old mother of two and returned me to my family. It is truly medicine of the highest order.

Second, I am incredibly grateful to Dennis and Larry Kessler for their support of the unit at the Medical Center. I had visited another local hospital (closer to my home) three times before going to Strong with no diagnosis. At Strong, they knew immediately what it was and how to treat it.

Lastly, the outpouring of concern from the staff at the Simon School and University Advancement was overwhelming. A constant stream of cards was delivered to me at Strong (many eager visitors were declined due to my condition). Meals were arranged for my family upon my discharge. Everyone’s concern and thoughtfulness motivates me to be an “ever better” colleague.

At the time of my hospital stay, I was also a part-time student at Simon, and the faculty worked with me to get caught up. I am happy to report that a mere three months after discharge I walked across the stage at Eastman Theatre and received my master of science degree in business administration.

I am now a grateful patient, staff member, and alumna. **R**

For more *Meliora* Moments, and to submit your own, visit <http://meliora.rochester.edu>.