

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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UT SOUTHWESTERN SCIENTIST, DR. STEVEN MCKNIGHT, GIVES \$3.5 MILLION TO CREATE BIOCHEMISTRY RESEARCH FUND

DALLAS – Oct. 8, 2001 – An internationally renowned biomedical research leader who is chairman of biochemistry at UT Southwestern Medical Center has pledged \$3.5 million to establish a biochemistry research fund. Dr. Steven McKnight, who co-founded Tularik Inc., a prominent research and drug development company in California, created the fund with a gift of Tularik stock to support a wide variety of basic-science research projects at the medical center.

The gift, which was made to Southwestern Medical Foundation, will establish the Sara and Frank McKnight Fund for Research in Biochemistry, named for McKnight's parents. The funds will be available to bolster unconventional research projects that might have difficulty acquiring traditional funding.

"When scientists have access to unencumbered funds, there is little that can stand in the way of imaginative and adventurous research," said McKnight. "As a researcher, I recognize the value of that kind of support, and I know how important it is to have the freedom to take risks. I wanted to create the fund not only to honor my parents – who have given me so many priceless gifts – but to give other scientists the financial independence to follow their own instincts."

McKnight's parents, with whom he credits much of his success, live in El Paso. Frank McKnight, a retired cotton business executive, served eight years as a presidential appointee with the Department of Agriculture and has served on the boards of a variety of civic and professional organizations, including the El Paso Museum of Art and the El Paso County Historical Society. Sara Stevens McKnight served as a staff assistant in the U.S. Senate from 1969 to 1977. She currently works as a travel consultant and remains active in a variety of civic organizations, including the El Paso YWCA, where she served as president. In 2001 the El Paso YWCA's transitional living center was named for her.

"We are touched and thrilled that Steve has established this fund," said Sara McKnight. "He not only has given a wonderful, unique gift to UT Southwestern researchers, but also to his father and me, who are indescribably proud that he has honored us in this way."

Steve McKnight has spent much of his career studying cell differentiation – how different genes make particular cells do what they are supposed to do. His early work, which garnered him membership in the illustrious National Academy of Sciences at an unusually young age,

(MORE)

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primarily involved large proteins and genes. He has recently moved his research focus to the discovery of small chemicals – hormones and metabolites – that may be responsible for switching genes on and off.

McKnight's work with gene regulatory proteins also led him into private business. Ten years ago he co-founded Tularik, a San Francisco-based firm focused on the discovery of ethical drugs that treat human disease by modulating gene expression. Early this year the company formed its first subsidiary in Dallas.

"Steve McKnight is a remarkable scientist who has his finger on the pulse of modern medical research," said Dr. Kern Wildenthal, president of UT Southwestern. "His generous, heartfelt contribution to the medical center – and ultimately to our best and brightest scientists – will give wings to some of the most exciting research projects we've seen."

Said Plack Carr Jr., president and chief executive officer of Southwestern Medical Foundation, "Dr. McKnight's gift is an expression of his belief in the need to support excellence in medicine, and Southwestern Medical Foundation is deeply privileged to be entrusted with the administration of these funds given in honor of his parents. This gift also draws the attention of many potential donors to the quality and operations of UT Southwestern and encourages others to make similar gifts."

After graduating in 1974 from UT Austin with an undergraduate degree in biology, McKnight went on to earn a Ph.D. in biology from the University of Virginia in 1977. Before coming to UT Southwestern in 1996, he worked for the Carnegie Institution of Washington, for which he continues to serve as a trustee; the Howard Hughes Medical Institute; and Johns Hopkins University, where he remains an adjunct professor.

McKnight lives in Dallas with his wife, Jackie. The couple has four children: Nell, Grace, Frances and John Stevens.

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