

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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DONATION FROM SCHOLLMAIER WILL EXPAND LAB SPACE TO STUDY AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION

DALLAS – May 15, 2000 – A \$200,000 gift from the Schollmaier Foundation will help UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas' Department of Ophthalmology expand its laboratory space for the study of age-related macular degeneration (AMD), a blinding eye disease that affects as many as 10 million Americans.

The gift from Ed Schollmaier and his wife, Rae, will advance research in an area that will become increasingly important as millions of baby boomers grow older. Schollmaier is the former chief executive officer of Alcon Laboratories in Fort Worth, a leader in sales and research spending in the global eye-care industry.

The name of the expanded space will be The Schollmaier Foundation/Ed and Rae Schollmaier Laboratory.

"We are pleased to help support the expansion," Schollmaier said. "It's the most significant contribution that our foundation has made to a department of ophthalmology research program."

A leading cause of blindness in the United States, macular degeneration occurs when the macula, the area of the retina near the optic nerve at the back of the eye, deteriorates, often causing normal central vision to be irreparably lost.

Dr. Albert Edwards, an assistant professor of ophthalmology who studies AMD, said, "The Schollmaier's contribution comes at a critical time as the Department of Ophthalmology focuses increasingly on improving understanding of macular degeneration and developing new therapies."

Last year the location of a gene that causes AMD was discovered by a team of researchers that included Edwards. The research suggests that a single dominant gene may be responsible for AMD in certain families with a history of the disease.

In other related research last year another team of UT Southwestern scientists also used genetically altered mice to help explain AMD and Stargardt's disease, which also affects

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central vision. The work is a major step toward finding treatment for blinding illnesses that involve vulnerability of the macula.

The work identified the molecule transported by Rim protein in the retina's photoreceptor cells. When a mutation occurs in the ABCR gene, which produces Rim, the protein malfunctions and cannot perform its transporter role.

Schollmaier said he is proud to have provided unrestricted grant support to the Department of Ophthalmology for many years.

"Over the past 20 years, Dr. James McCulley has built one of the top eye teaching, clinical and research programs in the U.S., perhaps in the world," Schollmaier said. "Folks that are that capable deserve to be supported."

McCulley, chairman of ophthalmology, said the department has come a long way, and that he appreciates Schollmaier's ongoing support.

"People like the Schollmaiers are an important part of our past successes and provide a major stimulus for future prospects," McCulley said. "We can't thank them enough."

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