There are so many exciting research projects in progress at the Wilmer Eye Institute—in the areas of glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, Fuchs’ Dystrophy, age-related macular degeneration (AMD), corneal diseases, pediatric ophthalmology, oculoplastics, gene therapy, and others, that it is impossible to share all of it with you in one issue. Therefore, we have highlighted a few of the important initiatives that are currently underway.

Similarly, we have been the fortunate recipients of many generous gifts from individuals, but are only able to share a handful in this publication. During the last fiscal year, Wilmer received gifts from over 1,200 grateful patients and friends, representing 39 states, the District of Columbia, and nine countries—clearly, the Institute’s mission has had a far-reaching impact on the fight to prevent and cure blinding eye diseases. We are deeply appreciative of this truly thoughtful philanthropy.

Sincerely,

Laurette L. Hankins, Director of Development

CONTACT US

For those who would like to support any of the programs or research projects at the Wilmer Eye Institute, please contact the Development Office at 410-955-2020 or email Laurette Hankins at lhankin2@jhmi.edu.
Albert W. Turner Family Makes $1 Million Commitment to Honor Walter J. Stark, M.D.

For Mr. Albert Turner, respect counts for quite a lot. In the case of his regard for his physician, Dr. Walter J. Stark, M.D., it translated to a gift of $1 million to create the Albert W. Turner Family–Walter J. Stark, M.D. Operating Room for Wilmer’s planned new eye care and research building. The sophisticated operating rooms will feature state-of-the-art surgical equipment and facilities.

“In making this gift, my sole motivation was to honor Dr. Stark and further his work,” says Mr. Turner. “It all stems from my respect for him as a physician and a person.” Mr. Turner, a successful land developer, has supported Wilmer since 1985.

According to Dr. Stark, his professional relationship with Turner has become a lasting friendship over time. “Mr. Turner has been a longtime friend and very generous in his support of the research efforts at the Wilmer Eye Institute,” says Dr. Stark, the Walter J. Stark Distinguished Professor of Ophthalmology and the Director of Wilmer’s Corneal and Cataract Service. “I am extremely honored to be able to join with him and his family in the naming of this operating room in our new building.”

According to Peter J. McDonnell, M.D., Director of the Wilmer Eye Institute, “Having these operating theaters will fulfill one of the real needs of the Institute, and we are deeply grateful for Mr. Turner’s generosity.”

Anonymous Donor Contributes $1 Million for Charles E. Iliff III, M.D. Professorship

During his 50-year association with the Wilmer Eye Institute, Charles E. Iliff III, M.D. was internationally renowned for his groundbreaking work in oculoplastics, cataract surgery, and corneal transplantation. Now, to honor Dr. Iliff’s name and legacy, an anonymous donor and grateful patient has stepped forward with a $1 million leadership gift towards the $2.3 million needed to establish the Charles E. Iliff III, M.D. Professorship in Ophthalmology.

According to the donor, “Dr. Iliff was an innovative surgeon who was very focused on his profession from the word go.”

Dr. Iliff’s career at Wilmer began in 1942, following his graduation from the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in 1939. Considered one of the pioneers of oculoplastics, the surgical restoration of the function and appearance of the eye, Dr. Iliff is also remembered for the many new surgical techniques that he introduced. At the time of his death in 1997 at the age of 86, Dr. Iliff was a professor emeritus of ophthalmology at Hopkins.

“He was a master surgeon and one of our finest teachers and clinicians,” says Walter J. Stark, M.D., the Walter J. Stark Distinguished Professor of Ophthalmology, and Director of the Corneal and Cataract Services. “That is what makes this generous endowment of a chair in his name so important.”
Think of it as the Wilmer Eye Institute’s ‘engine for innovation.’ In fact, the Morton F. Goldberg, M.D. Director’s Discovery Fund does just that, providing the critical support necessary to fund groundbreaking pilot research by Wilmer’s faculty—research that often falls outside of government funding. Now, thanks to a recent $100,000 gift from Alcon, Inc., a global leader in the research, development, manufacture and marketing of ophthalmic products, such research opportunities will be gaining an added boost.

**Spurring New Research**

**Focusing on the Future**

“We know that this gift will stimulate pilot research by our faculty members, leading to not just scientific discoveries, but also the opportunity, based upon those discoveries, to apply for even larger grants from the National Institutes of Health. In this regard, Alcon’s gift will be leveraged well into the future,” notes Morton F. Goldberg, M.D., Joseph E. Green Professor of Ophthalmology and Former Director, Wilmer Eye Institute.

