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**Roll Call**  
ASRT Election Winners

ASRT Foundation's  
**New Research Grant**

APRIL/MAY 2018 • VOL 50 NO 4

Michael Benzaia, R.T.(R)(CT),  
put his certifications to work as  
he followed his acting dreams.

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## COVER STORY

# 22

## R.T. Following His Dreams

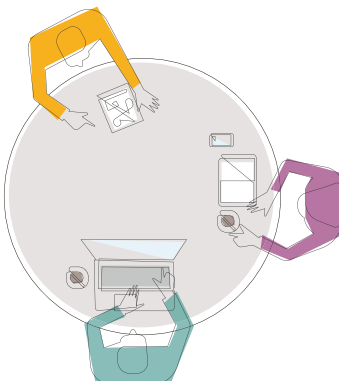
Michael Benzaia, R.T.(R)(CT), came to Tinseltown with a headshot, acting skills and something extra: his highly valued medical training.

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## Rip-Roaring Red Rock

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## Research Roundtable

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## ASRT's New Leaders Speak Up

**40** The ASRT election closed on March 6 and we've tallied the votes. Now hear from your new president-elect, vice president, secretary and treasurer.



## Society Achievements

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*an actor's*

Michael  
John Benzaia's  
training and  
certification as  
a technologist  
allowed him  
to pursue  
his dreams.

Michael John Benzaia, R.T.(R)(CT), has the rare distinction of succeeding in two careers — first as a computed tomography technologist and manager and then as an actor who's living his dream in California.

Michael's acting highlights include roles in "Modern Family," "Shameless" and "How to Get Away with Murder." He's also a sparkling smile in Sensodyne ProNamel Toothpaste commercials. "I played a doctor. I just got a check for residuals. That's pretty nice," he said. In addition to acting gigs as a health care professional and other roles, Michael works per diem as a technologist at three facilities in Santa Monica: Providence St. Johns Health Center, Westside Internal Medicine and Resolution Advanced Imaging. They're jobs he can tailor to fit his acting schedule.

"I love my job in radiology. Nothing can compare to it and I don't think I'd ever leave it. I'll always want to be in a lead apron in a dark room someplace looking at skeletons, bones and injuries," he said.

# Journey

BY DONNA OLMSTEAD, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

## Life's Journey

Michael said his passions for medicine and acting began with his mother, Edythe Benzaia, who died from complications of breast cancer when she was 54 years old and Michael was 18. Edythe imparted the confidence and skills he needed to pursue his dreams. "She did everything she could for me," he said.

Edythe grew up poor in the Bronx and wanted to make sure Michael had every possible opportunity, he said. "Because of her, I got a head start."

For example, she organized fundraisers so he could go on a school trip as a student ambassador to Scandinavia, and she pushed him to supplement his education with participation in sports and the arts. She also encouraged him to act in summer stock plays in the Catskills and Hudson Valley.

It was the connections he made during those performances that ultimately landed him a role in the reality show that brought him to California. One of his friends had become a casting director and encouraged him to come to New York City for an audition. Michael didn't get the part, but he got his name on a list that led to his role on the reality show "Summer Camp," which aired in 2013 on USA Network.

It was a fitting first role because one of his earliest jobs was as a health assistant in summer camp. Another early job was working in the medical records department of the hospital where his mother was treated for cancer. She was ill for more than seven years and "through that entire struggle she stayed positive," he said.

Michael said he liked working in medical records because, as he delivered paperwork, he could occasionally stop in to see his mother.

Michael's former supervisor, Pam Andry, M.S., RHIT, now retired, remembered Michael had a pleasant disposition and was a great asset as an employee. He was "someone everyone liked, and a good worker — helpful, pleasant, kind, efficient, smart. Although he was young and going through such a heartbreaking, difficult time due to his mother's illness, he didn't let that affect his job or attitude."

Pam said she's confident that Michael is still just as impressive in both his careers. He had a way of knowing just how to put a patient at ease and interacting with them in a positive way, she said, adding that she's glad Michael is pursuing his acting career. "I believe he has the ambition and personality to handle both careers. How wise of him to establish himself in a good and worthwhile career while also pursuing his dream of acting."

Like Pam, Michael said his bosses and co-workers suggested a career in the medical field might be a good fit, and Edythe's oncologist recommended radiologic technology. Taking that advice, Michael enrolled at SUNY Orange County Community College in Middletown. He was a freshman when his mother died. He said he believes that knowing he was on his way in his education and life made it easier for his mother to pass away.

"After my mom's passing I never looked at the world the same. The pain I felt refined me. Everything I thought about this life and my way of navigating in it completely changed," he said.

