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Transformational Gift to McKnight Brain Institute Launches Matching Campaign

UA Foundation | August 13, 2014

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Regents' Professor Carol Barnes

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The University of Arizona has received a \$5 million gift for its McKnight Brain Institute that challenges other philanthropists to match the amount to help support ongoing funding for neuroscience research.

The gift was made by the McKnight Brain Research Foundation, which has committed almost \$11 million to the UA's institute since 2006.

The University of Arizona Foundation will match gifts 1-to-1 until the establishment of at least a \$10 million permanent endowment. As a whole, the funding will mark a major step forward in reaching the University's \$1.5 billion **Arizona NOW** campaign goal.

The generosity of the **McKnight Brain Research Foundation** – and donors participating in the match – also will help the UA to play a prominent role in the emerging field of neuroscience. Public interest in the area has been growing and the White House recently launched a 10-year **BRAIN Initiative** that aims to revolutionize our understanding of the human brain.

UA President Ann Weaver Hart also has identified neuroscience as a priority for the University. The UA's strategic plan, "Never Settle," calls for creative collaboration and new partnerships in research – the exact strategy already employed by the McKnight Brain Institute.

"The McKnight Brain Research Foundation gift will equip some of our most innovative scientists with the resources necessary to seek fresh approaches to an important field," Hart said.

Established in 1999, the McKnight Brain Research Foundation honors William L. and Evelyn F. McKnight's interest in age-related memory loss. Evelyn was a nurse and William spent his 59-year career with 3M Co., where he served as president for 20 years and chairman of the board for 17 years.

Today, the Florida-based foundation supports research of the brain in the aging, making key investments in top-tier research institutions, including the UA. The foundation has specifically invested in the work of **Dr. Carol Barnes**, UA Regents' Professor of Psychology and director of the UA's **Evelyn F. McKnight Brain Institute**. Barnes, the Evelyn F. McKnight Endowed Chair for Learning and Memory in Aging, also holds appointments in neurology and neuroscience and is associate director of the UA's **BIO5 Institute**.

Barnes, who was drawn to the field after watching her grandfather struggle with memory loss, has taken the innovative approach of focusing on exactly how a normal brain ages.

"We cannot possibly understand what's going wrong with the brain if we don't understand what its 'normal' looks like," Barnes said of her research. "As we begin to understand aging in full depth, we can see what impacts it."

During a career that has spanned more than 30 years, Barnes has made enormous contributions leading to the understanding and alleviation of age-related memory loss. Barnes has conducted innovative research on aging and memory at the UA for almost a quarter of a century and has brought more than \$35 million in research funding to the University.

Her work was recognized last week when the American Psychological Association presented her with a 2014 Distinguished Scientific Contribution award. She also recently was awarded the Society for Neuroscience's Ralph W. Gerard Prize in Neuroscience, the highest recognition conferred by the society, which honors outstanding scientists who have made significant contributions to neuroscience throughout their careers.

"Dr. Barnes is an outstanding research scientist, and her interest is unique among neuroscientists," the trustees of the McKnight Brain Research Foundation said in a statement. "We are delighted to continue our long association with Carol and the University of Arizona as together we lead the way in medical research focused on the brain with the hope of preserving memory and enhancing life."

Barnes said the McKnight gifts and matching endowment campaign will permanently sustain the Institute's research, helping to purchase equipment and support the best and brightest graduate students.

With private funding, efforts like the McKnight Brain Institute are afforded flexibility and creativity to expand research programs beyond the necessary constraints of federal funding. For example, decades-long longitudinal studies that track patients over time can't be funded in typical three- to five-year cycles, but are exactly the type of efforts that can lead to breakthroughs in studies of aging.

"I'm incredibly grateful, as an endowment will fund our cognitive aging research into perpetuity," she said.

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