The Shoulders of GIANTS

Endowed positions make MSU’s best better
DAY ONE: On his very first day as MSU’s 22nd president, Kevin Guskiewicz joined 29 endowed professors and 10 endowed chairs onstage at the Wharton Center for the 2024 Investiture, which celebrated philanthropy and academic achievement in front of an audience of colleagues, donors, friends and family. LEARN MORE about this year’s honorees at: msu.edu/honoredfaculty

The generosity of thousands of alumni and friends empowers MSU’s students, faculty and leaders to accomplish the extraordinary every day. Ways to support Michigan State

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To remember MSU in your will, personal trust, qualified retirement plan or IRA, contact the Office of Gift Planning at (800) 232-4678 or (517) 884-1000.

The correct reference is Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, and the federal tax identification number is 38-6005984. If you have already named MSU in your estate plans, please contact us so we can welcome you to the Linda E. Landon Legacy Society. For more information, visit giftplanning.msu.edu.

Learn more at givingto.msu.edu

DEVELOPMENTS

FOR DONORS AND FRIENDS OF MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
MSU Developments, published two times each year, is devoted to the inspiration and impact of private philanthropy at Michigan State University.

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A LIFE STORY, TOLD THROUGH GIVING

For Marge des Lauriers and her late husband, Brad, making an impact at MSU is a way to show love

Margie des Lauriers was reading to a kindergarten class the moment she realized she wanted to be a teacher—even though she was only a first grader herself at the time. What better place to eventually pursue teaching than Michigan State University?

Marge earned her degree in 1952 and worked hard to pay for school, first as an operator at Michigan Bell and later through part-time jobs on and off campus.

She met a fellow named Brad at one such job, “scrapping dishes in the bowels of Yakeley Hall,” and because there’s no bond quite like one built in a campus dishroom, Brad eventually became her husband.

In the years that followed, work and family took the des Lauriers in many different directions, but their connection to MSU was always a priority.

They made their first gift to Michigan State in 1955. “Brad is the one who really started us on the road to giving,” Marge says. “It was just a couple dollars at first, and I remember saying to him, ‘That’s not much of a donation!’ and he said, ‘Well, you’ve got to start somewhere!’”

Sixty-eight (and counting) years after that first small gift, Marge continues to use philanthropy to honor the places and people and things she and her family held dear on campus.

In honor of Marge’s late sister, Angeline Buckwick—an MSU alumna and lifelong teacher—the family established a memorial scholarship in education and sponsored a bench in the 4-H Children’s Garden, a place Angeline loved to take her schoolchildren on field trips.

Another gift supporting the MSU Bike Shop honors their Spartan son Paul’s love for cycling.

Additionally, Marge and Brad documented an estate gift that established two scholarships to support students pursuing careers in the fields they loved: education for Marge and construction management for Brad. Regular cash gifts have enabled these funds to make an impact on scholarship recipients for many years, and their estate gift will be divided equally between both endowments in the future.

“College is so expensive now, and as the scholarship funds grow, I like seeing them make an even bigger dent in the costs these students face in pursuit of their dreams,” says Marge.

LEARN MORE about how you can support MSU by contacting the development office in your college or by contacting the Office of Gift Planning at (517) 884-1000, or giftplanning@msu.edu

COMPUTING KINDRED SPIRITS

Kun-Mu Chen Memorial Scholarship’s first recipient

The first memorial scholarship honoring distinguished electrical engineering professor Kun-Mu Chen has been awarded to a student who is a kindred soul.

Chen spent 40 years mentoring students and establishing a comprehensive research program in the College of Engineering. He retired in 2000 and passed away in 2022. He was passionate about science.

The first Kun-Mu Chen Scholarship has been awarded to Jacob Patton, a computer engineering student who fell in love with computers and science at age two. His childhood fascination ranged from Windows 98 to today’s smaller, faster computers with high-speed processors.

“Just seeing technology evolve so much over my lifetime has sparked a genuine curiosity on how these technologies worked,” Jacob says. “I knew I wanted to be a part of designing and developing these cutting-edge technologies. I thought, ‘What better way to achieve this goal than engineering?’”

Jacob is pursuing the software side of computer engineering, with an interest in artificial intelligence and embedded systems.

“I am honored with an award that’s named after a prestigious member of the university. It is a testament to the time and effort I’ve put toward engineering, a field I love,” he adds.

Patton, of Southfield, Michigan, is a member of the National Society of Black Engineers and the Michiganan Scholars program. Additionally, he plays trombone in the Spartan Marching Band and Spartan Brass.

LEARN MORE about support for the College of Engineering by contacting Senior Director of Development Mike Wallace at walla203@msu.edu or by calling (517) 355-8339.
The enduring impact of Steve and Nancy Lange’s commitment to music education

TAKING ACTION NOW AND FOR THE FUTURE

INSET PHOTO: Nancy Lange (center) and two recipients of the Organ Scholarship in memory of Dr. Stephen Lange: siblings Kelly and Tim Bohan. Tim is a former student of Steve Lange.

Dr. Stephen Lange

Nancy and Steve Lange met in the late 1960s in an MSU classroom. Little did they know they would embark on a journey that would leave an indelible mark on the world of music education.