“The Fund is intended to give the Wilmer Director, in perpetuity, the ability to underwrite the most promising research of the day, whatever that happens to be,” says Dr. Goldberg.

**Supporting Pilot Studies**

Right now, some of the most promising research supported by the Fund is reflected in the respective studies of two outstanding Wilmer clinician/scientists, Dr. Esen Karakurt, Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology for the Corneal and Anterior Segment Service, and Dr. Sharon Solomon, Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology for the Vitreoretinal and Retinal Vascular Services, is seeking a new drug treatment to combat age-related macular degeneration (AMD).
Dr. Akpek, who specializes in inflammatory and infectious diseases of the eye, is focusing on artificial corneal transplants for both adults and children. While corneal transplant is one of the most successful and frequently performed procedures today, the success rate is very low for those with ocular surface diseases, severe dry eyes, and autoimmune disorders. In addition, corneal transplant surgery for children is far more complex and challenging than that for adults, because of the fragile nature of infant tissue and the difficulty in visual rehabilitation for those so young. Through artificial cornea surgery, Dr. Akpek hopes to overcome these challenges; however, additional research is needed to perfect both the artificial cornea and the technique for transplantation.

In contrast, Dr. Solomon’s work engages the other end of the age scale, in addressing the needs of those who suffer from age-related macular degeneration (AMD), currently the leading cause of severe, permanent vision loss in Americans over 55. Of the two types of AMD, “dry” and “wet,” the latter is characterized by new, abnormal blood vessel growth that threatens vision by invading the central retina and leaking blood. While certain treatments for wet AMD are now in use, none have shown consistent success in stopping the disease. Dr. Solomon’s approach involves the application of new drug treatments that inhibit the stimuli for abnormal blood vessel growth. Specifically, she is studying the safety, tolerability, and efficacy of the drug Bevacizumab (BVCZ), which selectively targets abnormal blood vessel growth and stops its formation. Already approved for use against colorectal cancer, BVCZ has shown great results in reducing tumor growth. Dr. Solomon is seeking the same positive outcome in treating wet AMD.

**Breaking New Ground**

By investing in such pilot projects, the Director’s Discovery Fund is breaking new ground in the treatment and cure of ocular diseases. “Still,” says Peter J. McDonnell, M.D., Wilmer’s current Director and William Holland Wilmer Professor of Ophthalmology, “additional support of the Fund is needed to maintain the momentum of innovative research. We have senior clinician scientists leading research in all areas; we also have talented basic scientists whose work underlies much of our capacity, plus a vital group of younger researchers eager to carry us forward into the future,” he notes. “We need to find new ways to support their efforts, and eliminate obstacles, so that those advances come about sooner rather than later.”

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**Morton F. Goldberg, MD**

**Director’s Discovery Fund Contributors**

To date, leading contributors to the Morton F. Goldberg, M.D. Director’s Discovery Fund have committed more than $1.7 million toward a goal of $3 million. As of 10/01/04, commitments of $5,000 and greater include:

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  - Abraham* and Virginia Weiss
- **$250,000 TO $499,999**
  - Ms. Helen E. Day*
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  - Mr. Boone Pickens
  - Louis Slesin, Ph.D. and Lesli Rice
  - Mr. and Mrs. Marshall Wishnack

*deceased
When Arnall Patz, M.D. first learned that he had been chosen to receive America’s highest civilian award, his modest reaction was no surprise to those who know him. “I was astonished, totally overwhelmed, and highly honored,” Dr. Patz told a reporter. “And I could name 50 other medical scientists who probably deserve it more than I do.”

‘It’ is the Presidential Medal of Freedom, which honors those Americans who have made “an especially meritorious contribution to the security or national interests of the United States or to world peace or to cultural or other significant public or private endeavors.” On June 23, the Medal was personally presented to Dr. Patz by President George W. Bush during a special East Room ceremony at the White House honoring all 12 recipients of the award, including Pope John Paul II, actress Rita Moreno, and golfer Arnold Palmer. During the presentation, President Bush lauded Dr. Patz as, “…the man who has given to uncounted men, women, and children the gift of sight. For more than a half-century, his name has been the gold standard in the field of researching the causes and treatment of eye disease.”

