When Christopher K. Bichakjian, M.D., left the University of Michigan in 2003 after completing his Mohs surgery and cutaneous oncology fellowship, he and his wife, Maria, decided they wanted to experience life in a big city. So, they went as big as it gets — New York City.

After the birth of their son, Luca, and a year in private practice with a faculty position at Cornell University, the family decided it was time to come back to Michigan. Bichakjian rejoined the dermatology faculty at U-M in 2004, and he has never looked back.

“I have never regretted experiencing the grass on the other side of the fence; on the contrary,” he says. “The experience taught me just how much I value and enjoy academic medicine, and, most importantly, that there is no better place to accomplish my goals than at the University of Michigan.”

Now a professor of dermatology in the Division of Cutaneous Surgery and Oncology, Bichakjian cares for patients in the Comprehensive Cancer Center, within the Mohs surgery clinic, and in the multidisciplinary Melanoma and Merkel Cell Carcinoma (MCC) programs. The Mohs clinic enjoys a 98.4 percent excellence rating for overall care from patients, and Bichakjian’s colleagues are quick to point out that he is a major reason why. Their agreement manifested itself in many letters of support for him to be considered for the Outstanding Clinician Award.

The MCC program provides care for approximately 5-10 percent of all newly diagnosed MCC patients in the United States. The amazing growth of this program over the past decade is a credit to its founder, Bichakjian. Colleagues say he provides his direct phone number to patients, making him available to patients in off-hours for any concerns they may have. In addition, he spends many hours in the late afternoon personally calling patients to follow-up on their surgeries, to assess their well being and to answer their questions. His commitment and dedication to patients is at the heart of the patient-centered care experience and a reason his patients are so fond of him.

While he is glad to be back at Michigan, he does have one tiny regret — the weather: “To be completely honest, as much as I enjoy my professional life in Ann Arbor, the Michigan climate is not my favorite,” he says. “What may be surprising to some — which may not be a fact I should share with my skin cancer patients — is my love of sunny blue skies and sandy beaches.”

“I hear first-hand from patients and families regarding Chris’ dedication, care, thoughtfulness and expert medical skills. Patients travel long distances to be in his care and the team he has assembled.”

—Michelle Riba, M.D., M.S., professor of psychiatry and associate director, U-M Comprehensive Depression Center