Their passion for music led them to earn an impressive six degrees from MSU, with five of them in music. In 1970, Steve started work at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in downtown Lansing, where he served as organist, choirmaster and minister of music. He earned his Ph.D. from MSU in 1978. An accomplished organist and choir leader, Steve made a big impression on generations of people through his patience, relentless dedication, and indelible mark on the world of music education.

To honor him, Nancy established the Organ Scholarship in memory of Dr. Stephen Lange at MSU.

Nancy’s honoring of Steve and her dedication to the future of music education did not end there. In a gesture that speaks volumes about her commitment to nurturing musical talent, she documented through their estate a generous bequest to create the Stephen R. Lange and Nancy R. Lange University Music Scholarship for students focusing on organ or voice.

Her gift ensures that the Lange legacy will continue to thrive, providing opportunities for aspiring musicians to follow in the footsteps of Steve and Nancy.

To celebrate her generosity and honor her memory, the College of Music at MSU is creating the Stephen R. Lange and Nancy R. Lange University Music Scholarship.

INSET PHOTO: Gregory Shafer and Bernadette Gongora helped raise 30 foster children. Now, they also will have a positive impact on the lives of countless MSU students in need thanks to their $1.638 million estate gift to the College of Arts & Letters.

Gregory Shafer and Bernadette Gongora

“Steve taught, inspired and loved people of all ages, but his favorite students were always teenagers. He delighted in their energy, joy, openness and unlimited ability to learn,” Nancy says. “Financially helping future MSU voice and organ students is a way to continue sharing this love.”

Steve retired in 2015 after 45 years at St. Paul’s. He passed away in Jan. 2023, leaving his wife, Nancy, to carry on his legacy.

For more information about the Stephen R. Lange and Nancy R. Lange University Music Scholarship, please contact Tim Nieland, chair of the Department of English, at nieland@msu.edu or by calling (517) 353-4331.

These endowments will directly support the educational dreams and aspirations of our students and help the Department of English enhance our research and teaching strengths by recruiting and retaining world-class faculty.”

Gregory Shafer and Bernadette Gongora

Alumni Gregory Shafer and Bernadette Gongora

Chair of the Department of English

NIELAND

JUSTUS
PRESERVING A SANCTUARY
FOR BIRDS AND PEOPLE

David Dvorak’s lifelong commitment to the MSU W.K. Kellogg Biological Station

BY AMELIA SHUGAR

B esides W.K. Kellogg himself, there may be no more supportive individual of the W.K. Kellogg Biological Station than David Grant Dvorak, M.D.

Dave is a retired ophthalmologist who has lived on the shore of Gull Lake since 1973. His love for the area began long before he could kayak the blue waters of this inland lake.

During the summer of 1964, the Kellogg Bird Sanctuary was Dave’s outdoor retreat from the work of his medical internship. “I would go to the Bird Sanctuary and walk around. I have always enjoyed nature and liked just being outdoors.”

The 3.873-acre biological station located between Kalamazoo and Battle Creek offers many opportunities for the community to explore the great outdoors. Named for the 20th-century cereal magnate W.K. Kellogg, who donated the land and properties to MSU, this sanctuary for environmental research is MSU’s largest off-campus education complex and one of North America’s premier inland field stations.

Once Dave built his home on Gull Lake, KBS was only a short walk away. “I used to walk straight to the biological station and see the orioles. Many times, I looked for bluebirds, but I never was successful.”

The elusive bluebirds didn’t discourage him though. Dave became a member of KBS, and after his retirement in 2002, he volunteered to work in the KBS gardens. Although he didn’t consider himself a master gardener, he loved volunteering his time to keep KBS beautiful.

In 2003, Dave was particularly drawn to the KBS Shoreline Management Demonstration Area project, which he contributed to for multiple years. He already had a heart for philanthropy, inspired by his days in medical school when a grant from the Grand Rapids Foundation helped him complete his education. From that time on, Dave has always tried to give back through his own philanthropy.

Since KBS’s mission aligned with Dave’s interest in protecting lakes and wetlands, he was eager to understand the station’s needs and contribute to the cause: “Protecting the lake is one of the major priorities,” he says.

Dave’s tireless efforts didn’t go unnoticed by previous KBS Director Kay Gross, who invited him to join the Director’s Advisory Board in 2006. His time on the board gave Dave a front-row seat to KBS’s mission, and he was determined to do his part to meet those needs so the station could continue to thrive. “I would hate to see anything ever happen to the Manor House or the grounds or the Bird Sanctuary,” says Dave. “I have always been interested in nature.”

While ducks and geese preen their feathers on the lake that stretches beyond a granite stone nearby proudly lists his brother’s name. The Dvorak family legacy is now part of KBS.

After his retirement in 2002, Dave became a member of KBS’s Director’s Advisory Board, and a year later, he was elected Board chairpersons for the KBS Capital Campaign. In 2004, Dave was the lead donor to establish the Bird Sanctuary bridge in memory of his brother, Thomas E. Dvorak, who graduated from MSU’s College of Natural Science in 1943. The dedication of the bridge arching over Wintergreen Lake is something he will never forget. “We had a perfect day for the dedication. It was a sunny day. All the relatives came. My nephew Doug gave the dedication speech on the bridge.”

When Dave visits the bridge now, trumpeter swans fly overhead while ducks and geese preen their feathers on the lake that stretches beyond. A granite stone nearby proudly lists his brother’s name. The Dvorak family legacy is now part of KBS.

