



By Jenna Caputo/ Photos Contributed by Leticia Daconti and Brian Frederick

Leticia Daconti and Brian Frederick have long had one mission in mind – they want to make a difference. They have never wavered from that mission, but now in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become even more important.

Leticia is an Emergency Medicine Physician at Ellis Hospital and Saratoga Hospital. “What we are seeing right now in the U.S. is a healthcare system that was already at capacity, being even further strained,” she says. “But let’s not forget what makes this country’s medicine world-renowned – medicine that is evidence-based. Your doctor knows your chronic illnesses, your family history, your past conditions, the medications you take and weighs the risks and benefits of a drug or supplement for you. In the midst of panic, do not start taking medications or supplements just because you heard about them on TV or through a friend. They could make you sicker. Talk to your doctor.”

Brian has seen firsthand how hard Leticia and all her colleagues have been working, and he wanted to find a way

of spreading the hope that the #518RainbowHunt has been providing for the community into the medical institutions as well. He created **HopeForHealthcareWorkers.com** to provide a free platform for the community to send artwork and messages of support and encouragement to the local frontline workers while offering people the chance to do something tangible to help from the comfort and safety of their own homes. “Hospitals and healthcare workers around the country are running out of personal protective equipment that keeps healthcare providers and their patients safe from spreading the virus. Despite the danger this poses to hospital staff – and their families and loved ones – these dedicated professionals go to work every day to help those who may be having the worst day of their lives. They are exhausted, working extra shifts when their coworkers become sick, working in specialties they did not specialize in and wondering if they will be next to fall ill. Yet, they continue to give all they can out of a deep desire to help others.”

Brian & Leticia’s journey has been an interesting one. Growing up in Recife, Brazil, Leticia enjoyed spending time at the beach,

dancing and visiting with her extended family. During high school, her family moved to the Glenville area here in the Capital District when her father, an electrical engineer, accepted a job at an engineering consulting firm in Schenectady. Growing up with an engineer for a father meant early mornings solving math problems with her sister and going to sleep hearing her father sing the math songs he created. Leticia naturally thought she would become an engineer as well, but things changed by the end of high school. “Unfortunately, I was involved in an accident at age 18 and had to undergo a few surgeries,” she explains. “I was surrounded by doctors for a good two years. That’s when I realized the privilege one has as a doctor – to be there at someone else’s worst day, and to have the ability to make that day better. That’s what really drew me to medicine.” She received her BS in Biological Sciences (concentration in Neurobiology) with a minor in Applied Economics and Management from Cornell, and her MD from the University of Pennsylvania. She completed her Emergency Medicine residency at the University of New Mexico, working at the only Trauma 1 center in the state. Wanting to round out her education and to understand other cultures and methods abroad, she also completed an acupuncture certificate in Beijing, spent a month on scholarship in Vienna to study their healthcare system and volunteered in Guatemala.

Her work has been incredibly rewarding and she is grateful to be surrounded by a work family full of hard-working, intelligent, caring and supportive professionals. She is touched each day not only by their kindness and thoughtful gestures, but also by her patients and the bizarre, heartbreaking and heartwarming moments of their lives that she is privy to. “You see love each day,” she says. “I’ll never forget a patient’s wife many years ago who, upon her husband’s death, told me, ‘There lies the most amazing man in the world.’ The ER gives you perspective of what is truly important in life, you know?”

She keeps that perspective close to her heart each day and when she is not working, she tries to experience life as much as possible, enjoying photography, music, dance, travel and learning new languages. “It takes a lot of humility to learn something new, especially a language. You start out terribly and people laugh. But, time will pass regardless, right? So it may as well pass while you do something to better yourself. It’s never ‘too late.’”

Leticia and Brian love to travel whenever they can, enjoying the opportunity to not only see how different people live, eat and play, but



to also have the chance to connect with humanity in general. They cherish learning about different cultures and the adventures it always provides. “This world is so beautiful, and we are privileged to be able to see it,” she says. “Traveling gives you a different frame of reference – you realize that material things only bring so much happiness; what really matters is connections you make with people. And even if you don’t know someone else’s language, so much communication comes from facial expressions and gesturing. There’s nothing better than laughing with someone you can’t communicate with – there’s a shared humanity there that is unparalleled.”

Despite usually contracting some sort of illness or parasite whenever he’s abroad, Brian also loves their travel adventures and is most happy in the outdoors, kayaking or hiking in the Adirondacks when home, or out exploring when on a trip. “In February, I was lucky enough to travel to Tanzania with my brother and two friends,” says Brian. “We successfully climbed Uhuru Peak (Mount Kilimanjaro), the highest point in Africa, during a nine-day trip that brought us through jungles, moorlands, alpine desert and a winter landscape with glaciers in the distance (pretty cool considering we were on the Equator)!”

