Giving from the Heart, for Art
UNM Alumni Couple’s Gifts Support Student Scholarship, Faculty Enrichment
By Hilary Mayall Jetty

Marilyn Carlson’s family was delighted that she decided to pursue a degree in art. Her mother was a gifted musician, and she inherited a love of art from her father, the noted painter, political cartoonist, calligrapher and illustrator Ralph W. Douglass.

From 1929 until 1961 Douglass taught studio art in UNM’s College of Fine Arts (CFA), also serving as department chair for a decade. Among his many accomplishments are illustrations for the 1940s Mesalander series of children’s books published by UNM Press, a popular textbook on calligraphy, and his work on the design of UNM’s official seal (see page 3). Douglass’ works were widely exhibited, and his liturgical art is represented at Albuquerque’s First Presbyterian Church as well as in churches in Claremont and Fullerton, Calif.

In 1961, the year Douglass retired, Marilyn received her BFA degree in drawing and painting from the CFA and her husband-to-be, Jack Carlson, graduated with a BS degree in electrical engineering from the UNM College of Engineering (now the School of Engineering).

To honor her father’s artistic and academic legacies and express their high regard for the arts, Marilyn and Jack have established the Ralph W. Douglass Scholarship Endowment for graduate students majoring in studio art or art history.

“As alumni, the Carlsons know so much about UNM, and have passion for what they want to nurture,” said Kymberly N. Pinder, PhD, dean of the UNM College of Fine Arts. “As the daughter of an artist and art professor, and an artist herself, Marilyn has a natural understanding for the struggles artists go through, and the support they need.”

“I always appreciated art, painted and did calligraphy, which my dad taught me when I was young,” noted Marilyn. “I attended Occidental College in Los Angeles, but transferred to UNM. Of course one reason was Jack,” she laughed, “but my father encouraged me to pursue a BFA.”

(Continued on page 3)

Compassionate Care
Seattle Nurse Practitioner and UNM Alumna Navigates Health Care System for Patients
By Michelle G. McRuiz

The term “whisperer” refers to someone with a unique ability to break through barriers where no one else has succeeded. As a nurse practitioner and the owner of a medical advocacy business called Health Whisperer, Hari Kaur Khalsa ’94 MSN challenges herself to do this every day. She serves as a link between patients and their providers, helping her clients navigate the health care system.

Hari, who lives in Seattle, has operated Health Whisperer for the past seven years. Her work demands expertise, patience and compassion. She now shares some of that compassion with UNM’s College of Nursing as a donor.

Mending a Broken System
“We have a fractured health care system,” Hari said. “Nobody talks to each other. There are great doctors at hospitals, but they are often not there for the patients; they’re serving their institutions.” As a result, patients often can have a hard time seeing their providers, receiving appropriate care, and having their wants and needs heard. Whether her clients have issues about billing, medical services or appeals, Hari remains neutral, trying to accomplish what is best for the patient.

“You’re never just dealing with the client,” she explained. “You’re dealing with the family. You have to be extraordinarily patient and kind.”

Recently she helped a client win an appeal to a health insurer. “I was able to save my client $150,000,” she said. “But what gets me going every day is the relationships with the family and many of the medical people.”

Back in Touch
“I was never going to give any money to UNM or any other school; I don’t know why,” Hari admitted. But in 2010 she received a College of Nursing newsletter, and something about it impressed her. “It only talked about nursing and nurse practitioners,” she said. “I was grateful to see that. I sat down and wrote a check.” She always directs her gifts to the nurse practitioner program.

“When I went to UNM, the nurse practitioner program was new,” she recalled. “I was in the third class, and they accepted only eight people.”

Joann Weiss, who was associate dean for graduate nursing programs at the time, was a huge help to Hari, who had been struggling from not having been in school for a long time as well as making the cultural adjustment from living in India for five years to living in the United States again. “[Joann] is one of the reasons why I’m back in touch with UNM,” Hari said. “She kept me in the program. She really could see who you were in that situation.”

“UNM is a jewel,” she added. “It really teaches you to be independent, and that sets it apart from other schools.”

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Caring for Future Generations
UNM's First Pediatric Resident Honored with Endowed Chair at School of Medicine
By Michelle G. McRuiz

From 1965 to 1995, Alice H. Cushing, MD, served on the pediatrics faculty of the UNM School of Medicine. Recently, the school’s Department of Pediatrics established the Alice H. Cushing Endowed Chair, which will help recruit and retain outstanding faculty as well as enhance training and research capabilities.