With Dave as a major benefactor, KBS continues to stand as a beacon for environmental conservation and research. “Dave has been a transformative philanthropic leader on behalf of KBS, particularly for the Bird Sanctuary,” says KBS Director Fredric Janzen, Ph.D. “We are humbled by Dave’s ongoing faith in the KBS community and mission, and we wish him all the best while we witness the outcomes of his devotion to KBS continue to take shape in the coming years, benefiting KBS as well as the greater local community.”

Dave occasionally takes his kayak on Gull Lake to view the station from the water. “I love when you go by on a boat to see the difference of the Lakescape project,” he says. “I mean it’s not recognizable compared to what it looked like when we started. It has all grown so much.”

Dave retired from the KBS Director’s Advisory Board in 2023, but he continues looking for bluebirds at the KBS Bird Sanctuary. As he strolls across the grounds and greets the dedicated KBS and MSU colleagues, he is happy in the knowledge that this environmental sanctuary will continue to flourish. “I am most proud of knowing that the funds I have set aside will help give scholarships and maintain the facilities. One does not know what will happen in the future, but I hope that I am able to make a positive difference.”

**LEARN MORE about support for the W.K. Kellogg Biological Station by contacting Senior Associate Director of Development Karen Wnek at wnek@msu.edu or by calling (517) 353-5962.**
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Alumna Lorelei Rockwell and her husband, Wayne Kennedy, have an enormous presence on MSU’s campus. Despite the fact that it’s been more than six decades since Lorelei graduated with her degree in office administration, and she interned with Paramount Pictures as their campus ambassador, her love for video production with her public relations skills. And on the role of marketing and communications director—combining Disney College Program. She joined the MSU Telecasters and took years collecting every quintessential college experience she could.

One of those students, fresh out of her last class of her last semester of college at MSU, walked into the Main Library on a sunny Friday afternoon in late April with a big smile on her face.

Her name? Jennifer Laukonis. The reason for the big smile? Excitement. Because at that point, just a handful of final projects and a trip across the stage in her cap and gown were all that stood between her and a very, very bright future.

Jennifer is what you’d call a “digital native,” who grew up with technology and an inherent sense of how to use it to build—and entertain—an audience. She started a YouTube channel, built a technology and an inherent sense of how to use it to build—and entertain—an audience. She started a YouTube channel, built a

It was putting together the application materials, reflecting on everything I’d done so far, describing myself and my goals and then finding out that I’d received the scholarship. It made me feel so confident in myself and all the choices I’ve made so far.

And of course it took away some of the financial burden, which is such a relief. But more than that, it was just a great reminder that I’m in the right place and I’m headed in the right direction.”

As of this spring, that direction was clear and very, very exciting, says Jennifer. “I am endlessly appreciative to be awarded this scholarship. To be tied to Andre Blay’s legacy in any way is an honor,” Jennifer says. “To know that an MSU grad made such an impact on the film industry, and to know that now it’s my turn to go out into the world and hopefully do the same.”

Wayne’s four endowed funds, created and named in honor of Lorelei’s cousin, film industry mogul and fellow MSU alum Andre Blay

The scholarship, Jennifer says, was validation for all the experiences she had, and lessons learned and hard work that led up to it. This is the part she hopes that Lorelei Rockwell and Wayne Kennedy hear the loudest when they read this story.

“It wasn’t just the money,” she says. “It was the whole process. It was putting together the application materials, reflecting on everything I’d done so far, describing myself and my goals and then finding out that I’d received the scholarship. It made me feel so confident in myself and all the choices I’ve made so far.

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LEARN MORE about support for scholarships by contacting Associate Director of Development Madison Dugan at dugannm@msu.edu or by calling (517) 432-6493.

Lorelei Rockwell and Wayne Kennedy created their first scholarship in 2009 and have since given nearly $2 million to support their four named scholarship and fellowship funds across four colleges. In addition to the Blay Film Studies Endowment in the College of Communication Arts and Sciences, the Elizabeth Blay Maison Endowed Scholarship in the College of Nursing honors Lorelei’s mother, who devoted her career to nursing, while the Joseph Laurence Maison Endowment for fisheries and wildlife graduate students in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources honors her father, a Michigan outdoorsman and hunter all his life. And the Lorelei Maison Rockwell MBA Scholarship in the Eli Broad College of Business honors Lorelei’s degree and career.
Endowed faculty positions are as much tools for retention as they are for recruiting—rewarding the work that MSU’s reputation is built upon: the work of those who are already here, and the inspiration they’ve drawn from.

By Devon Barrett

So much has been said about endowed faculty positions as recruiting tools—leverage for universities to hire the best and brightest researchers from other institutions to continue their groundbreaking, discipline-crossing, mind-opening work here at Michigan State.

But aside from the promise of private funding to make their very best work even better, a big part of what brings new leaders to MSU is the reputation our university already has as a thriving environment for big ideas and collegial collaboration.

It is a reputation built on the shoulders of the incredible teachers and researchers who are already here:

Like the cat specialist in the College of Veterinary Medicine, who is a teacher, a researcher and a practitioner, paving the way for advancements in feline orthopedic surgery and beyond, and helping students, patients and colleagues, on an international scale, to better understand our furry friends.

Or the sustainable packaging expert in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources’ School of Packaging, whose insights into biodegradable and compostable packaging are more important than ever as humans attempt to reduce our impact on the environment.