He said he felt more confident and knew that if he pursued his goals with courage and determination, nothing would be out of reach. "I trained myself not to look to the outcomes, but rather the experiences I would gain," he said.

Ann T. Verschuuren, M.Ed., R.T.(R)(M), a professor and mentor at SUNY Orange, said Michael always had a sense of humor and an innate ability to discern what was really important and "not sweat the small stuff."

Ann continues to serve the profession as a delegate and president of New York State Society of Radiologic Sciences. When she has time, she said she loves to catch Michael on television, "using his charm and medical background to make a name for himself." Because one of Ann's degrees is a bachelor of arts, she said she understands the connection between the arts and radiography.

"While I work to create a well-collimated image framed with a marker, 'signed' as my artwork, Mike has been working on his interpersonal and patient care skills as he refines his talents as an actor," she said. "The ability to read people, improve communication and understand what others want is something acting and radiography have in common. It makes sense to me."

Michael graduated from the radiologic technology program at 21, then became certified and registered in radiography and computed tomography.

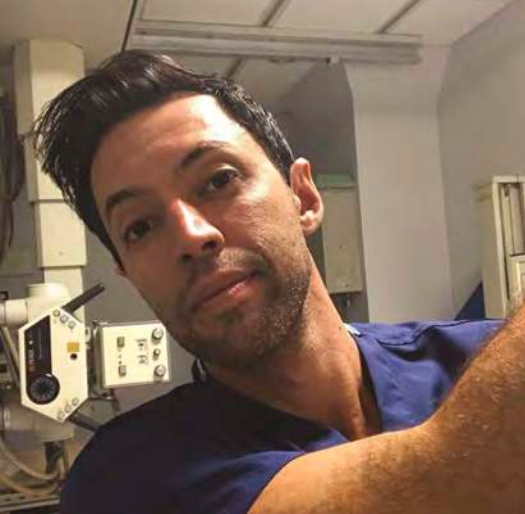
"It was an amazing program. I've gotten every [medical imaging] job I've applied for because they over-prepared us," he said. "They worked us so hard, but we were prepared — not only for the job, but for life."

## Putting It All Together

Michael said he loves working as a CT technologist. "I enjoy helping people," he said. "I have a bigger heart because of patient care. I also like that we are a team — we're part of a bigger picture."

He worked his way into a management position at Hudson Valley





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Orthopedics. He quickly found a sense of security and success in his radiography career, he said. "The great thing about radiology is you can always climb the career ladder."

Nicole Rushing, B.S.R.T., R.T.(R) (CT), chair of SUNY Orange, who worked with Michael, said he had a talent for understanding and helping people. "If we had a disgruntled patient, he would listen to them, calm them down, be empathetic and smooth the situation over or make the person feel better. He always tried to do what was best for the patient."

Moreover, he was kind and lighthearted, with a sense of humor that kept everyone laughing, she said. She knew Michael wanted to act.

"We often talked about him leaving to pursue his career," she said. She encouraged him to use his background as a technologist to follow his heart.

When he decided to move to California and pursue his dreams, Michael said it was nice to have the support of his co-workers and supervisors. "Every radiology department feels like a family," he said. "This is the blessing; that we are always there for each other."

## Launching a New Career

Michael's radiography background paid off as he pursued his acting dreams. He said he didn't know whether he'd make it in Hollywood when he started out, but his passion for acting was strong enough to take the risk. When he was called up for a role in "Summer Camp," he moved to California from Middletown, New York, with a few friends.

"When I told [my friends] I was going, they all wanted to go

too," Michael said. "We were all so excited."

Michael found that with his experience and certification in medical imaging, he easily landed a job in medical imaging and was the first among his friends to get a job. He's the only one from that group of friends who is still living near Tinseltown, where youth, hard work, talent and ambition don't always equal success. His friends all moved back to New York, he said.

Radiologic technology and acting might seem like an odd combination, but it fits Michael perfectly, he said. He enjoys helping people as a technologist and working in the medical field keeps any stress he feels during an acting job in perspective. "If we don't get the shot, no one is going to die," he said.

Since January, Michael has been auditioning for all kinds of roles during pilot season. It's a frantic time of year when producers seek the actors they need to turn hundreds of scripts into the first episodes of shows. A pilot episode could then be picked up and become a series.

"It would be great to get a 12-episode gig," Michael said. "I'd love to lock in a lead role on a show. Of course, I would love it if a feature [film] comes along."

Michael encourages those with a passion to allow themselves the opportunity to pursue their dreams. He said he feels successful when he performs each of his roles to the best of his ability.

"I don't want to be on autopilot, as a technologist or as an actor; I want to be in the moment. I want to change the people I meet and be changed by the people I meet," he said. "I give part of my heart to every patient, to every role." §