A Career of Accomplishment

And deserve it he did. In fact, in the eyes of his colleagues who have worked with Dr. Patz during his nearly five decades at Johns Hopkins, this humble Director Emeritus of the Wilmer Eye Institute is a true giant in the field of modern ophthalmology. “Dr. Patz will always be considered, by his peers and those throughout our profession, as a man who contributed critically to preserving sight,” says Peter J. McDonnell, M.D., current Director of the Wilmer Eye Institute and the William Holland Wilmer Professor of Ophthalmology at Johns Hopkins. “As a Wilmer faculty member for the last 50 years, his inspiration and leadership, along with his guidance and encouragement to all of our medical students, make him a role model for the entire Wilmer community.”
Dr. Patz’s stature among his peers is understandable, given his extraordinary accomplishments in the field of ocular medicine. Early in his medical career, Dr. Patz helped stop a growing epidemic of infant blindness by correctly identifying the cause—the then common practice of placing premature infants into incubators with high levels of oxygen. Despite ridicule and resistance from the medical community, Dr. Patz scientifically proved the link between the condition now known as retinopathy of prematurity (ROP) and the exposure of newborns to high levels of oxygen. His persistence paid off—and resulted in saving the eyesight of countless babies during the 1950s. For his work, Dr. Patz was awarded the prestigious Albert Lasker Medical Research Award, sometimes known as the “American Nobel,” in 1956.

In addition, Dr. Patz is widely known for his pioneering collaboration with the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory in developing the argon laser for use in the treatment of retinal disorders. This work blazed a new path to the eventual treatment of many degenerative eye conditions, including diabetic retinopathy, age-related macular degeneration, and retinal tearing.

An Eye for Inspiring Others

Aside from his clinical successes, Dr. Patz also made his mark as an outstanding educator. After joining the Johns Hopkins faculty in 1970, he founded its Retinal Vascular Center and, from 1979 to 1989, served as the fourth director of the Wilmer Eye Institute. Through his guidance, the Institute grew rapidly in reputation as the world’s leading eye care and research center. What’s more, he is widely praised for mentoring the budding careers of some of today’s foremost eye specialists. Notes Morton F. Goldberg, M.D., Joseph E. Green Professor of Ophthalmology and former Director of the Institute following Patz, “[He is] an exceptional colleague and friend, whom I consider one of the greatest ophthalmologists and greatest human beings in modern medicine. It was his passion, as well as his brilliance that made him a great researcher, clinician and most importantly, a mentor to all of us who learned and worked with him.”

Recognition Overdue

Despite such kudos from the medical community, famed novelist Tom Clancy felt that Dr. Patz deserved greater public recognition for his lifetime of achievements. Clancy, who had met Dr. Patz several years ago, has carried on a personal campaign for some time to give the physician his due. Then, early in 2004, Clancy literally caught the ear of President Bush during a Library of Congress dinner and shared Dr. Patz’s accomplishments with him. “I guess he listened,” Clancy smiles.

“The real heroes in life are the guys who push back the frontiers of knowledge,” says Clancy. “Dr. Patz is definitely one of the guys who [did]…”

While “delighted” to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom, Dr. Patz still prefers to redirect the spotlight away from himself and onto the mission of his work.

“I am extremely pleased that this award will bring focus and attention to the value and importance of work in preserving the sight of patients,” he says, “and to ophthalmology’s important role in medicine.”
A REASON FOR GIVING

Sharon Kress Supports “An Amazing Physician”

What causes an individual to decide to make a gift to the Wilmer Eye Institute? In the case of Sharon Kress, the answer is simple—gratitude.

In the early morning hours of November 26, 1997, Ms. Kress was driving down a highway to catch a flight at Newark Airport. Ahead of her in the darkness, she never saw the parked sanitation truck, partially extended into her lane with its lights out. To this day, she doesn’t remember what happened next.

What did occur was a catastrophic collision that she barely survived. Rescue workers frantically worked to remove her from the twisted wreckage with the Jaws of Life. “I was told later that when they found me, I wasn’t breathing and had no pulse,” she says. When she regained consciousness over a month later, this former marathon runner found herself in a rehabilitation hospital in North Carolina, suffering from severe internal injuries and multiple broken bones.

After nearly two years of recovery, including an operation to reset the proper position of her damaged right eye socket, Ms. Kress arrived at the Wilmer Eye Institute in 1998, preparing for the first in a series of procedures to correct a complex of unresolved issues regarding her right eye. Her surgeon was Nicholas T. Iliff, M.D., Professor of Ophthalmology and Plastic Surgery and Wilmer’s Director of Oculoplastic and Reconstructive Surgery. However, the pairing was not by chance; Ms. Kress and her brother previously had spent some time visiting “a number of prominent eye centers” to determine the very best surgeon for her needs. “I chose Dr. Iliff,” she says simply.