Alice, a native of Hobbs, N.M., became a physician in the 1950s, when it was neither common nor rare for women to pursue medicine. And although she had known for a long time that she wanted to study science, the pediatrics part came as a surprise.

After earning a bachelor’s degree in biology from UNM, Alice enrolled at the University of Colorado School of Medicine. (New Mexico did not yet have a medical school, and Colorado offered an interstate program for such states.) After graduating with her MD degree in 1952, Dr. Cushing and her husband moved back to Albuquerque, where she interned at what was then Bernalillo County Indian Hospital (BCIH, which became Bernalillo County Medical Center in 1968 and eventually UNM Hospital). She wanted to become a surgeon, but changed her mind after her son was born.

“When I saw this baby, I liked him pretty much,” she said with a chuckle, “and wanted to stay home with him.” Doing so gave her a practical perspective on her career as a physician. “I realized that most patients wouldn’t choose a woman surgeon, and I really liked kids,” she continued.

Longtime BCH/UNMH pediatric faculty member Dr. Robert Tully urged Dr. Cushing to start a pediatrics residency. Taking his advice, she became the first person to complete a BCHI pediatric residency and to pass her pediatric board certification examination.

During her career, Dr. Cushing served as an assistant professor, professor, and acting chair of the Department of Pediatrics—and is now a professor emerita at the school. “I loved children’s honesty and openness,” she said. “Children were never alcoholics or hypochondriacs. It was good for me to see them get well; it was misery for me to see the ones who wouldn’t get well.”

Now 84, Dr. Cushing is sharp, active, and a longtime donor to UNM—to Zimmerman Library and the School of Medicine. She appreciates how the Department of Pediatrics’ leadership has valued the importance of caring for patients and their families—and in turn, the communities of New Mexico.

“The department has done great work and continues to do so,” said Dr. Cushing. And that’s important because, above all, the discipline of pediatrics addresses the health and well-being of future generations.
Green the Peace Movement
UNM Alumna Wins Peace Prize for Green Technologies Work in Developing World
By Arturo Adams

he green movement is connected to peace," said Peter Nardini, winner of the 2014 Paul Re Peace Prize, administered biennially by the University of New Mexico Foundation. “There is a lot more violence in the world where resources are scarce.”

This past May, Peter won the peace prize for his work with his non-profit organization, Green World Health Net (GWHN). He founded GWHN in 2008 with one massive goal: to bring green technologies to improve health in underdeveloped countries around the world. He has served as its executive director ever since.

“At first our organization was called African Health Net,” Peter recalled, as he was first inspired to create the nonprofit while volunteering in Ghana, a West African country. “But then we realized that we wanted to have a larger, more global impact.”

One GWHN program, Recycle Health New Mexico, works not only on a global scale but also involves UNM students. Based in New Mexico, the program offers two work-study positions for students. To find participants for the project, Peter returned to UNM, where his wife, Katrina, is currently working on her master’s degree in public health. “We are very much trying to involve UNM in our work,” said Peter.

Recycle Health New Mexico rescues medical equipment that would otherwise go in New Mexico landfills. GWHN then partners with Project C.U.R.E., an organization which sorts, tests, and then distributes the supplies and equipment to hospitals in developing countries.

In 2013 alone, Recycle Health New Mexico prevented approximately 13 tons of medical supplies and equipment—estimated to be worth nearly $4.5 million—from going into New Mexico landfills, which instead ended up helping under-resourced hospitals provide better health care. “It’s very much a local project,” said Peter. “We are solving a problem in New Mexico and globally.”

Other GWHN work in New Mexico includes workshops at UNM and with the general public, at which participants are taught how to make their own solar panels for household use and charging mobile devices as well as how to make LED lights.

The Boko Bed Net Project, one of the first GWHN programs, provides solar-powered cooling systems to malaria nets that are otherwise too hot to use. It has garnered a lot of attention with the release of a short film, “The Boko Bed Net Project.” Clips from the documentary can be watched on GWHN’s YouTube channel, GreenWorldHealthNet, at youtube.com/user/GreenWorldHealthNet.

The film also discusses Peter’s first trip to Ghana in 2006, when he was inspired to found GWHN. He and Katrina volunteered there for three months at Dinchao Hospital.

“The people of Ghana are wonderful. They make the best of what they have,” said Peter. After designing and building a water system for the hospital, Peter realized that he wanted to do more development projects in the country; he had previous experience with such work while in the Peace Corps.

“T’d known that I wanted to join the Peace Corps ever since I was a kid,” recalled Peter. “And I did it backwards. Most people join the Peace Corps before they get their master’s degrees, but I did it after.”