And the accounting professor in the Eli Broad College of Business, whose expertise in his field is matched in equal measure with his expertise as a teacher, his ability to present complex information in an exciting, accessible way, and the connections he builds with students to help set them up for success.

These faculty members, who have a collective half-century of experience right here at MSU, earned endowed positions last year in honor of their accomplishments and their contributions to their fields, and also for their inherent potential—and desire—to do more, go bigger, or build something completely new.
“MSU has an incredible orthopedic heritage, with names like Dr. Wade Brinker, Dr. Terry Braden, Dr. Charles DeCamp, Dr. Gretchen Flo, and Dr. Loic DeJardin, to name just a few. It is amazing to look at the current ‘who’s who’ of veterinary orthopedics and see that the vast majority of them have some link to MSU. It is an incredible honor to be a part of that heritage and to have the privileged responsibility of sustaining and contributing to that reputation.”

When you ask Dr. Karen Perry what initially motivated her to specialize in cats, she answers in the way anybody who has ever owned a cat would expect. She grew up with cats. She has always loved cats. They have always been treasured family members and providers of emotional support. They deserve the best treatment so they can live their best lives.

The part about giving cats “the best treatment” is what really gets to the heart of her motivation.

“Cats were treated like small dogs for an incredibly long time,” she says.

Cats are not dogs, and treating them as such doesn’t always produce the best outcome.

It is this way of thinking that has shaped the last decade of steadfast work that Perry has done at MSU as a practicing veterinarian with a significant clinical presence, an active researcher, and a teacher committed to inspiring the next generation of feline-leaning veterinary professionals.

It also earned her the title of Pat Carrigan Endowed Chair in Feline Health.

The position was created through an estate gift from the late MSU Trustee Patricia Carrigan, a lifelong cat aficionado who understood—like Perry understands—how necessary it is that funding be devoted specifically to research that betters cats’ lives.

“It is absolutely a key aim of mine and a priority for my career to inspire the next generation of feline enthusiasts and orthopedic surgeons,” Perry says. “Promoting equal access to veterinary services for cats and the development of both surgical and nonsurgical treatments that are tailored to their unique requirements.” But there is a translational aspect to feline research, too. Certain diseases prevalent in cats—osteoarthritis, for one—are also prevalent in humans, and research into treating one could inform strategies for treating the other. And, of course, procedures and therapeutics that work exceptionally well on cats, who obviously have smaller bones and bodies than, say, the average dog, can also work on other cat-sized creatures.

(Perry does treat dogs, though. An avid user of social media as a tool for sharing her work and her patients’ success stories, Perry once used her platform to express delight over the opportunity to collaborate with vets from Tufts University on a procedure to surgically stabilize a femoral fracture in a teeny tiny fennec fox!)
“The School of Packaging stands out as a beacon of excellence in packaging research, education and outreach—truly a global leader in its field. Here, collaboration across different disciplines is not just encouraged, but celebrated. Perhaps the most fulfilling aspect of my time has been the opportunity to mentor students—and seeing them graduate and go on to effect positive change reaffirms my belief in the transformative power of education and research.”

The MSU School of Packaging is the packaging school. The first of its kind in the nation, the only program that offers a Ph.D. in the field and the alma mater of more than 40% of packaging professionals working worldwide.

That’s a big part of what brought Rafael Auras to Michigan State as a graduate student in 2000, and it is definitely part of why he never left. He joined the faculty as an assistant professor in 2004 and has grown his career and his reputation as a leading expert in the area of sustainable packaging over two decades.

The School of Packaging has grown, too, thanks in part to investments from its loyal community of alums, donors and corporate partners.

One of those partners—Amcor, a global leader in producing responsible packaging—made a big splash in 2021 with a $10 million gift to support a renovation project at the packaging building and create the School of Packaging’s very first endowed position: the Amcor Endowed Chair in Packaging Sustainability. And who better to hold that position than Rafael Auras?

In the year since he was named to the position, the reach and impact of Auras’ work has increased substantially in his capacity as both a teacher and a researcher.

From an instructional standpoint, elevating the importance of sustainability in packaging has a ripple effect. Graduates from the School of Packaging head out into the world with sustainability baked into their skill sets and at the top of their minds.

And watching packaging graduates make their own impact on the field is another thing that continues to inspire and fuel Auras. His lab-employed eight students this year—from undergraduate level all the way up to postdoctoral fellow—and boasts a roster of more than 30 alums and 30 visiting scholars since 2005!

One area Auras and his team of students and collaborators are currently prioritizing thanks to the Amcor endowment is life-cycle assessments: looking at the environmental footprint of the entire process of packaging—from what it’s made of, to how it’s manufactured, to how it’s transported and, eventually, to how it is disposed of, with the goal of implementing more sustainable practices and materials across the board.

“Being named the Amcor Endowed Chair in Packaging Sustainability marks a significant milestone in my career,” Auras says. “It’s truly an honor to hold the first endowed position in the School of Packaging, and this recognition provides a remarkable platform for envisioning my research trajectory over the next decade. It has enabled me to explore ambitious ‘moonshot’ projects that were previously out of reach.”

