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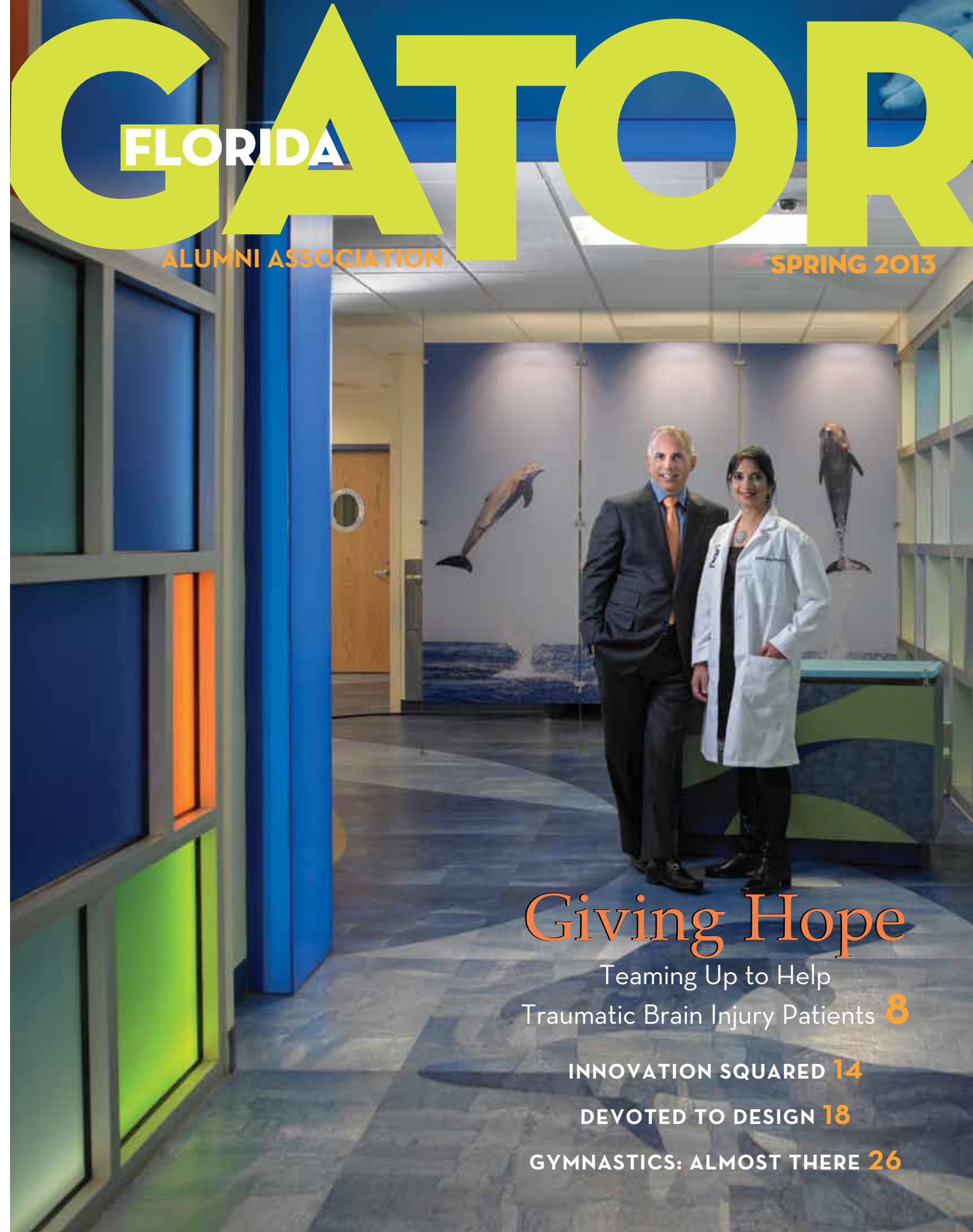
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FLORIDA  
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SPRING 2013



## Giving Hope

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# Giving HOPE

Alumnus Frank Toral and UF professor Dr. Latha Ganti Stead are changing lives.

By Renee Houston Zemanski

**Eighteen years ago, a newly married Cuban couple moved to Miami to pursue the American dream. Robert\*\* secured a great job with an electric company. The couple got an apartment and was thinking about having a family. Then, one night as Robert was working on an aerial lift, a driver under the influence careened into the truck that was holding him. Everything changed.**

Robert was catapulted out of the lift and fell 35 feet onto his head. In a coma, he was airlifted to the hospital; doctors weren't sure he would live. That night, the young couple's life was forever altered.

