



For Immediate Release

May 5, 2008

WSU Foundation announces \$8.5 million gift to WSU

Abilene woman's estate bequeaths second largest gift in university's history

At a news conference today (May 5), the Wichita State University Foundation announced an \$8.5 million gift from the estate of Evelyn D. Cassat. The majority of the gift will benefit WSU's department of communication sciences and disorders, specifically the Speech-Language-Hearing Clinic, and the WSU Regional Institute on Aging.

"This is the second largest contribution received in the university's history," said Elizabeth King, WSU Foundation president and CEO. "It is dramatic. In addition to what it will do for the faculty and students of WSU, we can only begin to imagine what it will do for aging citizens in terms of research and quality of life."

The gift will go toward renovation and equipment for the Speech-Language-Hearing Clinic, which will be renamed the Evelyn Hendren Cassat Clinic. The portion of the gift allocated to the department of communication sciences and disorders will support distinguished, endowed professorships that will further research in audiology and related subjects. The funds also will be used to enhance clinical services and support faculty development.

"This is a transformational gift for our college, which has had only one other endowed faculty position prior to this contribution," said Peter Cohen, dean of the College of Health Professions. "This gift will result in a program and facility that are both second to none."

The contribution to the WSU Regional Institute on Aging will support significant expansion of opportunities for WSU faculty to conduct aging research and also will support the Carl and Rozina Cassat Professorship in Aging, named after Paul Cassat's parents.

"'Invest in our faculty' will be the principle underlying the use of this generous gift," said J. David McDonald, associate provost for research. "Programs will be created to enable faculty to secure large blocks of time for research aimed at improving the health and well being of older Kansans."

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James Rhatigan, WSU Foundation consultant, met Evelyn and her husband, Paul Cassat, in 1998 when they called then WSU President Eugene Hughes with a business proposition.

“It was immediately apparent that this couple was highly intelligent and creative,” said Rhatigan. “I found them more interesting the longer I knew them — an endless source of stories.”

Neither Paul nor Evelyn Cassat made more than \$6 an hour during their careers, yet through their financial acumen, they were able to save and invest and, in the end, provide a major gift to the university.

“Evelyn Cassat, in particular, was an expert investor,” said Rhatigan. “The wealth she created will continue to be invested through the WSU Foundation, and earnings from those investments will present opportunities for students and faculty alike, far into the future.”

Rhatigan developed a warm relationship with them and became a close confidant to Evelyn Cassat after her husband’s death Nov. 21, 2002. Evelyn Cassat died Sept. 9, 2007.

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Photo of Evelyn and Paul Cassat is available upon request.

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Thinkers, Doers, Movers & Shockers

Paul and Evelyn Cassat Background

Evelyn Cassat and her husband, Paul, lived in Abilene, Kan., for many years. She graduated from Florence Memorial High School in 1929 and received a Bachelor of Journalism degree from the University of Missouri in 1933 and a Bachelor of Science in education from the Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia in 1938. She was a high school teacher in Florence, Chapman and Abilene.

A neighbor of Evelyn's parents offered to finance a legal education for Evelyn, given her quick wit and obvious intelligence. Evelyn was interested but said that her parents did not consider the law a good career option for women, so she did not pursue it.

Paul Cassat attended Kansas Wesleyan University, but his educational work was interrupted by his success in working with the United Telephone Company in Abilene. Southwestern Bell took over the company in 1939. He was a trouble shooter and key man for Southwestern Bell for many years until his retirement in the mid-1970s. He often talked about stringing private lines from General Dwight D. Eisenhower's train to his mother's Abilene home when Eisenhower visited during World War II. Paul Cassat was known as a kind and gentle man.

His father, Carl, was an auto mechanic until his death in 1926, and Paul Cassat demonstrated an avid interest in this emerging industry. The year his father passed away, Cassat submitted a patent application concerning the functioning of the internal combustion engine and was awarded a patent for his idea in 1929. He was only 20. In 1944, he developed a plan for a fluid clutch in automobiles and regularly talked about improvements in automobiles he envisioned.

The Cassats' quality of life in their later years was severely compromised by hearing loss. Evelyn Cassat also had macular degeneration and glaucoma, impeding her vision, which had a marked affect on her investment work. These factors led her to a growing interest in aging, and eventually this became the focus of her gift.