

Long Island BusinessNEWS

JULY 27-AUGUST 2, 2018 | OUR 65TH YEAR | NO. 30 | \$2.00 | LIBN.COM

EXECUTIVE PROFILE

MEDICAL ROADIE

Dr. Jorge Gardyn protects the people who protect communities

As an internist, Dr. Jorge Gardyn provides medical exams for more than 30 fire departments and 400 private companies – whether at their place of operation or his Amityville practice, Island Occupational Medical Resources. He spoke with LIBN about his work, his position as chairman of the Board of Trustees for Nassau Community College, his thoughts on Dreamers and what the new OSHA standards regarding silica mean to the building industry.

What drew you to medicine? I was interested in medicine since I was 11 years old. I guess it was the TV doctors at the time: “Medical Center” with Dr. Joe Gannon played by Chad Everett. I enjoyed science in high school. Some of my favorite subjects were science and history, that was the attraction.

Anyone else in your family doctors? I’m the first physician in my family.

Tell us about how you came to open this practice. I trained as an internist. When I finished, I worked as an emergency room physician for several years, and then opened a medical practice. I ran it as an urgent care because of my ER background. Within a few years, I came up with the concept of doing occupation medical exams ... I was performing exams in different types of work environments [including] fire-service volunteers in Nassau and Suffolk counties. I expanded it to Department of Transportation exams and for truck drivers and now work with all kinds of companies ... to provide all aspects of work related to health-care for their employees. It naturally evolved.

Are you affiliated with any of the hospital chains? This is an independent medical practice, otherwise known as a dinosaur. We have joined an independent practice association, which affiliates us with other independent practices to enhance quality of care. This is very much a concierge service business Once you are my client you have access to me on cell phone 24/7 to answer questions or if there are issues. [Fire-fighters work] 365 days, 24/7, and we work 365 days, 24/7 – that’s always been our catch line. We protect the firefighters that protect our community Fires don’t happen by appointment. We respond to a variety of issues that come up. It sets our practice apart.

Do you go onsite to clients, or are people sent to you, or is it a combination? It’s a combination. Our forte is we are a mobile health service company. For the convenience of our clients, we’ll go onsite. We also have a 5,000-square foot facility in Amityville ... to handle all manner of exams for our clients. We provide x-ray services, hearing booths, fitness for duty exams [and more].

How do you set up your onsite visits? I have a roster of about 20 people we call on to assemble a team. I can go anywhere from eight to 10 people, depending on the number of people we have to examine. We’re able to examine 20 firefighters per hour by doing multiple stations. I personally see every firefighter and consult with them at the end of their exam process.

How did you decide on the setup? It was an evolutionary process We worked out better systems of efficiency ... We can arrive at 7:30 a.m. and in 20 minutes have a medical facility. We’re like a MASH team.

So it’s completely transient? What you see in the truck translates into a full facility.

What kinds of challenges are patients seeing? I’m running cancer screening programs ... The No. 1 cause of death in firefighters is not heart disease but cancer. It doesn’t present itself until years later after the exposure. The rate of breast, prostate, esophageal, testicular and lung cancer is so much higher in fire service than the general population due to their risk of exposure. Right now we’re following many patients who were 9/11 rescuers. Much of [that work] is done by the World Trade Center Health Program under the auspices of the Mount Sinai We are seeing devastating effects to those exposures to this day.

What’s next for your practice? The next area is compliance with crystalline silica standards that were finally approved by OSHA. Silica is found in sand, concrete, stone, and the dust, if not careful, is inhaled into their lungs. It causes irreversible damage: lung cancer, tuberculosis, kidney disease. We’re getting the word out to construction companies. Up until now, no one was interested. It wasn’t being enforced. Enforcement [started] June 23.

Tell us about your work on the board of trustees at Nassau Community College. I’ve been the chairman since 2013. One of my goals is to try to encourage Hispanic students to go to school and further their education. [With] the Dream Foundation – founded by David Sperling, an immigration attorney – we are working with Hispanic groups to get the word out about taking advantage of going to Nassau Community College, and stay near to go far, whether as a means or end to further their education. What I found interesting about this organization is it’s raising funds to get scholarships to get students to go to school. Once Dreamers finish school they have no access to get public funds to go to college. This past year it awarded \$50,000 to 15 students to pursue their college education.

Why does this resonate with you? I was born in Cuba. My parents left as political refugees on the 17th of June, 1961, so here it is 57 years later ... that I arrived in this country as a political refugee immigrant. We were welcomed because at the time the political flavor was to welcome political refugees from Cuba with open arms. What was always stressed to me was education. My parents lost everything [except] a suitcase and family, and started from scratch ... I take these immigrant stories to heart. I realized we have to have a path that gets people into citizenship. For Dreamers, the only country [they] know is ours. What goes on today is not an acceptable story in the view of the history of this nation. It’s always been a welcoming beacon to the rest of the world. We have to filter and evaluate, but once they are here and integrated ... [we should] do what we can to encourage them through education. I established a scholarship at Nassau Community College in the name of my father to benefit Dreamers.

You never lose your education. What you have inside is yours forever. I’m proud to be Cuban and a bi-lingual citizen. It’s an enhancement, not a detriment and I lead by example The idea is to always advance.

And I have to ask about your piano playing. I play every day, I play both guitar and piano. I just enjoy it.



Photo by Judy Walker

– ADINA GENN