

“Beyond Terrifying”

MARY WEISER CARRIES A frying pan in her purse.

A few years ago, on a pleasant weekend getaway at their family place in northern Michigan, Mary’s 2 1/2-year-old daughter Cate and husband Marc caught a fish. They cleaned the fish and fried it for dinner. When, after a small bite, Cate complained that her mouth hurt, then her throat, Marc and Mary Weiser reached for the Benadryl, a proven first intervention to Cate’s allergies to eggs and other foods. But by the time the bottle was open, their daughter’s face and throat had swelled almost beyond recognition. In a matter of seconds,

a bucolic family trip turned into life-and-death drama.

The Weisers administered epinephrine and called 9-1-1, but their newly built home wasn’t recognized on the 9-1-1 emergency grid. “We broke every law of the road to get to the emergency room as quickly as possible,” Mary Weiser says. The ER staff was waiting and immediately administered more medications. Cate was going to make it.

“The realization that my child had been dying in my arms from something I fed her is almost unbearable to remember,” says Weiser. “Knowing that it’s likely to happen again is beyond terrifying.”

After a similarly frightening experience when Cate was just a year old and reacted to a small piece of egg, the Weisers had sought the help of a pediatric allergist who determined that Cate was also allergic to peanuts and tree nuts, shellfish, dairy, wheat, oat, soy and seeds. Over the next year and a half, tests continued to show that Cate was not allergic to fish — an excellent source of fat and protein, two items severely lacking in Cate’s highly restricted diet.

The fish that nearly killed Cate was prepared in the frying pan Mary Weiser carries to ensure that food cooked anywhere for Cate is not contaminated with traces of anything she’s allergic to. Unfortunately, allergy tests aren’t 100 percent accurate and, as the allergist told the Weisers, the true test is how Cate’s body reacts when she puts food — like that seemingly innocuous bit of fish — in her mouth. Now, every new food Cate eats has to be consumed in a medical setting in case she has another anaphylactic response — one involving multiple bodily reactions that can rapidly cause death.

Food allergies affect 12 million Americans — including 4 percent of U.S. children — and ingestion isn’t always necessary; reactions through inhalation and skin contact may be a threat as well. This ease of transmission can make the most common of childhood events fraught with risk — and dread for parents. Birthday



Marc and Mary Weiser

parties, public transportation, holiday fare, even classrooms can be a source of contamination. “Even taking her to a park, I wonder what the other kids had for lunch that day that might have been transferred to the play structure,” Mary Weiser says.

If fear and worry were kindled by Cate’s allergic reactions, so was Mary Weiser’s uncommon sense of activism. No newcomer to philanthropy, having raised \$8.6 million for the Washtenaw Housing Alliance and more than \$12 million in the Michigan political arena, Weiser became closely involved with the U-M Food Allergy Center. Led by James Baker Jr., M.D., chief of the allergy divi-

sion, as well as Jim Baldwin, M.D., Marc McMorris, M.D., and Matthew Greenhawt, M.D., head of the center, clinical director and research director, respectively, the Food Allergy Center is dedicated to providing full care to food allergy patients, including expanding education, research and community services for patients and their families. Weiser and Baker have the shared goal of growing a food allergy Center of Excellence at the U-M.

Mary Weiser’s efforts have already secured more than \$2 million for the center in just over a year, including a \$1 million four-to-one matching gift from the Food Allergy Initiative and a

\$750,000 commitment from an anonymous Michigan family foundation. Marc and Mary Weiser have made a personal commitment of \$100,000.

With the active support of husband Marc and father-in-law Ron Weiser, Mary is passionate about improving the lives of food allergy patients. Of Cate she says, “I want her to have the same opportunities everyone wants for their children.

“I’m indebted to the University of Michigan for recognizing the importance of this effort,” Weiser says, “and those whose futures are made better because of the work of the Food Allergy Center surely will feel the same.”
—RICK KRUPINSKI

In Gratitude for a Life Saved

HE GRADUATED FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LAW School, but Martin Lagina also has a special place in his heart for the U-M Health System. “My life was saved at the U-M Hospital,” says the successful energy entrepreneur from Traverse City, Michigan.

While still in law school, Lagina developed an acute case of appendicitis, which was initially misdiagnosed. Several days later, his roommate insisted on taking Lagina to University Hospital, where physician Richard Burney properly diagnosed his dangerous condition. “That was 30

years ago, and I still remember everything Dr. Burney said to me,” Lagina says. Burney still practices surgery at the U-M.

In gratitude for the lifesaving care he received, La-

gina and his wife, M. Olivia Lagina, have established the Ann Lagina Family Endowed Scholarship in the U-M Medical School, in honor of his mother. Lagina’s hope is that the scholarship will help medical students full of dreams for big futures with the heavy financial burden they incur to achieve them. —RK



Martin and M. Olivia Lagina

Uniting Passion and Purpose



Carolyn and Peter Mertz

PETER MERTZ HAS ALWAYS

been passionate about the natural world. Now this 1974 graduate of the U-M School of Natural Resources and Environment (SNRE) has found a way to unite that passion with the new U-M C.S. Mott Children's Hospital and Von Voigtlander Women's Hospital through generous and unique support.