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

Rafael Auras

Pollution problem-solver

AMCOR ENDOWED CHAIR IN PACKAGING SUSTAINABILITY

Years at MSU: 20

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16
“I love the sense of community and the shared commitment to excellence in the Broad College of Business. I was fortunate to be mentored by remarkable educators like Kathy Petroni and the late Ed Outslay, who were renowned for their dedication to pedagogical excellence and student engagement. This supportive and vibrant community encourages intellectual growth and innovation, and the chance to work with talented people and make a difference in the world is what keeps me here. I am proud to be a Spartan, and it’s always a thrill to hear a ‘Go Green!’ from fellow Spartans, whether I’m on campus or halfway around the world.”

We’ve all encountered, at some point in our lives, a person so engaging and ebullient and warm that, when we describe the person to others, we say, “I love so-and-so’s energy so much—they could read the phone book and I’d think it was interesting!”

In the Eli Broad College of Business, John Jiang is that person, and the thing he’s delivering isn’t a read-through of the phone book. It’s accounting classes, and it’s a huge part of what earned him the honor of being named an Eli Broad Endowed Professor.

There are pages and pages of sincere, positive reviews from former students who emerged on the other side of Jiang’s accounting classes with a deep understanding of the subject—and a bit of a soft spot for it, too. To summarize a few:

“[Professor Jiang] was a great professor and will be one of my longtime faculty connections at MSU.”

“I enjoyed his enthusiasm for a topic typically considered dry.”

“He expressed care and commitment to making sure his class learned the material.”

“He has inspired me to dive deeper into my understanding of accounting.”

And if the reviews aren’t enough, Jiang’s approach to teaching accounting has earned him a stack of awards too, including Outstanding Teacher of the Year in the Broad College, a Withrow Endowed Emerging Scholar Award and MSU’s Spirit of Ability Award, a huge honor that is bestowed upon faculty members who create “vibrant environments that welcome, fortify and compassionately challenge” students with disabilities “to reach their fullest ability.”

In short, he wants all of his students to leave his courses with practical skills—how to actually do accounting—but also the more cerebral skill of being able to think about accounting and use it to better understand current events in the business world that affect us all.

“Teaching accounting is like imparting a universal language,” Jiang says. “It’s applicable everywhere in our lives, and while we increasingly rely on software tools for tasks like balancing checkbooks and filing tax returns, it’s crucial to grasp the underlying logic and concepts of these tools to avoid becoming dependent on them.”

“The Broad College places a lot of emphasis on both research and student engagement, and that inspires me to make accounting accessible and engaging, helping students understand its critical role in business decision-making.”

When he’s not in the classroom, Jiang has his own body of research to focus on, too. Funding from the endowed professorship has already helped him advance a big project: a study of health care cost disparities that could eventually help inform policy around public health data reporting. In true “funding begets funding” fashion, he was able to secure a grant from the National Institute for Health Care Management Foundation to expand this work even further.

“Being named an Eli Broad Endowed Professor is a huge honor. It’s not just a nod to my past work, but also a vote of confidence in my future projects.”

Bringing it all together
When it comes to endowed positions—regardless of whether they’re being used as tools to recruit or to retain—everybody comes out on top.

Because in the same way Perry, Auras and Jiang draw inspiration from the faculty members who came before them—who imbued them with the desire to collaborate and become dynamic building blocks in the stellar reputation MSU has in each of their fields—faculty members of the future can look to them as proof that MSU is, and always was, a place where it’s impossible to not go big, do more and build something entirely new. Because the foundation to support it is already here thanks to the generosity of Spartans and friends like Eli Broad and like you.

LEARN MORE about support for endowed faculty positions by contacting the development officer in your college or unit or by calling (517) 884-1000.

VISIT MSU’s official Honored Faculty website, where you can search and sort by name, college or position to learn more about some of MSU’s best and brightest faculty members at: msu.edu/honoredfaculty

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

John Jiang
Accounting academician with an aptitude for accessibility

ELI BROAD ENDOWED PROFESSOR
Years at MSU: 19
She hits the tennis courts three to five times a week and cheers on the Spartan tennis student-athletes whenever she gets the chance. That love for the game and devotion to the success of Michigan State University’s student-athletes inspired Joan Secchia to commit $10 million in support of the university’s varsity men’s and women’s tennis programs.

“As a tennis enthusiast and a longtime Spartan, I am thrilled to make this commitment in support of both the men’s and women’s tennis programs at MSU,” Secchia says. “I am excited about the future of Spartan tennis and the impact this commitment will have on current and future student-athletes.”

The most immediate applications of Secchia’s gift include significant improvements to the Spartan tennis facilities, including new outdoor courts and enhanced spectator seating at the outdoor courts. Additional enhancements and upgrades using the funds will be determined later.

“Joan’s enduring generosity personifies a core principle of who we are as Spartans,” MSU President Kevin M. Guskiewicz, Ph.D., says. “Through her gift, she is enabling success for our women’s and men’s tennis programs and enriching the experiences of our student-athletes, and we are grateful for her everlasting commitment to Michigan State and Spartan Athletics.”

“We are extremely grateful for Joan Secchia’s generous commitment to our men’s and women’s tennis programs,” MSU Vice President and Director of Athletics Alan Haller says. “Joan is a longtime supporter of Spartan Athletics with a history of transformational giving. An avid tennis player herself, Joan’s gift will positively impact the student-athletes in our tennis programs for years to come.”

