

MEDICAL COLLEGE VOLUNTEER

Burkwald understands from experience the value of digestive disease research

Entrepreneurs are accustomed to accepting a certain level of risk, but what Daniel Burkwald experienced in 2004 was beyond reasonable expectations. The President and founder of Burkwald & Associates was meeting with a client of his employee benefits consulting firm when he was struck with such pain that he thought he may not make it through the meeting.

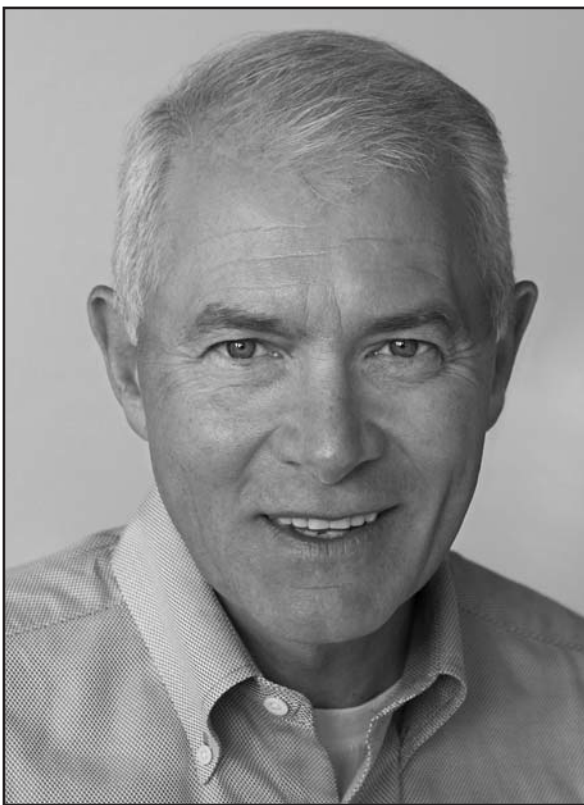
He had previously been diagnosed with ulcerative colitis and had been managing the symptoms of the digestive disease for several years. This day, however, was different, and he was admitted to the hospital later that night. For nearly two weeks, doctors struggled to relieve his pain and pinpoint the problem before Burkwald was finally transferred to Froedtert & The Medical College of Wisconsin. Within a day, Medical College specialists had determined that his colon had to be removed or he might not live another day. He had the surgery on Thanksgiving Day.

It was a major step in the treatment of a disease that will require a lifetime of management, as well as a turning point in Burkwald's life and in his relationship with the Medical College.

"I experienced a near-death event," he said. "The College saved my life and ultimately improved my quality of life, and in that, I want others to benefit so they can have better quality of life. At the Medical College, the way I can do that is assisting in the decisions being made there and to help provide assets to fulfill their mission."

Burkwald began more formal involvement with the Medical College's mission when he accepted an invitation to join the Digestive Disease Center Advisory Board in 2005. Board members help increase community awareness of the College's digestive disease clinical and research programs and help raise private funds. Never a joiner, Burkwald was adamant that his recommendations on the board be heard.

He was subsequently impressed when the College hired Kirk Ludwig, MD, a top colorectal surgeon and now the Vernon O. Underwood Professor in Colon Cancer Research and Associate Professor of Surgery. Dr. Ludwig has since provided critical insights for Burkwald's ongoing progress with a revised surgical procedure along with Lilani Perera, MD, Assistant Professor of Medicine (Gastroenterology and



Daniel Burkwald

IN THE KNOW

The **Digestive Disease Center Advisory Board** plays a critical role in raising private funds for cancer research and increasing awareness of Digestive Disease Center programs. Members include business, professional and civic leaders who are committed to advancing sophisticated medical research at the College.

For more information on the Advisory Board and its activities, call (414) 955-4700. For more information about the Digestive Disease Center, visit www.mcw.edu/gastrohep.htm.

Hepatology), who is assisting with his post-surgical bacterial issues.

Digestive diseases aren't pretty to talk about, Burkwald said, but as a society, we are getting better at it, and the advisory board can help.

"I believe that as we make the Medical College and the Digestive Disease Center more visible, more people will come out and will speak out relative to this disease," he said. "I think it's incumbent on us to do the research necessary to identify cures for children and adults in the community."

Now Chair-elect of the Digestive Disease Center Advisory Board, Burkwald believes in a strategic approach to fulfillment of the Center's goals, which include greater community awareness and growth of the center as a truly world-

class and respected entity within the College. Ultimately, Burkwald is motivated by the prospect of improving people's quality of life, which is also the nature of his business, even if it didn't start that way.

After graduating from college, Burkwald began his business as nothing more than a vehicle through which he could reach his dreams. He had no business background or experience coming out of University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse, he just knew he wanted to be in business for himself.

He began selling life insurance, but the business continued to evolve until at age 33, he had 70 people working for him, mostly in commodities businesses. But commodities weren't really Burkwald's passion. He is driven by building relationships, which is how Burkwald & Associates matured into the benefits and management consulting firm it is today.

"Most people in our business look at selling a product, and I look at it as a process," he said. "That is making people healthier, making people more aware of their health so they can have a better life and in doing so, create a better financial situation for their employer so they have more financial resources to grow the business."

His firm continues to help employers cut health care costs and even improve the quality of benefits for their employees. He greatly values the relationships built with clients and established within organization.

"I don't need to be the biggest," Burkwald said. "I just want to be the very best at what we do, and to have a growing, viable team that supports each other in a culture of creation that is always dynamic and growing."

Burkwald is motivated not only by his business relationships but also his personal relationships, in particular, his family, which stood beside him through many challenging times in his recovery. He and his wife, Kim, have two sons, 24 and 9, and one daughter, 21.

Some people, he said, look forward to retirement. Not Burkwald. His enjoyment of life and work make him feel retired already. He also plans to continue to advocate for greater awareness and advancing therapies for digestive diseases.

"Will we solve this?" he asked. "Probably not in my lifetime, but it's progress, not perfection."