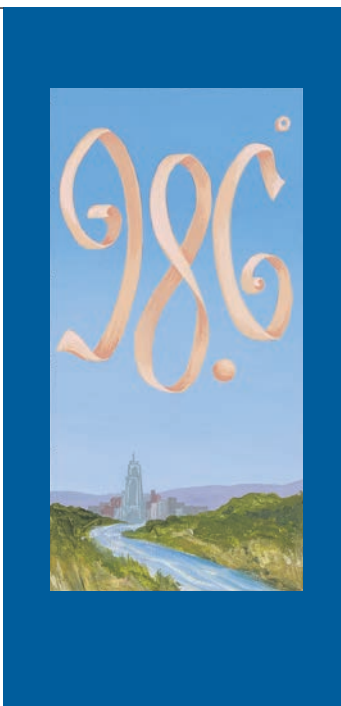


*People and programs
that keep the school
healthy and vibrant*



Student champion Joan Harvey (in burgundy) retired in 2020; she's shown here surrounded by students and colleagues on Match Day 2018.

CRITICAL (STUDENT) CARE

EMERGENCY FUND HONORS JOAN HARVEY

BY SAMANTHA PAIGE ROSEN

In August, when Chloe Heintz, Pitt Med major gifts officer, asked Joan Harvey what kind of support students could really use from alumni, she answered with hesitation: an emergency fund.

Harvey, who retired as associate dean of student affairs and associate professor of medicine in September, saw personal emergencies create substantial roadblocks for students even before the pandemic hit. “Med students have bumps in the road just like everybody else, but they’re also going through this very challenging curriculum,” she says.

A summer 2020 survey conducted by Pitt Med’s admissions and financial aid office revealed the extent of this need. Fifty-seven percent of respondents said the COVID-19 pandemic worsened their finances and a third reported job loss in their immediate family. Faculty and administrators mobilized.

Named in honor of the recent retiree, the Joan Harvey, MD, School of Medicine Student Emergency Fund provides temporary assistance to students facing unanticipated financial hardships. Students in any School of Medicine program are eligible to receive funding. They can apply once per term and are awarded a maximum of \$500 per term. The fund helps address acute

needs like groceries and rent, unforeseen medical expenses, travel associated with a personal or family emergency and technology for remote schooling.

“We want it to be as easy as possible to apply and get it into students’ hands,” says Chenits Pettigrew Jr., associate dean for diversity, equity and inclusion and assistant dean for student affairs.

As of November 2020, faculty, staff and alumni had made \$160,000 in donations and pledges to the fund. Ann Thompson, vice dean, Beth Piraino, associate dean of admissions and financial aid, and alumnus Edward Puccio (MD ’90) were the first to donate. Shortly after, they were joined by Anantha Shekhar, senior vice chancellor for the health sciences and John and Gertrude Petersen Dean.

“Faculty members have told me that ‘we were all students once’ and that it was especially important to them to help students through this stressful time,” says Heintz.

Harvey, who says she is humbled to be honored with the fund’s name, expressed relief that Pitt Med students would receive resources as they develop “skills of resiliency.”

Pitt Med community members rave about the longtime dean’s dedication to students. “Dr. Harvey has supported students through dramatic changes in our society, our medical school curriculum and the evolving expectations our country has for doctors,” says Thompson.

Harvey started at Pitt 30 years ago. Her career took her from New York to Massachusetts to rural Minnesota, where she served with the National Health Service Corps, to Bethesda, Maryland. Before moving to Pittsburgh, she served as an associate professor of clinical medicine and a lieutenant commander of the U.S. Navy Reserve at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, as well as an attending staff physician in rheumatology at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. In 1991, she assumed her position at Pitt Med.

Harvey has championed an advisory dean house system and programs that foster a supportive environment for medical students, including Faculty and Students Together and the Student Health Advocacy Resource Program. These initiatives connect students with faculty, students with students, and students with mental health professionals.

“At the end of my second year of medical school,” C. Nic Moga (MD ’01) recalls, “I ran myself into complete exhaustion and had what laypeople refer to as a ‘nervous breakdown.’ I didn’t really know what was wrong aside from the fact that I had to take some time off to readjust my life.

“I’ll never forget walking into Dr. Harvey’s office and trying to explain this to her.” He was met with warmth, compassion and understanding, he says. “The support I had from her and everyone in the administration at Pitt was responsible for not only helping me graduate from medical school but also for making me a better person.” ■

COURTESY WELLS FAMILY



Robert Wells with his mentor, the late Klaus Hofmann, son, Kevin, and Frances Finn Reichl, Hofmann's widow, circa 1981.

Inspired. Invested.

Before he joined H.G. Khorana's team at the University of Wisconsin that did Nobel-Prize-winning work by cracking the genetic code, before he became the biochemist behind paradigm-shifting work on unorthodox DNA structures, Robert Wells (PhD '64) was a coal-town kid.

"I grew up in a poor home, and that has had an impact on my life," says the Uniontown, Pennsylvania, native.

"Bob would come over in his little car to see me," recalls his wife, Dotty Wells, of their courtship in high school. Wells was doing odd jobs at the time, tarring roofs in the summer and other scut work for Dotty's neighbor, a brute of a man who had a moving business that sometimes hauled meat. In between, Wells

had to clean the truck. Says Dotty Wells, "That man would come to the corner to see if Bob's car was at my parents' house, and if it was, he would call my parents [to enlist Bob]. I mean, he was a devil."

"I came to the realization that a way out of all this was education," Wells says.

As a PhD student, he came under the tutelage of Pitt's Klaus Hofmann, a Swiss-German known worldwide for his work synthesizing and revealing the molecular structure of hormones; Hofmann also ran the biochemistry department with an iron fist.

But Hofmann was no devil. "I was accustomed to working hard and working with difficult individuals," Wells says. "And that was a great experience." From this formative mentorship, he learned focus, diligence, an appreciation for excellence—"and that hard work pays off."

Wells went on to make formative contributions to our understanding of DNA structure, molecular biology and genetics in many human diseases. He founded the Center for Genome Research at Texas A&M, led the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology and served as an advisor to the Senate and the White House. In 2014, Pitt named him a Legacy Laureate, the highest honor the University bestows on an alumnus.

Moved by their gratitude for the institution that launched their success, Robert and Dotty Wells have bequeathed a major gift in Hofmann's honor to support PhD students at Pitt Med. The gift is a nod, too—to the notion that before any great scientist's star rises, the uphill climb is steep, and often strained by the demands of raising a family. (For the Wellses, that strain meant going home to their parents some weekends to stock up on food.)

"Pitt is an extraordinary school," Wells says. "It has transformed itself over the years into an even stronger and more forward-thinking institution. We appreciate very much my education at the University of Pittsburgh."



Robert and Dotty Wells

To make a gift, contact Jen Gabler: 412-802-8317, jag188@pitt.edu, Giveto.pitt.edu