“Today is a momentous occasion for the Spartan tennis programs,” men’s tennis coach Harry Jadun says. “She has been a leader for our program, and the impact she has had on our student-athletes extends far beyond the tennis court. Joan’s gift reflects a strong belief in Michigan State University and our tennis program. We are so thankful for her support. Our goal is to compete for championships, and Joan’s gift will allow us to do just that.”

“Spartan tennis is better today because of Joan Secchia and her gift,” women’s tennis coach Kim Bruno says. “I’m so excited about the proposed facility improvements and the lasting impact it will have on our team.”

LEARN MORE about support for men’s and women’s tennis programs by contacting Executive Senior Associate Athletic Director of Development Jacob Kirkham at kirkham@ath.msu.edu or by calling (517) 355-3377.
CLOSING GAPS IN WOMEN’S HEALTH RESEARCH

Walstrom family creates endowed fund to foster next generation of women’s health leaders

There is a gender gap in medicine. Not just when it comes to symptoms—which present differently in women than they do in men—or to the prevalence of certain diseases and conditions, but also with regard to diagnosis and treatment.

According to the National Institutes of Health Office of Research on Women’s Health, women account for nearly 78% of patients with autoimmune disease and are more likely to have chronic pain. The time between symptom onset and eventual diagnosis can be much longer for women than it is for men.

To close the gap between women’s health research and other scientific disciplines, Ward and Mari Margaret Walstrom of Harbor Springs have made a $1 million gift to bolster research and other scientific disciplines, the Walstroms' commitment provides a path of inspiration for others to make a difference at the college,” says College of Human Medicine Dean Aron Sousa. “Our shared hope is that their generosity leads to new science and new scientists who make the world better for women everywhere who are suffering.”

The Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Biology was ranked No. 1 in funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in 2023, according to a recent Blue Ridge Institute for Medical Research report. Among 67 universities, the department has been in the top five of its peer institutions for many years and moved to the top spot last year.

One reason for the high ranking, Sousa said, is the department’s partnership with Henry Ford Health, whose researchers collaborate with the college’s scientists and are included as MSU faculty.

LEARN MORE about support for the College of Human Medicine by contacting Senior Director of Development Karen Weber at weberk16@msu.edu or by calling (616) 234-2827.

To help further engage the West Michigan and MSU communities in critical women’s health issues and challenges, the fund will also sponsor symposia, symposia and presentations featuring national and international leaders in women’s health research.

“One in 10 women are facing inflammatory pain and other uterine challenges, and the Walstroms’ commitment provides a path of inspiration for others to make a difference at the college,” says College of Human Medicine Dean Aron Sousa. “Our shared hope is that their generosity leads to new science and new scientists who make the world better for women everywhere who are suffering.”

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The MSU Museum is the beneficiary of a gift of $2 million from the Forest Akers Trust, leading to a major step forward in reimagining how the museum engages with its communities and educates future generations.

The generous investment will be used to construct and equip two groundbreaking spaces within the museum—an Immersive Lab and an Exhibit Lab—both set to transform the way MSU students and visitors interact with the museum's extensive collection of over 1 million objects.

MSU and its museum collections began together in the 1850s. From those early days until the present, objects and specimens have catalyzed teaching and learning inside MSU and for all Michiganders.

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MSU students engage with the MSU Museum’s collection.

HISTORY IN THE MAKING

Forest Akers Trust funds visionary project at MSU Museum

In a departure from conventional museum learning experiences, these new labs will empower university students to take a hands-on approach to exhibition creation and visitor engagement. The Immersive Lab and Exhibit Lab will serve as experimental spaces, providing students with the unique opportunity to co-create exhibits and design immersive visitor experiences. This initiative places students at the heart of the museum's educational mission, fostering a collaborative and innovative learning environment.

These two innovative labs will expand learning opportunities and experiences for all MSU students across a broad range of collections and holdings while supporting new accessibility technologies for learners of all ages and physical abilities so they can engage with exhibits,” says MSU Interim Provost Thomas Jeitschko. “It is a time of great momentum for University Arts and Collections, led by Vice Provost Judith Stoddart, and we are grateful for the Forest Akers Trust’s generous investment in expanding and enhancing the educational power of the MSU Museum.”

The funding from the Forest Akers Trust will be instrumental in redesigning these spaces and ensuring they are equipped with state-of-the-art fittings that allow for maximum flexibility in exhibition design and changing learning opportunities. The trust’s commitment to innovation and education will help the MSU Museum remain at the forefront of museum practice, creating spaces that are as dynamic and diverse as the collections housed in the museum.

“I am pleased to report that the trustees of the Forest Akers Trust unanimously approved MSU’s request to fund a $2 million project titled ‘Forest Akers Trust Immersive & Exhibit Labs’ at the MSU Museum,” says Stephen Terry, trustee of the Forest Akers Trust. “The objective of the trust is to promote the general interest and welfare of the student body of Michigan State University. This project clearly fits this objective, as the museum has been an integral part of student life and learning since the founding of the university in 1855.”

Established in the early 1960s by former MSU Trustee Forest Akers, the Forest H. Akers Trust Fund has been a steadfast supporter of MSU and its student body. Over the decades, the trust has contributed significantly to a variety of projects, benefiting the broader university community and enhancing the overall educational experience at MSU.

“We are profoundly grateful for the Forest Akers Trust’s vision and generosity,” says Devon Akmon, director of the MSU Museum. “This gift is a game-changer, enabling us to create inclusive, interactive learning environments that will support student success and inspire curiosity and creativity for years to come.”

