

FLORIDA

South Florida Edition

# Super Doctors™

2009

## THE REGION'S TOP DOCTORS

Physicians tell us which  
specialists they would choose

## THE CHILDREN'S CHAMPION

Dr. Steven Stylianos has a big  
heart for his little patients

## DR. GUMSHOE

How Dr. Eduardo Alfonso  
sniffed out a medical mystery

## THE PEANUTS GALLERY

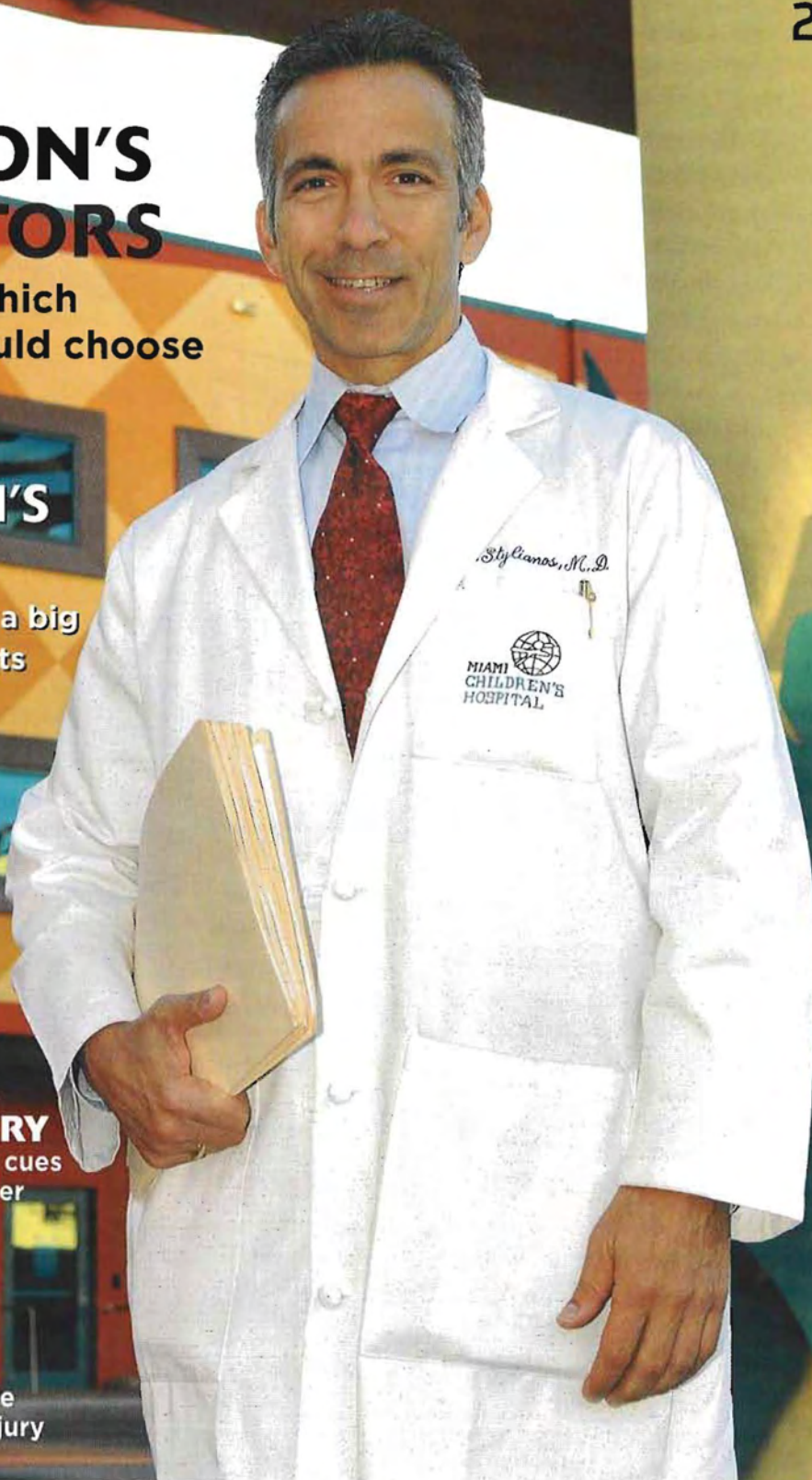
Dr. Patricia Cantwell takes her cues  
from an icon in a yellow sweater

