

OU teacher education endowment carries on a lifelong legacy

Throughout her more than 30-year career at Oakland University, Nancy Schmitz has seen the power of education to transform lives. The assistant vice president for student affairs and dean of students says that one of the most rewarding parts of her job is seeing OU alumni who are making a positive impact on their communities.

A passion for education is the legacy Schmitz received growing up in rural North Dakota, the daughter of a former school teacher who saw education as the cornerstone of a stable livelihood and more fulfilling life. She recently took action to ensure that legacy will continue through an endowment created in her mother's honor. The endowment provides an annual scholarship to be awarded to a junior or senior student majoring in elementary education or who is enrolled in the Secondary Teacher Education Program.

"She values education very much," Schmitz said of her now 98-year-old mother, Fern, who still resides in North Dakota and makes weekly visits to the local library. "Her philosophy was for her daughters to be financially independent, and she viewed education as a ticket to self-sufficiency."



Nancy Schmitz is pictured with her mother, Fern.

Coming of age during the Great Depression, Fern borrowed \$30 from her father to attend a local teacher's college, and later taught in a one-room schoolhouse for eight years before leaving to work in her family's farming business. Though her teaching days were relatively short—they remained close to her heart.

"Even after she left teaching, she often worked to create better situations for people," Schmitz said. "She was typically first on the scene whenever there was a challenge, and she always went about things with a soft-spoken, get-it-done approach."

Schmitz added that the scholarship focuses not just on academics, but also on leadership and community involvement.

"It's important to be a strong academic performer, but teachers also need to be strong leaders and know how to work effectively with people," she explained.

Moreover, Schmitz sees the endowment as a way to support students who may not fit the conventional mold of a scholarship recipient.

"There's a broad band of talented students who are capable of making a difference in this world and who don't always receive scholarships. And yet, scholarships often make the difference when it comes to a student being able to complete their education," she said.

Jon Margerum-Leys, dean of the School of Education and Human Services, expressed gratitude for Schmitz's longtime dedication to Oakland University and said the endowment promises to have a lasting impact both at and beyond the university's campus.

"Students who receive this scholarship will carry the lessons they learn at Oakland University into their own classrooms when they become teachers," Dr. Margerum-Leys said. "They'll be able to help a new generation of students develop the same passion for education and the same self-sufficiency that inspired this endowment. It's a wonderful legacy."

The scholarship will be awarded starting in fall 2017.

To learn more about OU scholarships and ways to give, visit isupportou.com.