Building on the MSU Museum’s commitment to fostering a culture of innovation and inclusion, this investment from the Forest Akers Trust marks a significant step toward realizing that vision.

This support is also another recent instance of increased investment in the arts on campus. MSU is home to nationally accredited museums, leading performing arts venues and programming that serves the community at the intersection of arts and research. Launched this fall, Arts MSU spotlights the importance of the kind of creativity, interdisciplinary discovery and student hands-on learning that can happen in these spaces, while gifts like this one make it possible.

LEARN MORE about support for the MSU Museum by contacting Senior Director of Advancement Liz Ivkovich at lgi@msu.edu or by calling (517) 353-5213.

New spaces will enhance opportunities for students to work with museum collections. Here Spartan Marching Band members enjoy seeing historic band memorabilia.
Thanks to a partnership with Dell Technologies and its iconic gaming brand Alienware, a new space at MSU provides an elite gaming environment for students to train and compete in esports at the highest level.

The Alienware MSU Esports Lounge is the university’s first dedicated space for students engaged in esports, a rapidly growing industry centered on organized professional or semiprofessional competitive video game play.

Located on the main floor of the MSU ComArtSci building, the 1,027-square-foot space is open to all MSU students and features 12 Alienware Aurora R16 battle stations—Alienware’s most advanced and most powerful desktop yet, powered by 14th Gen Intel Core processors—as well as Alienware m16 laptops, console gaming space, a varsity room and broadcast studio.

MSU esports is supported by the MSU College of Communication Arts and Sciences, the home of top-ranked game design and development programs.

The university celebrated the opening of the Alienware MSU Esports Lounge on Jan. 17 with special guests including former MSU women’s basketball player Aerial Powers, who is a brand and diversity ambassador with Team Liquid—a well-known esports organization—and WNBA player with the Minnesota Lynx. Michigan Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist II was also in attendance.

“Computers changed my life, and this new, state-of-the-art esports lounge will do the same for countless Spartans,” says Gilchrist. “Students won’t just use this lounge to game. They will network with other future professionals, discover career opportunities and build community. Governor Whitmer and I have worked hard to lower the cost of college and skills training, making more experiences like this one available for Michiganders in communities across our state. We are grateful to all the partners who made this transformative gaming lounge happen.”

This facility will provide a hands-on esports experience for the Spartan gaming community and will host team competitions.

“We are proud to partner with MSU on this next chapter of MSU gaming and esports,” says Matt McGowan, general manager of Alienware. “We are committed to supporting collegiate gamers, from novice to varsity player, by providing the products, accessories and experiences that help grow the next generation of gaming.”

The formation of a Spartan gaming community began with like-minded student groups and clubs. In 2016, students established the MSU Esports Club Association with the intent to unify the different gaming clubs and build a larger community rooted in the enjoyment of video games. The community has since grown—through continued enthusiasm and with the support of college mentors—to more than a dozen clubs, representing more than 2,000 students with diverse majors and interests.

MSU announced its first varsity esports team roster in 2023, competing in both the National Association of Collegiate Esports, known as NACE, and the Big Esports Conference, or BEC.

In April, MSU’s esports varsity teams competed in three games and left their mark on the inaugural Big Esports Conference championships. The conference is the official competitive home for esports teams from all 18 Big Ten universities. The event showcased the growing talent and popularity of collegiate esports.

MSU won the championship for Super Smash Bros., beating University of Michigan in the semifinals and Purdue in the final match. In an overtime victory over Ohio State University, MSUs Rocket League made it to the final round and secured second place in the tournament.

“Winning the inaugural Big Esports Conference Smash Championship is a validation and recognition of all the hard work and dedication our students have shown this year,” says Chris Bilski, Director of Esports at MSU. “They earned this, and I’m so proud of everything they and our program have accomplished in our first season!”

The success of MSU’s esports teams at the Big Esports Conference underscores the university’s commitment to fostering talent and excellence in competitive gaming. The rise of esports as a sporting pursuit is reflected in the growing number of collegiate programs and competitions dedicated to gaming. Events like the Big Esports Conference championships provide a platform for universities to showcase their esports programs and for players to test their skills against the best of the best.

LEARN MORE about support for esports at MSU by contacting Senior Director of Development Kristen McGrath at mcgra103@msu.edu or by calling (517) 432-5672.
In 2023, men were 2.5 times more likely than women to be executives in top leadership teams, and only 10% of CEOs were women. A game-changing gift to the Eli Broad College of Business seeks to address the gender gap and propel women graduates and their allies into the C-suite.

The gift, from Priya Balasubramaniam (MBA ’01) establishes the Dashney Women’s Leadership Accelerator (DWLA) to equip dozens of students each year with the abilities and confidence to pursue professional leadership positions. With long-term mentoring, coaching, workshops and experiential learning opportunities, the DWLA provides a powerful immersive experience for select undergraduates.

For more than 20 years, Balasubramaniam has called Broad College faculty member Helen Dashney a mentor and friend, and her gift is in honor of their lasting relationship. Dashney will serve as the DWLA director, offering one-on-one mentorship to the admitted students—known as DWLA Scholars. Her role will also include crafting personalized leadership development plans and cultivating a champion network to assist scholars when they become alumni and to connect them with future DWLA cohorts.

