New CETA Scholarship Honors Russell Ahlquist ’54

Students enrolled in the University of Hartford’s College of Engineering, Technology, and Architecture (CETA) will soon benefit from a $100,000 gift made by Beverly Harris and her husband, Don, who established the Russell W. Ahlquist ’54 Memorial Endowed Scholarship in honor of Beverly Harris’s father.

The Harrises’ gift is an investment that will fund scholarships in perpetuity for students enrolled in CETA.

“This generous gift from the Harris family will allow us to bring highly qualified students to CETA who would otherwise not be able to attend,” says CETA Dean Lou Manzione. “It makes us competitive with other engineering programs to bring the best and the brightest to our college.”

“My father’s education was very important to him,” says Beverly Harris. “He would be very pleased to know that he would be helping future engineers at the University.”

Russell Ahlquist was the first of nine children in his family to go to college. A veteran of World War II discharged with military honors, he began his career with the Emhart Corporation (formerly based in Farmington, Conn.) in 1948. He received an associate’s degree in mechanical engineering in 1951 and a bachelor’s degree in industrial engineering in 1954, both with high honors. He went on to earn a master’s in business administration at the University of Connecticut in 1959 and retired from Emhart as group president, specialty products, in 1977. He also served on the University of Hartford’s Board of Regents from 1970 to 1972.

Ahlquist had a strong passion and appreciation for higher education. His influence will live on through this legacy gift made by his loved ones.

Currently there is a critical need for endowed scholarships like the one established by the Harrises. Both federal and state financial aid programs have been substantially reduced in recent years, creating an even greater call for endowed scholarships at a time when student need is at a historic high. Endowed scholarships make an important difference for students not just financially but timewise as well. Scholarships can reduce the amount of time that students have to budget for part-time jobs, giving them more time to focus on their studies and making it easier to schedule the classes needed to graduate on time.

At CETA, the Russell W. Ahlquist ’54 Memorial Endowed Scholarship will enhance the school’s mission to nurture students who will solve problems and help people worldwide live better, healthier lives. “It is a fitting legacy for Mrs. Harris’s father, who took his education from CETA and really soared with it,” says Manzione. “It enables us to prepare the next generation of alumni who can go forward to make the same kind of difference that he made.”

An engineering student watches fog flow over a simulated airplane wing inside an air tunnel in the Thermo-Fluids Lab in United Technologies Hall on campus.

Other Gifts and Grants

Below is a select list of private foundation and corporate grants received by the University of Hartford in the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2014, along with each gift’s project or purpose.

- **Newman’s Own Foundation**
  - $125,000 » Civil Rights Act, 50 Years Later Program

- **The Prudential Foundation**
  - $75,000 » Small Business Technical Assistance Program

- **The Richard P. Garmany Fund at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving**
  - $55,000 » 2014 – 2015 Chamber Music Series

- **Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Hartford**
  - $30,000 » In Our Own Words

- **Newman’s Own Foundation**
  - $20,000 » Sustainable Business in Western Kenya

- **SBM Charitable Foundation**
  - $17,488 » Pre-Collegiate Workshops

- **The Augustine Foundation**
  - $10,000 » 50th Anniversary of Hartt Guitar Department

- **Kaman Corporation**
  - $10,000 » Scholarship

- **Newman’s Own Foundation**
  - $10,000 » Soccer Excellence Fund

- **Pratt and Whitney**
  - $10,000 » Engineers Without Borders
Mohan Kocherla M’13
Barney School of Business

A HAWK’S TALE
AT THE FOREFRONT of PERSONALIZED MEDICINE

Mohan Kocherla M’13 is a remarkable young man who believes in the power of education.

His story begins in India, where he received a bachelor’s degree in microbiology and chemistry in 2000 and a professional diploma in network-centered computing in 2001. That same year, Kocherla came to the United States and earned a master’s in 2002 in management information systems at Ferris State University in Michigan. In 2004 he received a second master’s in genomics and bioinformatics at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C. His MBA from the University of Hartford’s Barney School of Business was awarded in December 2013.

Despite his five degrees, Kocherla is not living the life of a perpetual student. Instead, he has been preparing himself, even before he knew it, to move up the ranks from research scientist to operations director and partner at Genomas, Inc., which is based on the Hartford Hospital campus.

“Genomas, Inc., is a biomedical company started in 2004 by Dr. Gualberto Ruaño. He was also my professor at The George Washington University,” says Kocherla. “He spotted my talent and asked me to relocate to Hartford in August 2004. I was employee 001. Since then, I have been helping him build the company. Now, 10 years later, I have gone from being an employee to a partner in the company.”

Genomas is a player in the new field of personalized medicine. According to the company website, the “one-size-fits-all” approach to prescribing medications is giving way to an advanced method of drug selection based on the capacity of the individual to process (metabolize) the prescription. That capacity can be determined through analysis of the patient’s DNA.

“For about 50 percent of the population, the suggested drug dose is appropriate. However, about 25 percent of us are below-average metabolizers and may face risks when a drug builds up and causes potentially serious or even life-threatening complications. And about 25 percent of people have an above-average ability to metabolize drugs. This capacity could lead to lack of efficacy, as the medication is broken down before it has its effect” (genomas.net).

Kocherla’s contributions to Genomas, according to company founder Ruaño, have touched every aspect of the business, from laboratory design and management to helping the company obtain Small Business Innovation Research grants totaling $7.2 million and beyond.

“Mr. Kocherla has excelled in many and varied capacities at Genomas: research and clinical scientist, laboratory manager, and presently director of operations. . . . (He) was instrumental in creating the Laboratory of Personalized Health, . . . a clinical laboratory serving doctors and patients in the New England region. Since its inception in 2004, test results on over 5,000 patients with mental ailments have directed psychiatrists in providing the right medication in the appropriate dosage amount, thereby preventing lethal adverse drug reactions.”

Asked why he decided to go for an MBA, Kocherla responds, “Before receiving my MBA, my expertise was in biology and computer science. As my entrepreneurial bent increased, I was falling short in understanding my customers and investors.”

About his experience at Barney, Kocherla says he initially chose the program for its flexibility for working professionals and its personal touch. He also says Barney’s supportive faculty have helped him accomplish his goal of developing effective business strategies to guide his company in the ever-growing market of DNA-guided medicine.

Kocherla won first place in the Barney business plan competition with “Genomics and Health Care vis-à-vis Insurance and Cash-Based Business Models,” then presented it at the Connecticut Collegiate Business Plan Competition. At the state level he received the Inaugural Intrapreneurship Award. Associate Professor Irina Naoumova explains that intrapreneurship refers to an entrepreneurship mindset for in-company projects, a concept that is very popular now in the corporate world. She calls Kocherla a team leader, his project’s “heart and soul,” and observes that “his presentation skills added to the judges’ positive opinion on his business idea.”

Although the company has just six employees now, Kocherla sees great growth in its future, thanks to a redefined business plan that he developed at Barney. “For 2014, we project multimillion-dollar revenue. I feel that the Barney curriculum has provided me with booster rockets to rise to the executive level. Though graduation marks a new journey, I will not easily say goodbye to Barney.”
Alumna Christine Dwyer ’07, who stars in the Broadway hit Wicked, wowed the audience with a performance of “For Good” with costar Jenni Barber during the televised Tony Awards on June 8. While at Hartt, Dwyer studied with voice teacher Kristin Huffman as well as Alan Rust and Diana Moller-Marino in the theatre department and performed in several school productions. For more about Dwyer, go to hartford.edu/dwyer_tonys.

Christine Dwyer ’07, right, sings “For Good” with Wicked costar Jenni Barber.