

Tuesday, February 9, 2010

Williamson Endowment

Endowed fellowship created in honor of OU charter faculty member

As a way to honor her husband, former Oakland University English Professor Marilyn Williamson has established an endowed fellowship at Oakland that will impact future minds in mathematics.

The James H. McKay Endowed Fellowship in Applied Mathematics is named after Jim McKay, a charter OU faculty member serving the university for 36 years, from 1959 to 1995. McKay is a former professor and chair of Mathematical Sciences at OU who was instrumental in developing the Ph.D. program in Applied Mathematics — the first Ph.D. program created in the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS).

McKay also founded Oakland's Summer Mathematics Institute, which exposes gifted high school students to advanced undergraduate mathematical concepts for college credit. The successful program was honored when its director, Eddie Cheng, recently received a prestigious Professor of the Year Award from the Presidents Council, State Universities of Michigan for 2009.

Williamson served as chair of the English Department, teaching English at Oakland in its early years and later went on to teach English and serve as a faculty chair at Wayne State University. She also served as associate dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Wayne State and provost of the university.

She hopes the endowment will serve to carry out and advance Jim's legacy of exemplary applied mathematics education at Oakland University.

Williamson, who is diagnosed with incurable brain cancer, hopes to augment the endowed fund by encouraging friends and acquaintances to contribute as well in an effort to support promising students in applied mathematics. "This is a worthwhile way to honor Jim and me, while also supporting the important legacy Jim left at OU."

Reflecting on their early years together at Oakland, Williamson describes the then fledgling institution as "more like a smaller college. We felt that we were part of something special and a little risky. No one else was doing anything like what we were doing."

The pair knew Matilda Wilson who hosted many parties at Meadow Brook Hall and who Marilyn describes as "highly sociable with faculty and students. She tried to create an atmosphere that was congenial."

Making her own mark on Oakland, Williamson was chair of the committee who first created the popular "exploratories," classes in the CAS, an interdisciplinary collection of courses with an emphasis on inquiry, which later evolved into The Honors College.

"Jim was a pioneer and set a high standard for math education at Oakland," Ron Sudol, dean, CAS said. "We are indebted to him for his contributions to countless students and faculty members, and to Marilyn for her foresight and generosity in establishing this award that will continue to provide support for students."

For donors interested in contributing to the James H. McKay Endowed Fellowship in Applied Mathematics, the university is accepting charitable contributions. Please contact Pat Zawadzki, director of Planned Giving at (248) 364-6129.

SUMMARY

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