“I have grown and derived joy from special relationships with students over the years, many of them still ongoing,” says Dashney, who has worked at the Broad College since 1996. “To have someone as accomplished and humble as Priya recognize my work at Broad with this gift is perhaps the pinnacle of my 30-plus-year career. I will strive to honor her by contributing to the confidence with which DWLA Scholars and their connected peers launch their professional careers.”

Balasubramaniam, vice president of operations at Apple, says the unwavering support she received from Dashney was her driving inspiration to pay it forward. Whether it meant knowing she had someone who cared or having a sounding board to provide meaningful guidance when facing professional challenges, she says Dashney’s mentorship has been immensely helpful.

“She exemplifies the kind of support from advisors who can help you ‘turn hopelessness into hope,’” Balasubramaniam says, “and that is paramount in the creation of the Accelerator.”

Balasubramaniam, who has given back to MSU in many ways, says establishing the DWLA is all about making sure young leaders are “poured up to be intentional and have purpose in their actions and activities. Shining a light and passing things forward.”

Selections for the inaugural cohort were announced on Dec. 8, 2023, welcoming 14 DWLA Scholars to the program, with programming beginning in Jan. 2024. Alexis Cuellar, a junior majoring in accounting, is one of the first DWLA participants. As the first in her family of eight siblings to attend college, she says being selected helped validate her decisions and expand her leadership skills.

“I am grateful and beyond excited to be part of a community of women with diverse experiences that can add to my learning and personal growth, and I hope to contribute to their journeys as well,” she says.

**LEARN MORE about support for the Eli Broad College of Business by contacting Associate Director of Development Jackie Richardson at richa921@msu.edu or by calling (517) 355-8504.**

The Accelerator will feature focus areas like business communication skills—helping newcomers speak up and make themselves known in a clear and impactful way.
WELCOME, PRESIDENT GUSKIEWICZ!

On tour with MSU’s 22nd president

President Kevin Guskiewicz joined MSU on March 4, 2024, and made a commitment to spend his first 100 days meeting as many Spartans—on campus and off—as possible. From celebrating the impact of philanthropy at the endowed faculty investiture on his very first day to meeting with alumni and donors across Michigan and at events on both U.S. coasts—including the Wharton Series in New York City and the Orange County Spartans annual golf outing in California—he’s getting to know what Spartans are all about. And in the process, he’s becoming one of us.

Mid-Michigan donors and friends were invited to a Friday evening Cowles House reception to get to know Kevin and Amy Guskiewicz during their first week on campus.

President Gusiewicz participated in this April’s Wharton Series in New York City and paused for a photo with alumni leaders there.

The welcome that President Gusiewicz has received as the newest member of our worldwide Spartan community evokes the words of another university president: Dr. Clifton Wharton, who characterized our university and its people as “open-minded and open hearted ... with a profound generosity of spirit.”

In March, Vice President for University Advancement Kim Tobin interviewed the new president before a gathering of Southeast Michigan Spartans.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

“Growing up I would watch ‘Grey’s Anatomy’ and knew I wanted to pursue a career somewhere within the medical field. Going into college I was not sure the exact path I wanted to follow medically and knew human biology would be a good major where I could be flexible with that decision until I figured out what I wanted to do. From my research experience ... I have gained presentation skills and laboratory skills that I hope to use for my future career of working on pharmaceuticals in a laboratory setting.”

JESSI RODRIGUEZ, ’24
Human Biology, College of Natural Science, Precision Health Program

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Mall Family Endowed Professor in Genetic Autism Research

A $2 million investment by the Mall Family Foundation has empowered the recruitment of genetic autism research expert Lucas Pozzo-Miller, Ph.D., as the inaugural Mall Family Endowed Professor in Genetic Autism Research in the College of Human Medicine.

Previously at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, where he led a lab team of neuroscientists over the last 25 years, his research focuses on the neurobiological bases of syndromic forms of autism caused by single gene variants, combining cutting-edge experimental approaches.

He says the No. 1 reason he chose to come to MSU was joining the research team in Grand Rapids—a skilled team of developmental neuroscience researchers (Dan Campbell, Dan Vogt, Barbara Thompson, Michael Williams and Jeff MacKeigan), plus disease expert André Bachmann, who discovered in 2022 that repurposing an existing prescription drug could successfully treat a rare genetic disorder—and accessing partnerships with the Helen DeVos Children’s Hospital; the knowledge and technical capacity at the Van Andel Institute; and MSU’s nationally recognized centers of excellence in neuroscience research.

This convergence of knowledge, partnerships and philanthropy uniquely positions MSU to positively impact genetic autism research.
Developments
University Advancement
535 Chestnut Road, Room 300
East Lansing, MI 48824

For the past 25 years, thousands of Spartan student-athletes have elevated their academic accomplishments at the Clara Bell Smith Student-Athlete Academic Center, built in 1998 thanks largely to the philanthropic support of alumnus Steve Smith and named to honor his mother.

This year, Michigan State student-athletes turned in a record-breaking spring semester in the classroom, posting the highest cumulative GPA in athletic department history: 3.3744. All teams posted a 3.0 cumulative GPA, marking another first for the athletic department.

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Football player Caleb Gash works out of the Smith Center computer lab.

LEARN MORE about support for MSU Athletics at spartanfund.net or call (517) 432-4610.