

Endowed research professorship honors a life of service

📅 April 10, 2019

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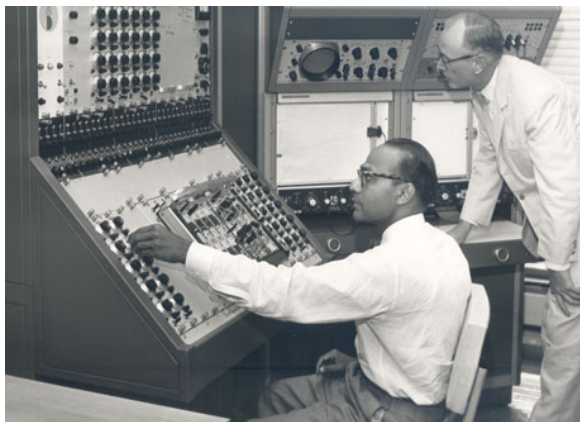


Oakland University's vision statement pledges to “unlock the potential of individuals and leave a lasting impact on the world through the transformative power of education and research.”

When it comes to fulfilling that vision, one would be hard-pressed to find a greater champion than Venkat Reddy. When he passed away in 2018, at age 95, the distinguished professor of biomedical sciences had devoted nearly 50 years to pushing the boundaries of ophthalmic science and guiding Oakland to national prominence in the realm of eye research.

Laying the foundation

In 1968, Reddy co-founded Oakland's Eye Research Institute (ERI) with colleague V. Everett Kinsey, one of the nation's preeminent eye researchers. The pair obtained funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to build the fourth floor of Dodge Hall, which provided space for ERI labs and offices.



Venkat Reddy (seated) and V. Everett Kinsey, co-founders of the Oakland University Eye Research Institute, are pictured.

In 1985, Oakland was awarded a National Eye Institute, NIH, Core Center Grant which, at the time, was held by only 30 institutions in the country. Some of the funding was used to expand ERI facilities.

“We had the grant before the University of Michigan, before Harvard and before Stanford,” said ERI Director Frank Giblin. “That really helped support the research of all the ERI investigators.”

Reddy served as ERI director from 1975-1997. Under his leadership, the institute became independent, after initially being part of the Department of Biological Sciences. He also created an annual conference on the biochemistry of the eye, which brought world-renowned scientists to Oakland's campus for 25 years.

After a 10-year stint at the University of Michigan, Reddy returned to Oakland as distinguished professor emeritus. He spent the next several years interacting with students and faculty, and stayed involved in a variety of research-related endeavors.

Leaving a legacy

Following the death of his wife in 2013, Reddy pledged his support for an endowed research professorship – the Alvira M. and Venkat N. Reddy Endowed Research Professorship in Eye Research.



Alvira and Venkat Reddy are pictured.

“He was very excited about the research professorship,” Gibling said. “He was committed to helping the ERI continue into the future, because he and Dr. Kinsey had invested so much energy into seeing it succeed.”

The professorship supports a faculty member focusing on eye research, and was recently awarded to its first recipient, Andrew Goldberg, professor of biomedical sciences. The funds will be used to investigate causes and potential cures for eye diseases such as macular degeneration and retinitis pigmentosa.

“One of the questions that has to be addressed to develop better treatments is how rods and cones (in the eye) maintain their shape,” Goldberg explained. “They have a very specific geometry, and diseases can disrupt it, which ultimately results in vision loss.”

A video about Goldberg’s research can be viewed [here](#).

‘It must not fail’

Goldberg and Reddy met in 2008, when the latter returned to Oakland as distinguished professor emeritus, and shared a mutual appreciation for each other.



Pictured from left are current and former ERI faculty members Kenneth Mitton, Venkat Reddy, Shravan Chintala, Dao-Qi Zhang and Andrew Goldberg.

“He was a really cultured person,” Goldberg said. “Although he grew up in a rural village in India, he was very much an explorer, and became a global citizen. He believed in politeness and civility in human relationships – and he loved his wife and children dearly.”

Reddy and his wife traveled extensively, and had friends and colleagues all over the world. He was widely recognized for having published more than 180 peer-reviewed articles and earned many research awards – including the prestigious Friedenwald Award in Ophthalmology for his pioneering studies on aqueous humor dynamics. He received the Michigan Scientist of the Year Award in 1991, and his research was funded by the National Eye Institute for more than 40 years.

Throughout Reddy's decorated career, the ERI remained a top priority.

“Dr. Reddy told me once that he and Dr. Kinsey adopted the mantra ‘It must not fail’ when getting the institute on its feet and seeing it through difficult times,” Goldberg said. “Even after death, he is still engaged through this endowment. Everyone at the ERI plays a part in making sure his mantra and memory live on.”

Learn more about the Eye Research Institute at oakland.edu/eri.