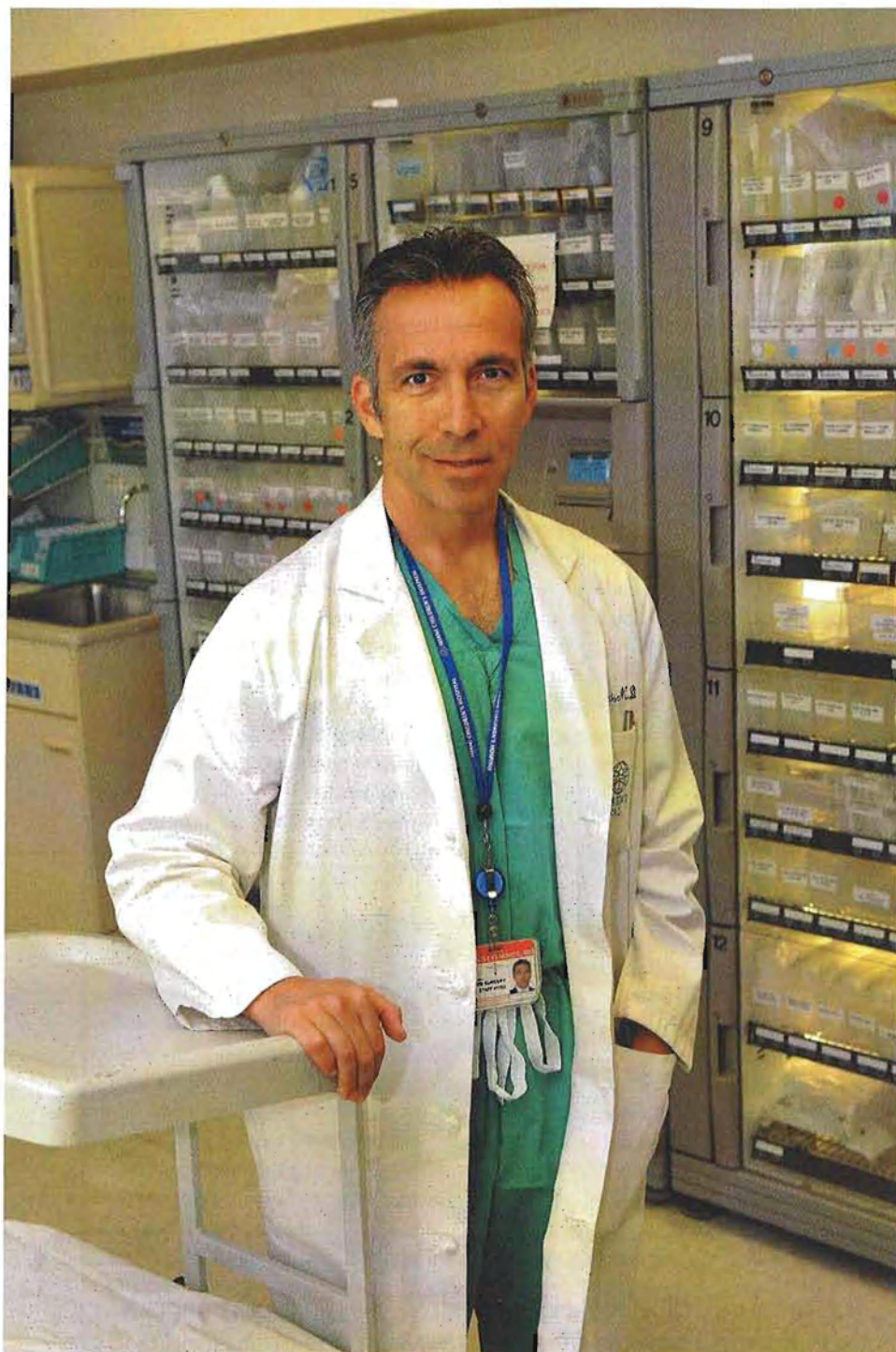
## THE PIONEER

For Dr. Barry Katzen, blazing  
a trail is second nature

## SIDELINES SENTINEL

Orthopedic guru Dr. John Uribe  
runs a deep offense against injury





Stylianos goes beyond the call of duty for his patients at Miami Children's Hospital.

**D**r. Steven Stylianos examines a chart for an ICU patient at Miami Children's Hospital (MCH). Inside a glass incubator lies his tiny patient, who, at just over two pounds, is no bigger than a kitten. His still-developing eyes are covered so the lights that keep him warm won't damage them. A tiny stocking cap is perched on his head, and his diaper, about the size of a cocktail napkin, is loose and gaping.

He came into the world unready, but he's not giving up. Neither is Stylianos. Despite the tube down his trachea, Stylianos points to the tiny, pumping chest. "He's breathing on his own," he says. "He's a fighter."

