Every student at UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School is a future member of the Alumni Association—even a potential board member. For some, the opportunity comes up quickly. The association’s president, Geza Kiss, MD ’95, assistant professor of anesthesiology, remembers being invited to become the Class of 1995’s delegate to the board soon after graduation. Dr. Kiss, who received the Alumni Award, says, “I didn’t know much about the association at that point, and I thought serving on the board might be one of the perks of receiving the award. So, of course, I said yes.”

Dr. Kiss has served on the board continuously since 1995, including terms as membership chair and vice president, and he has co-chaired the past three Alumni Reunion Weekends. “The accumulated experience and continuity of the board are among its greatest strengths,” says Dr. Kiss.

Nancy Sierra, MD ’89, the Alumni Association’s vice president/president-elect, has served on the board for eight years. “The Alumni Association is a worthy cause,” she says, noting that new volunteers are turning out for association activities—from distributing mugs at Convocation to her favorite alumni event, Career Night. “Emergency medicine always has good attendance at Career Night, and we enjoy the students’ interest and good questions,” says Dr. Sierra, who is the physician quality director for Physician’s Practice Enhancement, LLC.

The Alumni Association secretary, Tamara LaCouture, MD ’94, was recruited to the board by her friend and colleague Eduardo Fernandez, MD ’89, then president of the association. Dr. LaCouture, who practices radiation oncology at Cooper Health System, enjoys the span of graduation years, interests, and experience among board members.

She hopes to encourage the “spirit of giving back,” so that the students are never without alumni support: “I want to keep the younger members active in the association, so when we’re the old guard, they’ll feel committed to the students and young alumni coming along behind them.”

Hank Lubin, MD, a former president and member “emeritus,” with extensive association experience, serves as treasurer. In addition to his leadership, alumni have benefited from Dr. Lubin’s extensive
computer skills. These include his design, creation, and maintenance of the association’s first Web site.

Dr. Lubin is also a knowledgeable fund raiser, with a clear view of the association’s role in the growth of the medical school. “Our biggest project was to build a $100,000 endowment, the RWJMS Alumni Association Scholarship Fund,” he says. “We reached that goal in four years, and we plan to keep adding to it.

“Some people are inclined to contribute to the long-term growth of the school through the endowment,” adds Dr. Lubin. “Others prefer the continuity of a named scholarship opportunity. The association offers a range of options, because the more choices people have in supporting an institution, the more likely they are to find their niche and want to give.” Dr. Lubin is an internist, in private practice in East Windsor.

In his first term on the board, Andrew Stefaniwsky, MD ’77, is chairing the Membership Committee. Why now? “I’ve enjoyed contributing to the school and attending reunions, and I’m proud to be an RWJMS grad,” he says. “Last summer, I found I had a little more time because my children were heading to college, and I wanted to Renew my ties to the school by getting more active in the association.

“Every graduate is a member of the Alumni Association, but they’re also very busy with their families and careers,” adds Dr. Stefaniwsky. “As membership chair, I hope to find ways to help alumni become active members of the association.” Dr. Stefaniwsky particularly enjoys speaking with students at alumni-sponsored events such as Career Night. “They’re interested in meeting and learning from someone with 30 years of medical experience.”

Dr. Stefaniwsky, a gastroenterologist, is in private practice in West Orange and is affiliated with St. Barnabas Hospital, in Livingston.

Ravi D. Goel, MD ’97, chairs the Development Committee. Dr. Goel started as a class delegate to the board in 2002 and has been active with the fifth and tenth reunion committees. He also serves on several professional boards and in June was elected to the American Medical Association–Young Physicians Section Governing Council.

No stranger to the association’s fund raising efforts, Dr. Goel regularly participated in its Phonathons as a student. Under his leadership, the board will continue to focus on the Hippocrates Scholarship, a full, four-year scholarship awarded annually to an incoming first-year student. He also hopes to help build the endowment for scholarships and increase awareness of the named scholarship opportunity for alumni who donate $1,000.

“The board is collegial, and Steve was a great president — very hands-on,” Dr. Goel says in a nod to Steven H. Krawet, MD ’89, who completed his term in 2006. “No one comes onto the board with a personal agenda — just a sense of responsibility to the medical school and alumni,” he adds. “We want to support the students and help recruit the best of New Jersey’s future doctors to RWJMS.”

Reunion co-chair Francine E. Sinofsky, MD ’81, clinical associate professor of obstetrics, gynecology, and reproductive sciences, is in private practice in East Brunswick and Manalapan. A past president of the Alumni Association, Dr. Sinofsky has chaired or co-chaired every Alumni Reunion Weekend since 1983.

— K.O’N.