Scholarship gift for FSU med school honors 'Dr. Pat'

RON HARTUNG

The sons of beloved pediatrician Pat Woodward are reaching deep into their pockets to help ensure that Gadsden County has the physicians it needs in the future.

Pat Jr., Fred, Daniel and Edward Woodward — with the permission of their publicity-shy father, "Dr. Pat," and their mother, Mary Jane — have established the Pat M. Woodward, M.D. Legacy Scholarship Endowment at the Florida State University College of Medicine. Their donation will provide scholarship support for deserving third- and fourth-year students committed to practicing pediatrics or family medicine in underserved Gadsden and other rural North Florida communities.

It also will provide scholarship support for Gadsden high-school students who are considering medical careers and have been selected to attend the College of Medicine’s Summer Institute.

Dr. Woodward was greatly moved by his sons' proposal, as outlined in a letter from Fred that Mary Jane read aloud to him. "I heard the words with a mixture of appreciation, awe and a degree of timidity," he wrote in reply. "Please accept our gratitude."

On Feb. 28, when the Woodward sons signed the gift agreement at the College of Medicine, Fred explained, "We wanted to do something to honor Dad while he could enjoy it. We can get at least a partial scholarship by next fall."

His brother Daniel said they wanted to repay the generosity their parents have always shown them.

"It's a generosity we've seen them extend to people they know and love in their own community, but they extend it far beyond that as well, to people who are in need, people who just need a friend or a kind word," Daniel said. "It's been very meaningful in our lives. They know how important they are to us, but this was an opportunity to do something very tangible."

The College of Medicine’s mission to provide compassionate physicians for all Floridians, including those in rural areas, mirrors Woodward’s philosophy.

He retired in 2001, the year the College of Medicine’s first students arrived. Nevertheless, he has strong connections with the medical school — principally in his relationship with Senior Associate Dean Alma Littles. He was her pediatrician when she was growing up in Quincy, her role model in his approach to medical care, her mentor when she was a medical resident and, later, her partner in medical practice.

"Even though Dr. Woodward is not on our faculty, he embodies everything we attempt to teach our students," Littles said. "His knowledge, skill, gentleness and compassion are the key in-

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ingredients of patient-centered care. His patients loved him. Those of us who learned from him — and future Gadsden physicians who get a boost from this endowment — can only try to measure up to his example.”

Fred Woodward said he came up with the endowment idea three or four years ago, but it wasn’t until his dad’s 77th birthday last Octo-ber that he went into action. The planning involved a flurry of emails among the far-flung brothers, who live in Tampa, Raleigh, Annapolis and Providence but still think of Quincy as home. Perhaps the most important email, though, was one he sent to Littles.

“I wasn’t really sure where to start,” he said. “I didn’t really know Alma personally, but I knew she had worked with Dad. So I looked her up on the web and found her email address.” He said the reply he got was quick and enthusiastic.

On the day the sons signed the gift agreement, Littles sat beside their father and reminisced. Example: “As residents at the Family Medicine Program at TMH, each of us spent two months during our third year of residency in Quincy with Dr. Woodward. He actually had an apartment behind the office where we stayed. It was one of the best learning experiences we had. I told everybody at the time, ‘You wouldn’t think it would be so different, being just 22 miles from Tallahassee, but pediatrics in Quincy is not the same as pediatrics in Tallahassee.’ So you really did get to learn a lot more.”

This endowment could change the lives of certain Gadsden students who don’t even know yet that they want to become doctors.

“There’s a story behind every gift that people give to the College of Medicine, and we love them all,” Dean John Fogarty said. “Certainly the story behind the Woodward gift is among the most heartwarming. The way these sons appreciate their parents’ legacy in Quincy, and the way they’re recognizing that legacy with a gift that will enrich the community for generations — that’s simply remarkable.”

The Summer Institute is part of the SSTRIDE pipeline program through which the college cultivates future medical students and health-care professionals for underserved communities in Gadsden County and elsewhere in Florida. The acronym stands for Science Students Together Reaching Instructional Diversity and Excellence.

To honor “Dr. Pat” through a gift to build the endowment, mail a check payable to the FSU Foundation to Pam Wilson, FSU College of Medicine, 1115 W. Call St., Tallahassee, FL 32306. On the memo line of the check, please write “Woodward” F07896.”