



## Strangers in the West

While politicians in the U.S. debate whether to allow Syrian refugees into the county, LAU NY hosted a lecture and book signing in December with author and archeologist Dr. Linda K. Jacobs, who spoke about some of the earliest Syrian immigrants to the so-called “promised land.” Their story is detailed over the 400-plus pages of her new book, “Strangers in the West: The Syrian Colony of New York City, 1880-1900.”

The immigrants came from what was then known as Greater Syria, and lived in tenements in lower Manhattan. Arriving in the New World with little more than their resourcefulness and business acumen, Jacobs spoke about how they built a thriving colony that was the cultural and economic center of the Syrian diaspora in America.

In her book, Jacobs, who is the granddaughter of two Syrian emigrants from different parts of what is now Lebanon, blends family history with historical data to explore the lives of Syrians arriving in the United States during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Like many research quests, hers started with a journey into her family’s past.

“When I began four years ago, it was simply to do a genealogy of the family, understand the relationships and business activities of my relatives,” she said. “I was shocked to learn that no one had investigated the Manhattan colony ... It became my mission to reconstruct it by discovering every Syrian who had ever lived in New York before 1900. I did that, one name at a time.”

Jacobs presents a vivid portrait of life in this early immigrant community; one that was made up of peddlers and merchants, midwives and doctors, priests and journalists, performers and impresarios. They learned English, built businesses, and became an important thread in the rich tapestry of the immigrant culture of 19th century New York.

In telling the story of her grandfathers, Jacobs says she wanted to dismiss the myth that all immigrants to America were successful. While one grandfather built a thriving textile business, the other died penniless with a large debt. There were cases of disease, adultery and crime among members of the early community.

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# LAU academic center



## Film Screening: Cairo Drive

On December 7, LAU NY, in collaboration with the American University in Cairo, hosted a screening of “Cairo Drive” by Sherief Elkatsha.

The documentary explores the life of one of the world’s most populated cities from its streets. Shot before and during the Egyptian revolution, it touches on the country’s collective identity, inherent struggles, and the sentiments that lead through the historic changes taking place in Egypt today. Guest snacked on popcorn and afterwards had the chance to interact with Elkatsha in a light hearted Q&A session.

## Exploring Lebanon’s Roots and Vines



On November 12, Lebanese wine writer Michael Karam delivered an illustrated lecture on the evolution of the Lebanese wine industry, from its inception to the present day, at LAU NY. The talk drew more than 150 people as Karam gave an overview of the country’s 5000-year-old wine tradition, before diving into the modern industry. The lecture was followed by a tasting of wines from nine Lebanese producers. The evening was co-sponsored by the Union Vinicole du Liban (UVL) and the Consulate General of Lebanon in New York

## LAU NY ACADEMIC CALENDAR

### Public Events

**March 11:** An Evening with Bassam Saba & April Centrone of the New York Arabic Orchestra, 7:00 PM

### Courses

**January 25-April 30:** Arabic Language Courses

**July 18-29:** The Lebanese Diaspora in the World and in New York

**August 1-12:** The City and the Writer

**August 1-15:** Design Management

**For more information, please contact:**

Lina Beydoun, Academic Executive Director  
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## LAU matters

*LAU Matters* is published quarterly by the New York Headquarters and Academic Center of Lebanese American University and distributed free of charge to alumni, friends and supporters of the university in North America.

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Cover Photo: Dr. Linda K. Jacobs talks about the Syrian Colony of Lower Manhattan



## Meet the New Director of the Women’s Institute

The fall of 2015 ushered in a new era for LAU’s celebrated Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World as the university welcomed a new director, Dr. Lina Abirafeh.

“I am the third generation of women in my family working at LAU,” exclaims Abirafeh, who brings to the table 20 years of experience in working on gender issues in development and humanitarian contexts.

Under the umbrella of many UN agencies and international NGOs, she’s worked in Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Nepal, Haiti, and the Congo, among others, focusing on gender-based violence in emergency settings like conflict, post-conflict, and natural disaster.

Just six months into her role, Abirafeh has already launched several new initiatives, including a monthly brown

bag discussion series called “Food 4 Thought” and a minor in Gender Studies.

“I believe in her proven record and leadership, both in an academic setting and in the field all over the globe. For students studying gender, she is a shining example of the tremendous impact graduates can achieve beyond the classrooms and in the real world,” says IWSAW Advisory Board member Aida Shawwaf.

Established in 1973, IWSAW produces groundbreaking academic research on women in the Arab world, seeks to empower women through development programs and education, and serves as a catalyst for policy change in the region.

Along with the support of her dedicated team and the LAU Continuing Education Program, Abirafeh is working on developing a professional certificate

in ‘Gender in Development and Humanitarian Assistance’, expected to launch this summer.