And little did he know it, but attorney **Frank Toral's** life would also be changed.

When Toral (BS '89), got the phone call late at night, he met Robert's family to counsel them. He soon discovered they needed much more than legal advice.

"It was a barrage of questions and confusion," Toral recalls. "There were language barriers, and they needed someone to help guide them through the medical procedures, the diagnosis and what was happening. I learned a lot from that experience."

And that experience led Toral to found the law offices of Toral Garcia Battista, a statewide law firm specializing in brain and spinal cord injury.

"That random phone call changed the course of my practice," Toral says. "My client's life changed dramatically. He would never work again. He would never attend school. He needed 24-hour care."

\*\*Fictitious name to protect privacy

"It not only affected him, it affected everyone around him," he continues. "Even mild brain trauma can affect a person. There can be memory, neurological and personality changes – and these affect relationships. They become strained. These families don't just need legal help; they need assistance in accessing community resources and a brain injury professional to guide them through the continuum of medical care. They have questions – are they going to get better? How long is the rehab going to be? Who's going to pay the bills?"

That phone call was in 1995. Since then, Toral's firm has hired a social worker and trauma nurse to address clients' immediate needs while still in the trauma center. The firm has successfully represented many families throughout Florida.

However, Toral wanted to do more. As the first college graduate in his family and the first U.S.-born child of Cuban immigrants, he had a desire to succeed and help others.

"I want to make the most of my opportunities," Toral says. "I remember my grandmother saying to me: 'This is the greatest country in the world, and you can make anything happen if you apply yourself.' I had

the American dream, and I guess that's why I related so well to that young family who had that dream slip away from them."

As a result, Toral and his wife, Olivia, founded the Toral Family Foundation, dedicated to improving the lives of the victims of traumatic brain injury (TBI) and their families. While helping families is the main objective of the foundation, it also seeks to support brain injury research, education and access to community programs.

*"It's the little things we do; it doesn't have to cost a lot to give of yourself. We need to give people hope. People need hope."*  
- Frank Toral

### Bringing in UF

When he started the foundation four years ago, Toral wanted to introduce it with a big splash. "We really put some thought into who we could partner with that could bring awareness to this issue," Toral says. That's when the firm's CFO, Tom Hoy, a Kellogg MBA grad, suggested that Toral talk to his former Kellogg classmate, **Dr. Latha Ganti Stead**, a professor of emergency medicine and neurological surgery and chief of clinical research (in emergency medicine) at the University of Florida College of Medicine.

Stead, a recent Fulbright Scholar, was contacted by Hoy, but she says she was skeptical of meeting with an attorney.

"It's funny, I just wondered, 'Why would an attorney want to meet with me; what does he want from me?' I was very cautious," Stead recalls. Cautious, that is, until she met Toral in person.

"Within the first five minutes of meeting Frank, my opinion totally changed; it became apparent to me that he was a good person," she says. "He was not in it for the money. He really wanted to make a difference; he really wanted to help people. We hit it off immediately."

Toral wanted to know how he could help Stead create awareness and research for TBI. She offered to help as a researcher. They decided UF could use funding for an endowed professorship so Stead could dedicate a specific portion of her time to researching TBI issues and building a team to focus assessment, diagnosis, prevention, advocacy and treatment of TBI.



**Dr. Michael L. Good**, dean of the UF College of Medicine, signs paperwork to help establish the Toral Family Foundation Professorship in Traumatic Brain Injury, with **Frank Toral** (right). Back row: **Dr. Joseph A. Tyndall**, chairman for the department of emergency medicine, and **Dr. Latha Ganti Stead**.

Toral donated \$500,000 to establish the endowed professorship in perpetuity.

"The money will help us to create awareness and establish a clinic," says Stead, who previously had to conduct patient meetings via cell phone or on a bench near the UF&Shands emergency department entrance.



"Patients would be sent home because their CT scans were OK, but they often had other symptoms," she explains. "They would come back saying, 'I just don't feel right; my head hurts; I can't concentrate; I'm dizzy.' It was frustrating; I didn't know what to do for them because I wasn't a TBI expert. I would make phone calls, but I couldn't get answers. So, I started telling people when they were leaving the ER, 'If you can't find anyone to follow up with, call me on my cell.' I would get calls, and we would meet near the main entrance. We needed a formal TBI clinic."

Stead wasn't asking for much – no increase in salary, no big buildings – just some space to follow up with patients. So, she made a pitch to open a clinic. While she was in the meeting, her phone rang. It was a patient, and she told him she would meet him in the parking lot after the meeting. When she hung up the phone, she was told she could have her clinic.