Mertz, along with his wife, Carolyn, has made a gift to help fund the green roof of the new hospitals. The roof will be named the Carl and Mary Jane Mertz Green Roof in honor of Peter Mertz's parents. The Mertzes, residents of Hanover, New Hampshire, have also provided seed funding for the Pediatric Cardiology Longitudinal Outcomes Program, a study that will improve quality of life for children with congenital and acquired heart disease.

While attending the 2010 Griese/Hutchinson/Woodson Golf Tournament in support of the new Mott Hospital, Peter and Carolyn took a tour of the existing facility. They were struck by the amazing care they witnessed and, in particular, the compassionate, skilled professionals who were so devoted to improving children's health and helping patients

and families feel comfortable during a challenging hospital experience.

Peter Mertz, who also holds a U-M M.B.A., considers it "a privilege to support this new hospital and the lifesaving research conducted here. It's a very special opportunity to be a part of such an amazing place."

Philanthropy has been part of Mertz's life since his student days. A grateful scholarship recipient himself, he established the Peter C. Mertz Scholarship in SNRE just a year after graduating. From that gift, he says, he learned three important lessons that have guided him to this day. "It was easy," he says. "It was very meaningful to the recipients. And I've never felt that I have less after I have given something away to help another person."

Peter Mertz is the CEO of Global Forest Partners LP, an investment advisory firm that makes private equity investments in sustainable forestry on behalf of institutional clients. Founded in 1982, it is one of the oldest and largest timber investment managers in the world. "We plant more than 20 million trees each

year," Mertz says, "creating benefit for users of wood 10, 20 or 30 years into the future." Carolyn Mertz is active in community affairs and is the past chair of the board of trustees of the Montshire Museum of Science in Norwich, Vermont, which features interactive learning about the natural and physical sciences, ecology and technology. She says, "Peter and I have made a lifelong commitment to give of our time, talent, substance and influence to work with and help others."

The green roof that the Mertzes have funded is part of the U-M's commitment to use resources more efficiently and to harmonize natural and built environments, as well as to pursue LEED certification of the hospital facility. The goal of the Longitudinal Outcomes Program is to design and conduct long-term follow-up research to better understand the nature and scope of difficulties that survivors of childhood heart disease experience over the course of their lives. Through their gift, the Mertzes will be helping countless children, women and their families — and the environment — for generations to come. —RK

The diagnosis of food allergy is complicated. Living with it can be distressing to patient and family alike.

Your gift can help give hope to a child, a parent, a family member, a friend.

To contribute to food allergy research, education and patient care at the University of Michigan, call (734) 998-7705 or visit www.med.umich.edu/foodallergy/gift.htm.



Challenging Prostate Cancer

THE CALIFORNIA-BASED PROSTATE CANCER FOUNDATION HAS MADE A \$5 MILLION commitment to match an equal amount of support in order to propel the advancement of prostate cancer diagnosis, prognosis and personalized treatment strategies through research at the U-M. The challenge extends to December 31, 2013.

Prostate cancer is the third-most-common cause of cancer death in men of all ages and the most common cause of death from cancer in men over age 75. Since 1993, the Prostate Cancer Foundation has been investing in the most promising research programs, channeling resources to the world's top scientific minds. The foundation's partnership with the U-M fuels an already robust and promising program of Michigan research into the causes and treatment of prostate cancer.

To make a gift to what is known as the Prostate Cancer Foundation-University of Michigan \$10 Million Challenge, go to www.medicineatmichigan.org/gifts, call the Comprehensive Cancer Center Development Office at (734) 998-6893, or use the giving envelope provided in this issue of *Medicine at Michigan*. —RK

Professorships Recently Inaugurated



A longtime champion of education in the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences was honored May

12 with the inauguration of the **Terry J. Bergstrom Collegiate Professorship for Resident Education in Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences**. Established through gifts from friends of Terry Bergstrom (M.D. 1965, Residency 1969, Fellowship 1975) and alumni of the department, the professorship honors an emeritus faculty member who received the department's teaching award 16 times. The first Bergstrom

Professor is Shahzad I. Mian, M.D., an associate professor of ophthalmology and visual sciences, and residency program director.

The **Endowed Professorship in Burn Surgery** was established to assist in the development of new programs in burn surgery and to support the activities of a clinician, investigator and educator. Inaugurated June 20, the professorship supports the activities of Stewart C. Wang, M.D., Ph.D., a professor of surgery in the Medical School and director of burn surgery in the Trauma Burn Center. A skilled surgeon, educator and investigator, Wang is recognized internationally for his expertise in traumatic injuries research. —KB