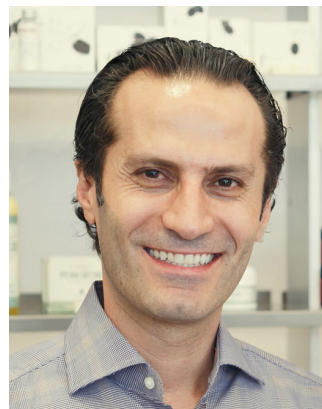
An existing IWSAW project on gender training for Lebanon’s police and internal security forces needed funding for a new phase, and thanks to Abirafeh’s tireless work to secure a grant from the Dutch embassy, is now underway.

Additional projects include revising guidance for female migrant domestic workers, including guidance for their potential employers, and expanding the Basic Living Skills Program, combining it with critical vocational training for women.

**GET IN TOUCH**  
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## Alumni Spotlight: Pierre Boutros



**Please tell us a bit about you and your relationship with LAU:**

I attended LAU from 1991 until 1993, where I studied pharmacy. In 1993, I traveled to Boston to attend Massachusetts College of Pharmacy where I graduated as a pharmacist in 1996. I kept in touch with LAU through its alumni chapters and am currently the vice president for

LAU Alumni - Michigan Chapter.

**You have grown several successful pharmacy businesses. What's your secret?**

I wanted to model my pharmacy businesses after neighborhood-style stores, where the owners knew the customers and vice-versa, where you could truly establish long term customer relationships. In pharmacy, trust and longevity are the keys to success. Mills Pharmacy + Apothecary is truly a new model of pharmacy in the Detroit area; it has traditional dispensing, a state-of-the-art compounding lab on site, and a world-class apothecary that sells the best personal care products there is to offer. We took an existing family business and made it the best in class.

**Despite the demands of a growing business, what motivated you to decide to run for Commissioner in your home town of Birmingham, MI?**

I have always felt connected to the city. It has both a small town

charm and an international appeal. I bought a house, started a family here, and run my business here, so I am 100% committed to this city. I have always thought that everyday citizens should get involved in their government. The idea that I could give back to this community by running for office was really my motivation to get involved.

**You have been active in higher education in the past, serving on a board at Wayne State University. Why is supporting education important to you?**

I owe a lot of my success to opportunities brought about by the higher education system. I could not have been educated in the Science of Pharmacy had it not been for LAU and the dedicated staff of professors that enriched our minds. I do what I can, professionally, to be involved in paying this forward.

**What role did your time at LAU play in influencing your career or your character?**

LAU opened doors for me by giving me the opportunity to travel to the United States and attend one of the best colleges for pharmacy, making me a strong individual and entrepreneur that can think outside the box.

**What do you think the benefits of an American-style, liberal arts education are in Lebanon, or in the Middle East in general?**

I think that a liberal arts program can reinforce the path that most students take by enriching their experience with real-world skills that they may not have chosen to pursue otherwise. The opportunity to experience psychology, literature, language, etc., while applying it to your chosen career path is an opportunity that a lot of students around the world do not get to experience. I believe it creates a richer learning environment.

### Great news for new students!

LAU now proudly offers federal financial aid to U.S. citizens through FAFSA. For more information on how to take advantage of this resource, please visit [aid.lau.edu.lb/us-federal-loans](http://aid.lau.edu.lb/us-federal-loans). Questions can be sent to: **Linda Nicholas at [linda.strauss@lau.edu](mailto:linda.strauss@lau.edu)**



## Houston

LAU pharmacy students doing their rotations in Houston at Methodist Hospital gathered at Fadi's Mediterranean Grill on February 11. Dr. Ray Hachem, (back row, second from left) serves as a mentor for the students, and Mike Liebl (back row, center) oversees them at Methodist Hospital.

## Northern and Southern California



In February, Nada Sara (top photo) gave a lecture on Lebanon's UNESCO Heritage Sites to the California alumni chapters, speaking at the San Francisco Towers on February 6 and at the House of Lebanon in Los Angeles on February 7. She presented an uplifting view of the country, including important historical information unbeknownst to many Lebanese. The lectures were well received and her talk is being considered for other alumni chapters in the future.

## UPCOMING ALUMNI EVENTS

**March 5:** Toronto Alumni Chapter Annual Dinner, Mazza Garden, Ajax Ontario

**March 31-April 1:** Board of Trustees Meeting, LAU NY

**March 31:** Chairman's Dinner, New York, NY

**June 5:** Toronto Alumni Chapter Annual Breakfast in the Park

**September 8-9:** Board of Trustees Meeting, LAU NY

**September 9:** Gala Dinner, Metropolitan Club, New York, NY

**September 11:** Toronto Alumni Chapter Annual Family Picnic

Additional alumni events pending

If your alumni chapter has an upcoming event, please notify:

**Ed Shiner, Director of Alumni and Special Projects, (646) 255-1099, [ed.shiner@lau.edu](mailto:ed.shiner@lau.edu)**



Ambassador William A. Stoltzfus Jr. and Janet Sorg Stoltzfus



The Stoltzfus Family: A Multi-Generational Legacy

LAU recently lost a friend and supporter in Ambassador William A. Stoltzfus, Jr. Born in 1924 in Beirut, he was the elder son of William and Ethel Stoltzfus, who had made their separate ways to Lebanon in 1919 to work with orphanages and refugee camps following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

The younger William, known as “Bill”, grew up in Aleppo, where his father was head of the North Syria School for Boys, and later Beirut, when his father became President of American Junior College, subsequently Beirut College for Women, and now LAU.