After receiving a dual master’s degree in community and regional planning and Latin American studies from UNM, Peter volunteered with the Peace Corps from 2001 to 2004. He served as a basic sanitation specialist in Bolivia, designing and building water systems among other side projects, such as introducing highly nutritious peanut butter to the local diet.

The Peace Corps also proved to be significant to Peter in another way—it was during this service that he met Katrina. The couple later moved to San Francisco, where Katrina studied to become a nurse-midwife and Peter began work as managing director of Volunteers for Inter-American Development Assistance (VIDA), an organization that sends medical supplies to hospitals in Latin America.

Looking for a new volunteer opportunity around this time, the couple decided to make their first trip to Ghana, which they chose for its English-speaking populace.

“In some ways Bolivia prepared me for Ghana, but the scale of poverty was much more extreme than I was expecting,” said Peter. “It was an eye-opener.”

GWHN continues to work in Ghana today with the Boko Bed Net Project. This year has seen a significant expansion of this project involving several malaria research teams and organizations currently working there. The Albuquerque-based organization also continues to run the Recycle Health New Mexico program for reducing medical supplies and equipment throughout the state.

Peter believes it is important for people in developing countries like Ghana to gain their first exposure to technology through alternative technologies, expressing his concern for greenhouse gases and global warming. He hopes to expand GWHN’s projects to more countries in the future.

“This is completely necessary work,” said Peter. “It is our future, and we don’t have another choice.”

Peter Nardini greets staff at Nana Dikya Hospital in Dixcove, Ghana as they receive a shipment of much needed medical supplies and equipment from Direct Relief International and Green World Health Net.

Katrina and Peter Nardini take a break from their work with Green World Health Net with a walk on Lagoon Beach in Akwadaa, Ghana.

“With a commitment of support, tenured and tenure-track faculty would be able to take advantage of amazing opportunities,” Dean Pinder explained. “For example, they would be able to access funding to pay for expenses involved with exhibiting their work, accept an invitation to deliver a paper or perform abroad, or attend a class or conference to advance their professional practice.”

Through a charitable remainder trust, the couple is establishing the Jack and Marilyn Carlson Endowment for Faculty Enrichment for Art and Art History in Honor of Ralph Douglass.

“Most professors work not just for money, but for the love of practicing their art, and teaching,” said Dean Pinder. “This will help us attract and retain quality faculty, providing funds that can be used to further their work and bring those experiences and accomplishments back to campus, our students and Albuquerque.”

At home, the Carlsons enjoy receiving updates on a variety of campus activities. “Our association with UNM brings announcements of so many wonderful shows, lectures and programs to our mailbox,” said Marilyn. They occasionally visit one of their three sons, who lives in Santa Fe, and whenever possible they delight in returning to the energetic environment of UNM.
The UNM Foundation has a variety of giving societies including, but not limited to, cash, securities, real property, bequests or other estate plans. In some, gifts may take a variety of forms including, chairs are also great ways to give. Gifts endowing programs, professorships and giving campaigns. Supporting events or programs, including scholarships, University's schools, colleges and needs. You also may give gifts to a are used for the University’s greatest needs. You may give to the UNM Foundation to arrange the scholarship for political science and peace studies students at UNM.

"Issa wanted to go into law and politics because he wanted to make a difference," said Carol. "But he was never able to realize that goal."

Yet Issa did make an impact on those around him during his life. He was an active volunteer for Albuquerque Sister Cities, participating in fund-raising even when he could barely walk. He also went to Santa Fe for a Hiroshima Day commemoration, an occasion close to his history.

Issa’s father, Nanao Sakaki, a well-known Japanese poet, walked through Hiroshima just three days after the atomic bombing. He was looking for a friend who lived in the city.

“Even doctors have said that Issa’s disease could have come from his father’s exposure to the radiation, but there’s no way to know,” Carol commented. “We don’t know.”

Like Issa’s father, Carol is also a poet. While completing her master’s degree at UNM in TESOL, but there’s no way to know. “Carol commented. “We don’t know.”

It was during gardening sessions in her garden that Carol’s inspiration first struck. "I told him about tea ceremony developed to end civil war in Japan. Carol encourages people to donate to the scholarship fund to further this goal of peace—to make a difference like Issa wanted to. “Contribute,” she said. “Celebrate who Issa was, and who he might have been.”

To donate to the Issa Sakaki Merrill Scholarship, please visit unmfund.org/fund/issa-sakaki-merrill.

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