“Ms. Kress had extensive injuries to the tissues and bones around her right eye, which interfered with the normal blink mechanism as well as the proper lubrication of her eye,” recalls Dr. Iliff. “My challenges were to regulate those particular aspects, and to correct the position of her upper eyelid that had been damaged by the injury. I also needed to re-establish the normal tear drainage, which ultimately required a reconstruction of her tear drainage system. The challenges then were to balance the blink, the eyelid position, and the effectiveness of her tear drain to work together.”

In the ensuing years until 2003, Dr. Iliff accomplished just that, while taking the additional step of helping to coordinate Ms. Kress’ care with other Hopkins physicians. “If Dr. Iliff had not made the extra effort to find these doctors for me, I would still be dealing with health issues,” says Ms. Kress. “He got me on the right path.”

Throughout this period, Ms. Kress was in regular communication about her progress with Dr. Iliff between her visits to Baltimore, talking by phone from her home in New Jersey, “even in the evening and on weekends,” she remembers. By the time her final procedure was completed, she had made her decision. “I wanted to let Dr. Iliff know how grateful I was,” she says, “and how much I wanted him to be able to offer the same care to others who had dealt with the same problems that I had.” Her initial pledge, made in 2002, is exclusively dedicated to supporting Dr. Iliff’s research work. Dr. Iliff calls the gift, “a complete surprise.”
“Ms. Kress made this gesture completely on her own,” he says. “She has been extraordinarily generous.”

Two years later, Ms. Kress asked if she could increase her gift, and queried Dr. Iliff as to what kind of support he needed most. “She was interested in promoting our work toward the care of people with her type of injury,” says Dr. Iliff. “Since a significant part of our training of our fellows is in the management of trauma similar to hers, we thought that the best use of her gift would be in supporting those fellowships.” This second gift was made by Ms. Kress in 2004 to help support Fellowships in Oculoplastic Surgery.

“Since a significant part of our training of our fellows is in the management of trauma similar to hers, we thought that the best use of her gift would be in supporting those fellowships.”
—NICHOLAS T. ILIFF, M.D.

While Dr. Iliff affirms that all of his patients are “special” to him, he notes that working with Ms. Kress formed a strong bond. “When a patient has long-term problems to solve, the doctor and patient have to work in a partnership to solve them,” he says. “That’s certainly what has happened in the case of Ms. Kress and me. She’s been extremely brave and has had to face a tremendous challenge, which she has done amazingly well.”

For her part, Ms. Kress expresses a similar admiration. “There’s probably nothing in this world that could repay all of the things that he’s done for me,” she states. “He is an amazing physician and person. I was very lucky to meet him.”
A NEW CHAPTER BEGINS

October Brings Formal Dedication of Stark-Mosher Center for Cataract and Corneal Diseases

On Friday, October 8, 2004 Wilmer celebrated a remarkable friendship—and the start of a new chapter in the advanced treatment of cataract and corneal diseases—with the formal dedication of Wilmer’s new Walter J. Stark, M.D. and Margaret C. Mosher Center for Cataract and Corneal Diseases at the Wilmer Eye Institute. The Center will create a dynamic focal point for Wilmer’s renowned expertise in the diagnosis and care of cataract and corneal disease. New non-surgical approaches to treatment will be explored using such sophisticated tools as molecular biology and genomics. In addition, the Center will engage in a broad spectrum of start-up research conducted by teams drawn from the top clinical and scientific talent at Wilmer and Hopkins.

For Walter J. Stark, M.D., the Walter J. Stark Distinguished Professor of Ophthalmology, and Wilmer’s Director of the Corneal and Cataract Services, the new Center exemplifies his vision of Wilmer’s core strengths. “With its 15 corneal transplant surgeons, this Center is the largest and finest surgery service of its kind in the world,” says Dr. Stark. “Not only can we treat any corneal, cataract, or anterior segment disease, we also are doing critical research that will lead to the cure of many of today’s challenging diseases.”

At the same time, the Center and its name reflect the close bond between Dr. Stark and his patient, friend, and benefactor, the late Margaret C. Mosher. For over a decade, Mrs. Mosher, known throughout Wilmer as “Maggie,” was a leading contributor to the Institute, helping to create the Walter J. Stark Distinguished Professorship in Ophthalmology in 1991, the A. Edward Maumenee Professorship in Ophthalmology in 1993, and the Walter J. Stark Corneal Research Fund in 1998. In addition, she was an active member of the Wilmer Advisory Council and attended many of the Institute’s educational and social functions.