LAU Matters spoke to Bill’s son and Board of Trustees member, Philip, about how he and his family plan to keep his parents’ spirit alive through LAU, and in turn, how an LAU student can carry on the legacy of his parents.

When my grandfather was president of BCW, the function of the college at that time was not simply to educate young people, but also to instill them with a sense of civic engagement. Service was part of the ethos of the school, as it is now for LAU.

My father and mother were totally committed to public service. My father was a career diplomat, serving in Egypt, Libya, Kuwait, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Ethiopia, Oman, the UAE, Qatar and Bahrain. He also served his country as a pilot in the Naval Air Corps.

My mother, who died in 2004, taught at BCW where she met my father in 1953. She became an accomplished diplomat in her own right, providing channels of communication through her personal contacts among women in the countries my father served, particularly in the Gulf. She read to the blind, developed and was head teacher at a pre-school program for low-income families in Ethiopia, served as volunteer coordinator for children with cerebral palsy in the Gulf, and established the first non-religious school in north Yemen, the Ta’iz Cooperative School.

Because of my parents’ lifelong dedication to service, we decided we wanted to establish an award to go to an LAU student who has demonstrated a remarkable commitment to community service.

My parents taught me that real service comes from a feeling of empathy for one’s fellow man, which depends on being able to understand and appreciate another person’s perspective. There are many universities in the U.S. that push a liberal arts agenda, but there are only a handful in the Middle East. LAU excels in educating the student in a civic-minded way, and that’s why we continue to support the university.

With this gift, the Stoltzfus family carries on its legacy of service, and creates opportunities for the next generation to follow in their footsteps.

To make a donation in memory of William A. Stoltzfus Jr., visit [campaign.lau.edu.lb](https://campaign.lau.edu.lb) or call **Robert Hollback, Assistant Vice President of Development for North America at (646) 255-1097**

Strangers in the West

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Jennifer Batri, a New Yorker of Syrian heritage who attended the lecture, says Syrian immigration into the U.S. today is different.

“The 20th century immigrants bear very little similarities to the 21st century immigrants who are coming under different circumstances, with different backgrounds and religious beliefs,” she said. “The past wave is not reflective of the future wave and cannot guarantee a similarly successful integration process.”

While almost all of the immigrants detailed in Jacobs’ book were Christian, on December 9, the same day as the lecture took place, an article was published in the New York Times newspaper revealing that Muslims not only lived in the Syrian colony, but worshiped there, too.

“An understanding that Arab immigration has a long history in New York will help people see Arab-Americans as one of many immigrant groups that have contributed to our culture, economy and peoplehood,” said Dr. Vinton Thompson, president of the Metropolitan College of New York, who also attended the lecture.

“We are investigating the possibility of enrolling Syrian refugee students,” he added, saying that it would be a “wonderful turn of history to bring Syrian refugees to study in the same neighborhood that first welcomed large numbers of Arab immigrants to the United States.”

To get a copy of the book, email [info@kalimahpress.com](mailto:info@kalimahpress.com)



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This list includes donors from North America who have recently supported LAU

# Ziad Sankari

## Where do you live and what do you do?

I am the founder of CardioDiagnostics, a medical technology company specialized in cardiac care solutions. Our technology can monitor the electrical activity of the heart and keep tabs on potential abnormalities. And we can do it wirelessly, so cardiac patients can go about their lives instead of staying in the hospital. I split my time between Lebanon and the U.S. We have a small office in San Francisco.

## How did you come up with the idea for your company?

My father died 13 years ago of a heart attack and doctors said at the time that they could have prevented the attack if they could monitor his condition outside the hospital. The loss of my father was the motivation behind developing a cardiac monitoring technology. I created my very first prototype at LAU.

## How and when did you get involved with LAU?

I studied computer engineering at LAU, graduating in 2007. After getting my master's at Ohio State in Biomedical Engineering, I later ended up teaching back at LAU from 2011-2012. In my classes, I focused a lot on building my students' self-confidence. In Lebanon, we put ourselves down a lot. Once that mentality is changed, we can do miraculous things. Some of my ex-students have founded their own companies in Lebanon.

## What do you think about the merits of an American-style education in Lebanon?

An American-style education helped me prepare for the outside world. The way the education was structured helped me get into graduate school at Ohio State, and helped me excel once I was there.

## CardioDiagnostics is only two years old and you've already been recognized by President Obama as an "Emerging Global Entrepreneur". What's next for you and your company?

Today we are 10 people, operating on three continents, with customers in eight different markets. We want to grow our presence in Europe and the U.S. The need is global in that cardiac disease is the leading cause of death around the world. As such, a lot of medical experts want to bring the technology to their countries, but there are many challenges with scaling that we have to overcome, and I know that we will.

