

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

Contact: Susan A. Steeves
(214) 648-3404
or E-mail: susan.steeves@email.swmed.edu

WELCH FOUNDATION UPGRADES CHEMISTRY CHAIR

DALLAS – October 20, 1998 – Houston native Robert A. Welch believed that understanding chemistry was key to improving human existence. In that spirit, the foundation he established recently donated \$350,000 to upgrade a chemistry research position at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas.

The gift raises the endowment to \$1.35 million for the Robert A. Welch Foundation Distinguished Chair in Chemistry, which is held by Dr. J.R. (Camille) Falck, professor of pharmacology, biochemistry and molecular genetics. The Robert A. Welch Foundation, formed in 1954 from the bulk of Welch's estate for the purpose of supporting chemical research, has given UT Southwestern a total of \$22 million.

Falck is an organic chemist who discovers the structures of compounds involved in biochemical processes, then synthesizes the molecules to help create drugs to fight deadly systemic fungal infections, cancer, diabetes, dilation of vessels in the brain, hypertension, inflammation of the eye and other conditions.

"The Welch Foundation has been very generous in supporting chemistry-oriented science," said Dr. Steven McKnight, chairman of biochemistry and holder of the Distinguished Chair in Basic Biomedical Research and the Sam G. Winstead and F. Andrew Bell Distinguished Chair in Biochemistry. "This has been especially important here because UT Southwestern, unlike most medical schools, has decided to put an emphasis on chemistry: the heart of biomedical research."

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To expand the scope of biomedical research, McKnight began an initiative to bring chemists to the biochemistry department when he became chairman two years ago.

"Camille does amazing work in synthetic organic chemistry that has been invaluable to our biomedical researchers," said McKnight. "Just as important is that he has played a very significant role in spearheading the move by UT Southwestern of using chemistry as the important tool it is for scientific investigation. So the Welch Foundation decision to increase support of Camille's work is well-deserved and fitting."

Falck, who earned his doctorate in organic chemistry at Colorado State University, came to UT Southwestern in 1979 after completing a postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard University. He was named to the Welch Foundation chair last year. "The Welch Foundation has been a great benefactor for many of the UT Southwestern investigators, and I've appreciated all the support it has given to me over the years," Falck said. "It has enabled me to explore speculative and creative work."

In addition to the Distinguished Chair in Chemistry, the foundation has provided a Distinguished Chair in Science to be held by a respected senior researcher, and supports 44 UT Southwestern principal investigators with research grants. During its 44-year history, the Welch Foundation has given more than \$350 million to Texas institutions for the support of chemical research. The minimum grant is now \$42,000 per year.

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