

## The Past Is Present

Like almost everyone who heard about the 21st Century Endowed Scholars Fund in January 1993, I had no idea who the donors were. The \$10 million gift was extremely generous. Starting with six students in the Class of 1996, it would cover the full four-year tuition at Penn's School of Medicine for six students in each class. The initial gift would support the first 25 students selected as Endowed Scholars. Not even the six recipients of the scholarships, who attended the press conference at which the gift was announced, had been told who their benefactors were. The anonymity was part of the agreement.

Reporters from national, local, and campus publications had flocked to the John Morgan Building. I was there representing the University's biweekly tabloid for employees, *The Compass*. The founding editor of *Penn Medicine*, Marshall Ledger, Ph.D., was among those in the room, but he appeared to know no more than the rest of us. All we knew was that the donors were an alumnus of the School of Medicine and his wife – in the words of William N. Kelley, M.D., then dean of the school, “a humble couple who feel very strongly about medical education.”

As Kelley and Fredric Burg, M.D., then the school's vice dean for education, explained, the program was established so that the students would have the freedom to pursue the medical careers of their choice without being constrained by financial concerns.

The identities of the donors were kept secret until May 1996, when the first Scholars were set to graduate. They were – and are – Walter Gamble, M.D. '57, and his wife, Anne. Part of the story

is the warmth they have shown former and present recipients of the scholarship program and the example the Gambles have set for them.

All these years later, it seemed like a good idea to take a look at the 21st Century Endowed Scholars Program. In this issue, you can read about what the original recipients are now doing, as well as some recent and current Scholars. The debt that graduating medical students are carrying is greater than ever. So is the need for financial aid.

I first learned about Roy Vagelos, M.D., while working at *The Pennsylvania Gazette* and covering a speech Vagelos gave at a Baccalaureate Ceremony. The event takes place before the University's Commencement. The purpose seems to be to inspire the graduating students, and that day Vagelos performed his role very well. He has a B.A. degree from Penn (1950) and an M.D. degree from Columbia, but he was speaking primarily as CEO and chairman of Merck & Co., the pharmaceutical giant. He spoke not about the daily ins and outs of running a major corporation but about one of the extraordinary decisions the company made in the 1980s. Merck provided a drug to fight river blindness, a parasitic disease that affects millions of people in Africa and elsewhere – free of charge.

A few years later, in 1994, I was at the press conference called to announce the new chairman of the University's board of trustees. It turned out to be . . . Roy Vagelos, M.D. He was stepping into

another important role, one he fulfilled with distinction. As Judith Rodin, Ph.D., then president of the University, pointed out, Vagelos possessed an attractive combination of experience, in both medical research and private business. “He's been in the trenches *with us*,” she said. “He knows from the inside what universities are about” while also knowing the challenges that major corporations face. Vagelos and his wife, Diana, are also major donors, supporting both Penn and Barnard College.

An account of the recent public conversation Vagelos had with Arthur L. Caplan, Ph.D., director of Penn's Center for Bioethics, is in this issue. The stated topic was potential conflicts of interest in university-corporate alliances. But their talk ranged more widely than that.

In 1997 I ran an article on William Hanson, M.D. '83, then associate professor of anesthesiology and critical care, in *Penn Health Magazine*. We referred to him then as C. William Hanson III. Even back then, Hanson was keeping abreast of medical and technical innovations. What had caught his eye – and, as a result, ours – was the possibility of using a computerized “nose” to diagnose some illnesses. Hanson had heard about dogs that could smell the difference between the urine of people who did and did not have cancer. There were also dogs that could smell cancerous skin lesions. Hanson undertook to test a device that was widely used in the beverage, food, and perfume industries – but now he applied it to diagnose lung infections. His research was picked up around the country. It is not surprising that his interests and experiences led him to write *The Edge of Medicine: The Technology That Will Change Our Lives* (2008), featured in this issue. ■