Healing "little people," as Stylianos calls his patients, is the work he says he was born to do. "I ended up right where I belong," says the soft-spoken chief of pediatric surgery at MCH. The statement holds double meaning for Stylianos—Miami is where the story of his family began.

Stylianos was born to immigrant parents. His father, from Cyprus, and his mother, from Greece, met in Miami in the late '40s. They lived in Miami for a few years before relocating to Dumont, N.J., a small, blue-collar town about 10 miles from New York City. "My parents were children of the war," he says. "So the values they taught were hard work and the importance of education."

As a teenager, his interests were more aligned with soccer and rock 'n' roll than school. "I was good in school, but didn't have concrete aspirations," he says. That changed after a high school guidance counselor told him he had the stuff to make a great doctor. "I never really had guidance before," Stylianos says. "That's a function of immigrant parents. They don't know ... they just want you to be somebody."

# The Children's Champion

## The chief of pediatric surgery at Miami Children's Hospital is exactly where he belongs

by G.K. SHARMAN photography by BRIAN IMMKE

After graduating from Rutgers University, he attended New York University for medical school, followed by a Columbia residency and a Harvard fellowship. "It was a nice ascent," he says.

His upward motion included a stop at Englewood Hospital in New Jersey, where he worked as an orderly in the X-ray department. There he met an ultrasound technician named Joann, who became his wife. "She grew up in a small town, too," he says. "After we bought our first home, we'd take walks after dinner. Heading back to the house, we'd just laugh looking at it, like, 'This can't be real.'"

Years and miles away from his orderly days, Stylianos joined MCH's surgical staff in 2005, and was elected chief of its department of pediatric surgery in 2006. Prior to MCH, Stylianos worked at Children's Hospital of New York, where he served as director of the operating room. It was in those corridors that he honed his skills in separating conjoined twins, successfully separating three pairs throughout his tenure.

"It has to be a passion," Stylianos says of pediatrics. "It's not work to go into if you don't feel a visceral connection to it. Anytime you can affect the life of a child in such a profound way, it's an incredible feeling."

Stylianos' work is his life, and he gives all that he can. If your child recently had surgery, he'll check in on a Sunday. He gives out his cell number and e-mail address. And he's known for figurative (and literal) handholding through a scary test or two.

"He tries to reduce the fear," explains Jackie Gonzalez, senior vice president and chief nursing officer at MCH. "He makes time to answer questions and connect. You'd never see him

rush through an explanation or cut short communication with a family."

The human connection is his strength. "He's a good technical surgeon," says Dr. Michel Nahmad, the hospital's former chief of pediatric surgery. "But when you're operating on kids, that's not enough."

He needed all his abilities to save conjoined twins Carmen and Rosa Taveras. The surgery required non-scalpel skills like confidence and maturity—he was only a first-year ("a real newbie") when the Taveras family came looking for a miracle at Columbia in 1992.

The twins were attached at the pelvis, their legs straight out in a "splits" position, and shared several internal organs, with one bellybutton between them. "They were two gorgeous little babies who happened to be stuck together," Stylianos says.

In a meeting with his mentor, Dr. Peter Altman, Stylianos laid out his vision, everything from pre-op imaging to where the first incision should be made. Altman's response? "Sounds good. They're yours."

"As a first-year, you're aching to show your stuff," Stylianos says. So he assembled a team that included 50 professionals for different roles; his was to reconstruct the girls' bowels.

Sixteen years later, the twins are happy and healthy. Rosa, the more laid-back sister, describes Stylianos as "the best doctor ever."

"He was so kind to me and my family," she says. They've kept in touch with him over the years.

"There's something special about conjoined twins," he says. "There's something about separating them that defies our mindset. It's not just anatomy we're separating."

Although Stylianos still spends time in the operating room, he's also focused on spreading MCH's mission. "We've recently chartered an affiliation with Florida International University," he says. "MCH will serve as the academic center in pediatrics for the school. We're committed to finding the right balance of clinical, expertise, research and education to do what we can to ensure our care is accessible to kids in South Florida and beyond, into the Caribbean basin and South America."

Stylianos attributes his success to hard work and good timing. But he also has a firm support network in Joann and his three daughters, Alex, 22, Vanessa, 19 and Sophie, 17. "We are very close," he says. "I have such great kids, and I married the perfect person: someone who loves to travel and eat." The Stylianos' favorite cuisine? "Any," he says with a laugh.

By moving to Miami—where his parents met decades ago—his life has come full circle. "When we moved here, they came down from New Jersey, where they still live, and I took them back to the little church where they got married 52 years ago," he says. "It was incredible. It's all incredible, really. My career is a dream come true for them. I have to pinch myself sometimes. I'm living the American dream." 🍀