

Media Contact: Russell Rian
214-648-3404
Russell.Rian@utsouthwestern.edu

Dallas couple gives \$150,000 to support macular degeneration research at UT Southwestern

DALLAS – March 7, 2006 – A family history of macular degeneration and a resolve to help those who suffer from it prompted Dr. Wayne and Peggy Dear to contribute \$150,000 to support research at UT Southwestern Medical Center into the devastating eye disease.

The donation, which was given to Southwestern Medical Foundation, was made in memory of Mrs. Dear's late aunt, Zora Simmons Meagher, who suffered from age-related macular degeneration (AMD), the leading cause of blindness in Americans over the age of 50.

The gift will establish the Zora Meagher Macular Degeneration Research Professorship and will help launch a cutting-edge investigation into how the sight-stealing disease progresses.

"Zora was a thoughtful and generous person who always put others before herself," said Mrs. Dear. "Regardless of what life presented, she met each challenge with both courage and optimism. As she got older, her mind stayed bright but she couldn't see, and it was hard to remain independent. We hope this gift might somehow keep others from suffering the same fate."

Mrs. Meagher was born in Grand Saline, Texas, in 1907. She lost her parents during childhood, and was brought up in Dallas and Los Angeles. She met her husband, Joe, in Hawaii and the couple moved to the Philippine Islands prior to World War II. After the Japanese invaded the island chain in 1942, the Meaghers were interned in prison camps for three years. Liberated by U.S. paratroopers in a dramatic rescue, Mrs. Meagher welcomed the opportunity to spend her life on the West Coast caring for others, including Joe and later, her sister, Coy.

"Mrs. Meagher was a courageous lady, and we are pleased that her memory is being honored with this professorship," said Dr. James McCulley, chairman of ophthalmology and one of her physicians. "Our department is a worldwide leader in macular degeneration research, and the Dear's generous gift will further those efforts." Dr. McCulley directs the Jean H. & John T. Walter Jr. Center for Research in Age-Related Macular Degeneration.

As many as 30 million Americans are afflicted with AMD, with about 2 million suffering a severe form. If not properly diagnosed and treated, the disease can gradually erode a person's central vision and the freedom to perform daily activities.

(MORE)

Dear gift – 2

Dr. Yu-Guang He, assistant professor of ophthalmology, will be the first holder of the Zora Meagher Macular Degeneration Research Professorship.

Dr. He earned his medical degree from Tongji Medical University in China before coming to UT Southwestern in 1988. He has a strong research background in ocular cell biology and immunology and has published extensively. He received his clinical training at the University of Washington in Seattle and UT Southwestern and now heads the retina fellowship program here. Among his awards are honors from the National Eye Institute and Contact Lens Association of Ophthalmologists. Dr. He was the first to research platelet-activating factors as a possible method for preventing the disease.

“This generous gift from the Dears supports an area of research in which there is great promise and urgency,” said Dr. Kern Wildenthal, president of UT Southwestern. “We are pleased that they have chosen to honor Mrs. Meagher in such a valuable way, and we are very grateful for their thoughtfulness.”

Dr. Dear is a retired cardiologist. He spent 35 years with the Texas Heart Institute at St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital in Houston, and served as a clinical faculty member at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston and at Baylor College of Medicine, from which he received his medical degree.

Peggy Simmons Dear went to Stanford University and is a member of the Junior League of Dallas.

The Dears are longtime members of the Friends of the Center for Human Nutrition and the President's Research Council. They also support the Jay Simmons Scholarship Fund for medical students at UT Southwestern. The couple is involved in a number of charitable organizations, including an endowment for cardiology research at the Texas Heart Institute, and the Alexis de Tocqueville Society of the United Way. Dr. and Mrs. Dear divide their time between Dallas and their cattle ranch west of Cleburne.

“Peggy and Wayne Dear have made a wonderful gift, and the foundation is honored to have their confidence,” said W. Plack Carr Jr., president of Southwestern Medical Foundation. “We're proud to be a partner with them and UT Southwestern in addressing this disease that affects so many people.”

###

To automatically receive news releases from UT Southwestern via e-mail,
subscribe at www.utsouthwestern.edu/receiveneews