

# WSU Academy of Medicine Invests in Profession's Future Excellence

By Mark Willis

Walter Reiling, M.D., makes a simple pitch when he talks to colleagues about joining the Wright State University Academy of Medicine. "Did you have student aid when you went through medical school?" he asks. "Where do you think it came from?"

Dr. Reiling adds, "The fact of the matter is, most of us had some kind of financial aid in medical school. We need to remember that when we think about the future of medicine as a profession."

That argument convinced Chris Danis, M.D. He graduated from Wright State in 1982 and remained in Dayton to practice surgery. He decided to join the Academy of Medicine five years ago, and today he is its membership chair. "I thought it was time to give back to the institution that supported me during medical school," he says. "It's a way to invest in the next generation of medical students, not bricks and mortar."

The Wright State University Academy of Medicine was established 23 years ago by Founding Dean John Beljan, M.D., and a group of dedicated physicians in the community. In addition to supporting medical education at Wright State, the community-based service organization also would become yet another bridge between the medical school faculty and Dayton-area physicians. The Academy established an annual awards program to celebrate academic role models, including voluntary and fully-affiliated faculty as well as residents. The Academy focused its fund-raising efforts on academic scholarships and low-interest loans for Wright State medical students.

"The Academy's founders recognized that it would take years for a young medical school like Wright State to build a philanthropic endowment. They wanted to make a difference right away -- and get the most 'bang for the buck' -- so they started a revolving loan fund," explains Dr. Reiling. An Academy member from the beginning, he chairs its executive committee today.

Wright State medical students use simple-interest loans from the Academy of Medicine to hold down the cost of more expensive financial aid that otherwise would begin to compound interest during medical school and residency. Since 1985 the Academy's loan program has generated nearly \$1.5 million in loans, saving medical students more than \$500,000 in additional debt burden. When Academy loans are repaid after residency, the money is returned to the revolving loan fund. This year interest on loans combined with Academy membership dues will add an additional \$125,000 to the fund.

"What started out as a small project has grown into a significant source of support for more than 400 medical students. It's an achievement the founders can be proud of," says Virginia Wood, M.D., immediate past chair of the Academy's executive committee.

Under Dr. Wood's leadership, Academy of Medicine membership broadened to include other "stakeholders" with an interest in medical education, including regional health-care administrators and parents of medical students. She also directs her membership pitch to Wright State graduates and former residents.

"Although there are many organizations asking for our time and money these days, the Academy of Medicine is a direct, tangible way to help those who are following us in the profession," she says.

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(For membership information, contact Robert Copeland, director of advancement at Wright State University School of Medicine, at 937 775-2972.)