

Research inspires family's support



Amanda Wade Fund targets cerebral palsy

Jim and Ellen Wade said they already had plenty of reasons to support their alma mater, and they had been doing so for years, when they learned Virginia Tech was partnering with Carilion Clinic to open a research institute and school of medicine in Roanoke, Va.

Because they live in that city, they were excited to see a development that was certain to make a positive impact on the region's economy. But they grew even more enthusiastic when they learned about some of the groundbreaking work in neuroscience being done at the Virginia Tech Carilion (VTC) Research Institute.

Pursuing discoveries in brain science



Michael Friedlander, executive director of the Virginia Tech Carilion Research Institute, serves as senior dean for research at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and as a professor of biological sciences and of biomedical engineering and sciences at Virginia Tech. He also conducts research in his own laboratory, working on new stimulation paradigms to help offset the effects of traumatic brain injuries on the brain's learning and memory processes. Visit <http://bit.ly/research-vtc> for edited excerpts from a conversation with Friedlander about his institute and the role of philanthropy in helping it to grow and excel.

“The quality of people [VTC Research Institute Executive Director] Michael Friedlander is bringing to Roanoke and the type of research they’re doing here can create tremendous economic development opportunities for this part of the state,” said Jim Wade, a former president and current member of the board of directors for Advance Auto Parts, who earned his accounting degree from Virginia Tech in 1976. “But there is a personal part of it for us. The research [many of the institute’s scientists] are doing is on the brain and how it functions, and part of that is directed to cerebral palsy and its causes and treatments, which hits home for us because of the needs of our daughter.”

To support such research, he and his wife created the Amanda Wade Fund for the Virginia Tech Carilion Research Institute, which is named for their youngest daughter, who has that condition.

Amanda Wade earned her bachelor’s in psychology from Virginia Tech in 2007. The Wades’ eldest daughter, Jennifer, is also an alumna, having earned a bachelor’s in accounting and information systems in 2006 and a master’s in that subject in 2007.


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The Wades said their decision to endow the research fund was cemented after they met Sharon Ramey, a professor on the faculty of both the research institute and the Department of Psychology in Virginia Tech’s College of Science.

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“We were extremely impressed with Dr. Ramey and how she goes about her research in a personal way,” Jim Wade said. “She spent time with Amanda, and it was obvious that she works really hard to get to know people as part of the research she’s doing and takes more than just a scientific approach.”

Ellen Wade, who earned her bachelor’s in human nutrition and foods in 1976 and a master’s in that subject in 1981, added, “When we found out that Dr. Ramey was doing research on cerebral palsy we just felt like this was a gift from God that we have all these people in Roanoke. Their work may not help Amanda, but I truly believe that at some point it will.” 

‘Virginia Tech is really part of our family’

The Virginia Tech Carilion Research Institute is one of many programs related to their alma mater that Jim and Ellen Wade have supported. Members of the Ut Prosim Society of extraordinarily generous supporters of Virginia Tech, they have also given generously to the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, the Graduate School, the Pamplin College of Business, and the W.E. Skelton 4-H Educational Conference Center at Smith Mountain Lake. The Wades also established a women’s pole vault scholarship that is named for their daughter, Jennifer, who was on Virginia Tech’s track-and-field team during her time at the university.

“Ellen and I see Virginia Tech as a very special place,” Jim Wade said. “With us both having gotten our degrees from there and both our kids having done so, Virginia Tech is really part of our family. We like that we’re able to give back and help a lot of people in different ways.”

Visit <http://bit.ly/ut-prosim-society> to learn more about the Ut Prosim Society.

‘I realized I could use my disability as a strength’

Amanda Wade, who has cerebral palsy, earned her bachelor’s of psychology from Virginia Tech, with honors, in 2007, and also has a master’s of counseling from Radford University. She plans to become a certified rehabilitation counselor in order to help people with the emotional challenges faced by those who have disabilities.

“The reason I chose that field is I realized I could use my disability as a strength in helping connect with other people with disabilities, such as war veterans coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan, or other people with CP,” said Wade.



From left, Jim Wade and his daughters, Amanda and Jennifer.