Although the clinic was established as the UF Center for Brain Injury Research and Education in fall 2012 and was semi-operational in the winter, Stead plans an official grand opening in July 2013 when she returns from her Fulbright semester abroad. She is entertaining two options, including using space in the emergency department at UF&Shands or at UF&Shands Medical Plaza, where most clinics are housed. It doesn't make a difference to Stead where it will be, just that it will be.

Giving HOPE



## Preventing Traumatic Brain Injury

March is Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Awareness Month. TBI, defined by the American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS) is “a blow or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the normal function of the brain.” TBI symptoms can be mild to severe. Many TBIs occur while participating in sports; that’s why the AANS offers this advice:

- Always wear a helmet or protective headgear approved by the American Society for Testing and Materials for specific sports.
- Follow all rules and warning signs at water parks, swimming pools and public beaches.
- Never dive into water less than 12 feet deep or into aboveground pools. Check for debris before diving into deep water.
- Be aware of drivers and avoid uneven or unpaved surfaces when cycling or skateboarding.
- Never slide headfirst when stealing a base.
- Supervise young children at all times, and don’t let them use sporting equipment or play sports that aren’t age-appropriate. Replace damaged sports gear.

Additionally:

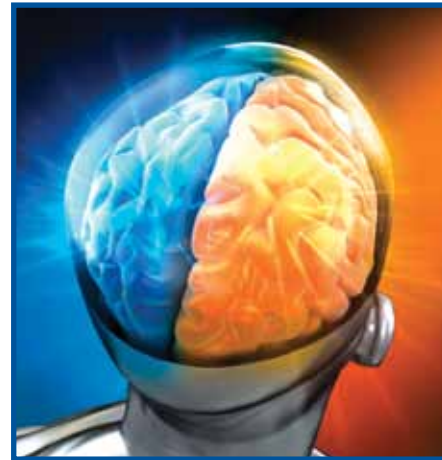
- Obey all traffic signals and wear a seatbelt when driving.
- Remove hazards in the home, such as toys or items on steps, that may contribute to falls.
- Use safety gates and install window guards if you have small children.

For more information, visit [www.aans.org](http://www.aans.org).



## Accomplishments

Still on Stead’s agenda is defining a standard of care for TBI, including other ways to test for brain trauma. “There’s no standard of care for TBI right now, no protocol and it’s completely up to the attending physician about what tests to perform,” Stead explains.



However, there are accomplishments that are becoming tangible with the establishment of the UF Center for Brain Injury Research and Education. These include:

1. Compiling local, state and national resources where families affected by TBI will have access to a multi-disciplinary group of medical professionals and a one-stop shop for resources.
2. Connecting all UF TBI specialists to the new center.
3. Developing a multisite research project to collaborate with a significant number of trauma centers where UF takes the lead in TBI research.
4. Launching a TBI clinic and a TBI support group.
5. Establishing a series of tests beyond CT scans Right now, Stead and her small research team are performing oculomotor (eye-movement), balance and neurocognitive testing within hours of the injury at the emergency department. At press time, no other emergency department in the country does this type of acute testing.

“These accomplishments are a result of the inexhaustible energy of Dr. Stead,” says Toral. “She’s really passionate and is an advocate for these families. She’s done what I think would be difficult for 10 people to do, and I don’t know how she’s done it.”

Stead has equal admiration for Toral’s efforts. “He is an amazing person and so humble,” says Stead. “He is one of those people who are passionate while being true to themselves. I really respect that. He wants to and is making a difference. I think a lot has to do with his faith.”

Faith does play a major role in Toral’s life. “One of the big reasons why my wife and I decided to give back was my faith,” says Toral, who happens to be an ordained pastor at his church. “God gave me this one and only life, and I want to make the most of it.

“I want people to be aware that there are people around us who are hurting,” he continues. “We have a responsibility to encourage and help those people. Some of us have a great

*“I want people to be aware that there are people around us who are hurting. We have a responsibility to encourage and help those people. Some of us have a great capacity to do that. And with our capacities and gifts comes greater responsibilities.”*  
– Frank Toral

capacity to do that. And with our capacities and gifts comes greater responsibilities – especially in your given field. If you are an engineer, build something. If you’re a lawyer, do pro-bono work. It’s not just nice to do; it’s our responsibility. It’s the little things we do; it doesn’t have to cost a lot to give of yourself. We need to give people hope. People need hope.”



For more information on TBI and how you can help, please contact the UF College of Medicine at 352-273-7986 or visit [drgator.ufl.edu](http://drgator.ufl.edu).

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