“My wife Polly and I became very close friends with Maggie over the years. Maggie didn’t want a lot of credit for her support—she just enjoyed working with a very successful and winning team.”

Initiated through her estate, the establishment of the Stark-Mosher Center represents the culmination of Mrs. Mosher’s admiration for the Institute and its work, according to Edward E. Birch, Ph.D., trustee of the Margaret C. Mosher Trust. “Johns Hopkins and the Wilmer Eye Institute were very important parts of Mrs.
Robert B. Welch, M.D. Honored by the Retina Society as Drive for Named Professorship Continues

Recognizing one of their best, the Retina Society selected Robert B. Welch, M.D. as their Guest of Honor for their 37th Annual Meeting Banquet, held in Baltimore on October 1. The leading organization of vitreo-retinal specialists in the U.S., the Retina Society seeks to reduce worldwide visual disability and blindness by promoting education and professional interaction among clinicians and researchers.

“As a charter member and past president of the Retina Society, he was an apt Guest of Honor at our meeting,” says Julia A. Haller, M.D., Katharine Graham Professor of Ophthalmology in the Vitreo-Retinal Surgical Service at Wilmer and a member of the Retina Society. “Dr. Welch’s name is almost synonymous with Wilmer. He’s been one of the most loyal contributors to the Institute over the years in so many ways, from teaching to authoring the official Wilmer history.”

The Society’s recognition is just the latest in a continuing series of accolades for a man whom many consider to be one of the truly exceptional clinicians, researchers, and educators in the history of the Wilmer Eye Institute. The son of an Annapolis ophthalmologist, Dr. Welch graduated from the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in 1953, and after completing a residency in internal medicine at Duke University, returned to Hopkins for an internship and residency at Wilmer under Dr. Alan C. Woods. In 1959, he took the position of chief resident, and from 1959-1985, co-directed the Wilmer Retina Service, where for 25 years, every Wilmer resident spent three months in training.

He also served as the chairman of ophthalmology at the Greater Baltimore Medical Center from 1985 to 1991, and was a retinal consultant to the Walter Reed Army Hospital and the Bethesda Naval Hospital. Today, he continues to maintain his private practice at his father’s original office in Annapolis, with his wife Betty serving as his practice manager.

In the field of clinical research, Dr. Welch has been recognized for his many contributions, including studies of pars planitis, sickle cell hemoglobin C disease, and Von Hippel-Lindau Disease, a rare genetic disorder characterized by the growth of hemangioblastomas in the retina. “Dr. Welch actually coined the term “sea fan” to describe the appearance of new blood vessels in sickle cell retinopathy,” notes Dr. Haller. “He also invented the term ‘pars planitis.’ In addition, he was considered one of the major retinal surgeons in the country for many years.”

Because of Dr. Welch’s many achievements, a number of his colleagues, friends, patients, and former students have begun a major initiative to underwrite the Robert B. Welch, M.D. Professorship in Ophthalmology. The new chair will support the work of one Wilmer faculty member in care, teaching, and clinical research of retinal disease.

“I think it will be wonderful to have Dr. Welch’s name permanently associated with Wilmer through a professorship,” says Dr. Haller, who was inspired to sub-specialize in the retina by Dr. Welch. “Personally, I think that every person who has ever been a part of Wilmer would like to see this professorship happen—and soon.”
MISSION STATEMENT
The mission of the Wilmer Eye Institute is to contribute to ophthalmic knowledge and to continue to reduce suffering from blindness and loss of vision at home and around the world, through leadership and excellence in research, education, and patient care.

ABOUT WILMER
The Wilmer Eye Institute provides diagnostic, medical, and surgical care for adults and children and is a referral center for all eye problems. Wilmer provides routine preventative care, and evaluates and treats patients with specific complaints or those with a family history of eye disease. Treatment for eye emergencies is available 24 hours a day through Wilmer’s Eye Emergency Service, a designated Maryland eye trauma center.

Wilmer Services and Locations
General Information and Referrals 410-955-5080
Emergency Services 410-955-5347
Johns Hopkins Hospital 410-955-5080
Bayview Medical Center 410-550-2360
Columbia (Charter Drive) 410-910-2330
E. Baltimore Medical Center 410-522-9800
Frederick 301-620-9268
Green Spring Station 410-583-2800
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