

PULSE

PHILANTHROPY IN ACTION
at the University of Virginia Health System



How One Foundation Helped Transform a School

Thomas Foundation Closes Doors After 16 Years of Service to State

When George D. Thomas established the Theresa A. Thomas Memorial Foundation in 1975, he could not have foreseen the incredible impact his generosity would have on many institutions, but particularly on one school at UVa and its students. For over 16 years, the foundation has advanced educational opportunities for health care providers in primary care, generalist medicine, and rural health. The foundation has donated more than \$6 million to UVa, with more than \$4 million of that total going to the School of Nursing. It was to the nursing school that the foundation made its first gift in 1988, and throughout the years the foundation has helped shape all areas of the school—including making the lead gift in the school's first-ever capital campaign. Now, as the foundation closes its doors, it has made its final gift to the nursing school—\$1 million to help make the critical expansion of McLeod Hall a reality.

The Thomas Foundation's generosity has made many notable advances at UVa possible, including:

- Dramatic increases in student financial aid. With the foundation's support, more than 360 nursing students and 115 medical students have received generous scholarships and fellowships, allowing them to graduate with less debt.
- Creation of the first radiosurgery center in the state at UVa, where more than 4,000 patients have received life-saving gamma knife surgery.
- Formation and renovation of two clinical learning laboratories to give nursing students critical, hands-on training in the best patient care and intensive care practices.
- Establishment of four endowed professorships to recruit the very best nursing educators and researchers to UVa.
- Lead support for the McLeod Hall expansion, a project to provide 30,000 square feet of much needed, new space for nursing research and education.

The Thomas Foundation has proven itself to be a devoted benefactor to the UVa School of Nursing.

From Personal Loss Springs New Opportunities for Growth

When he established the Thomas Foundation, George Thomas expressed his desire to assist in providing health care for those who might not otherwise receive it—a mission that sprang from personal tragedy. In February 1972, Thomas' wife Theresa (a diploma trained nurse) became seriously ill with what was considered at the time to be the flu. As her condition worsened, he tried in vain to find a doctor to visit their home in semi-rural Hanover County, Va. Theresa Thomas died shortly after being taken to the hospital, and Thomas established the foundation in her memory. When Thomas himself died in 1977, foundation trustees Jim Roberts and Tom Carr and president Charles Reed took on the mission of promoting educational opportunities for health care providers—and ended up leading the charge to improve nursing and medical education in Virginia, as well as many other health care initiatives.

Roberts, whose daughter Charlotte (Nurs. '79, MSN '96) graduated from UVa, became a charter member of the School of Nursing Advisory Board and served as chair from 1997 until December 2003. He consulted with the school on their first fund-raising campaign, and with his leadership the school raised more than \$19 million to support current and future nursing projects at the University. Roberts worked tirelessly to identify and cultivate potential donors for the school, and his efforts brought the McLeod Hall expansion project to the desk of Virginia Governor Mark Warner—an act that led the state to contribute \$6 million to the \$14 million project.

“Through the Thomas Foundation,” explains School of Nursing Dean Jeanette Lancaster, R.N., Ph.D., F.A.A.N., “Jim has had an extraordinary impact on the lives of hundreds of students—and there is no way to count the number of lives that will be changed when our addition to McLeod Hall is built. Our relationship with Jim Roberts and the Thomas Foundation has transformed the UVa School of Nursing, allowing us to offer our students incredible opportunities in nursing education.”



UVa Health Foundation Board Member and School of Nursing benefactor Jim Roberts.

A True Friend to the School of Nursing

Among the mementos in Jim Roberts' office is a photograph of a group of nursing students who received scholarships thanks to the Theresa A. Thomas Memorial Foundation. Roberts, president of the foundation and a member of the UVa Health Foundation Board, is particularly proud of that picture and of the many letters he receives from students each year, thanking the foundation for helping make their dreams of being a nurse or doctor possible.

“Those types of letters are the best rewards,” Roberts says, a telling statement from a man who literally had a day—March 27, 2004—named in his honor by Virginia Governor Mark Warner, commending Roberts' dedication and commitment to the University.

Roberts, a lawyer and partner at Troutman Sanders LLP in Richmond, Va., helped his client and friend, George Thomas, establish the foundation in 1975. But above his responsibilities as president of the foundation, Roberts has taken a special interest in the School of Nursing.

“From the moment Linda Davies, our former director of development, and I ‘found’ Jim Roberts we knew we'd found the school's next guardian angel,” remembers Jeanette Lancaster, R.N., Ph.D., F.A.A.N., dean of the School of Nursing. “His commitment, his friendship, and his leadership have helped our school and its students flourish, helping us realize our goals for the present and daring us to make bold plans for our future.”



From increasing scholarships to renovating facilities, the Theresa A. Thomas Memorial Foundation has dramatically advanced educational opportunities for nursing and medical students at UVa.