Brian grew up in Burnt Hills, often playing in the woods at the Indian Kill Preserve or hanging with his family at Paradox Lake in the summer or sledding and skiing in the winter. Brian and Leticia met in their high school AP Physics class when they became lab partners. They began dating and maintained their relationship long distance for college, before coming together again for grad school and eventually marrying. Brian earned a dual-BS in Chemistry and Biomolecular Science from Clarkson University before completing his first MS in Chemistry at Clarkson, then his second MS in Biochemistry and Molecular Biophysics at the University of Pennsylvania, where he researched cancer cell movement in tumors. “Research and discovery have always appealed to me and I have always wanted to help others,” says Brian. As a biochemist, he has worked on a variety of projects including researching new drug therapies, how to combat cancer and ways to convert non-edible plant mass (like



corn cobs) into sustainable fuels, among other valuable research. But he realized there was a dire need for better communication between the science community and general public. “There is so much important research being done that most people do not know about, and it can be difficult to value the unknown,” he explains. So he began freelance writing for the non-profit think tank, Food Tank, to get the word out there on important issues like sustainability.

After Leticia’s residency was over, they decided to move back east and settled in Clifton Park to be closer to their families in an area that would be great to start their own family. After they moved, Food Tank offered Brian a Fellowship, which eventually lead to his becoming the Editorial Manager, where he oversaw a team of writers that researched stories from around the world to inform the public and to use at summits so stakeholders can have honest and productive conversations on various aspects of the food system. He is grateful to have worked on many important projects that reached all over the world, however, he recently decided to leave Food Tank to pursue new opportunities. Besides working on the Hope For Healthcare site, Brian is also on the communications team and steering committee for the campaign to elect Joe Seeman, a progressive Working Families Party Democrat, to the 112th District of the NYS Assembly. Brian is also a correspondent for the Adirondack 46ers – a program for hikers aspiring to hike all 46 of the Adirondack high peaks to partner with a correspondent to exchange stories of climbs, receive encouragement and share the journey.

When not working, the two enjoy our area with outside activities and hitting up the restaurants and local theaters. Brian also frequently takes on woodworking projects and cooks up a storm in the kitchen. In addition to their various activities, the couple always takes time to enjoy each other’s company. This year marks their 16th anniversary as a couple and ninth year married. “Somehow we are more in love with each other every day,” says Brian.

“We come from very different cultures and backgrounds, but we truly appreciate each other and feel enriched to have access to a different perspective so readily,” says Leticia. “The life of an immigrant is difficult, even when done legally. Imagine leaving behind everyone you know, your culture, your language, in search



of a better future. It’s also extremely isolating, especially around holiday time. Thankfully, at this point, enough time has passed by that I’ve created strong friendships that offset that. And of course, I have Bri’s family who includes me. But, if you know of a family in your neighborhood who is from a different country, please try to include them. You may discover that your life becomes enriched by this, too.”

After being on the frontline, Leticia and Brian are both home-quarantined with COVID-19 but are recovering well and looking forward after recovery to being able to help out in ways that others who have not had the virus or are compromised and are hesitant to, cannot. To start, they plan on donating plasma to Albany Medical Center. They urge everyone to keep washing our hands and social distancing, but to not disconnect. “Call your family and friends to check on them and break the social isolation,” says Brian. “Wave to your neighbors and give them a hand if it seems like they could use one. Do an act of kindness for a complete stranger. The COVID-19 pandemic is scary and is upending normal life, but we are all in this together and share a common humanity.” Leticia also reminds us to be patient and kind with the ER staff as they deal with life and death all day long. “If you wait several hours to be seen, it is not because we have been purposely ignoring you – it’s because other people are sicker and had to be seen first, or they arrived before you and have been waiting longer.”

They are leaning on their favorite quotes through this time and share them with us – “Know thyself,” says Brian. “Although I could be a lot better at that one. And, ‘This too shall pass’ – important to remember, whether it’s to help you through a hard time or to remind you to embrace a good time.” Leticia’s favorite is, “The best way out is always through,” from Robert Frost.

It is their hope that in moving forward, everyone remembers the unity we all feel right now, and that we can overcome our divisions and create a more sustainable, just and hopeful future filled with more adventures, wisdom and friendships, remembering that we have more in common with each other than the media and politicians sometimes make it seem. Brian says, “It is great to see how many people in the community have stepped up to help their neighbors and we feel lucky to live in such a caring community!”

