

## Mary Didiuk, PhD '87



After graduating from Ursuline Academy in 1987, Mary received a Bachelor of Science degree in Chemistry from Fairfield University. She completed a Ph.D. in Organic Chemistry at Boston College in 1996 and was then granted a post-doctoral fellowship to pursue advanced studies in Bio-organic Chemistry at Harvard University through the National Science Foundation.

Mary started her professional career as a research medicinal chemist at Pfizer Global Research and Development in Groton, Connecticut and spent twelve years in drug discovery in the Cardiovascular and Metabolic Diseases therapeutic area. Furthermore, she is the co-author of twenty-three peer reviewed scientific publications and the co-inventor of fourteen published patents with several additional provisional patent applications pending.

Mary believes that Ursuline provided her with academic knowledge, taught her invaluable life lessons, and fostered a supportive community that profoundly influenced her journey after high school. While a student, her mentors instilled in her a belief that women can be leaders and they encouraged her and all students to pursue their passions fervently. When Mary pursued her graduate work at Boston College, she noticed the stark reality of the gender imbalance in her field - only 17% of students in her program were female. In her research lab, she was the only

female out of twelve graduate and postdoctoral students. She credits Ursuline with giving her the foundation to believe in her own abilities as a woman.

Ursuline's commitment to fostering the development of women who embody faith, integrity, and dedication to service was a big part of Mary's educational experience and it has transferred to her personal and professional life. The motto of *Serviam* profoundly impacted her as a student and she has, since graduation, carried a strong sense of purpose to help others. Throughout her years as a chemist, she had been waiting for the right opportunity to give back to families living near her in Connecticut.

In 2019, Mary co-founded Traveling Toys, Inc., a non-profit whose vision revolves around creating toy libraries in collaboration with public libraries. The core mission of the organization is to provide children and teenagers from diverse socio-economic backgrounds with access to high-quality, age-appropriate toys to promote play; this, in turn, enhances the development, creativity, and learning of the children they serve. She has successfully established nine toy libraries, circulating more than 22,000 toys. There are currently five more libraries fully funded. In 2023, the organization served 43,000 children and teens across several cities and counties in southwest Connecticut. Mary notes that there is a history of toy libraries in the United States, dating back to the Great Depression and the services that the libraries provide remain relevant today. There are currently over 400 toy libraries operating in the United States and twelve other countries. In 2023, Mary was honored to receive Shoreline Publishing's Beacon Award for her work with the organization.

Mary has lived in Madison, Connecticut for twenty years with her husband Andrew, their two sons, and their labradoodle.