

# giving matters

FALL 2006

A publication for supporters of  
health-related research, education,  
and service at the University of Minnesota



PHOTO: JIM FICARRA

Jeff Lion (right) is supporting University research into alternative therapies for acute lymphoblastic leukemia, a cancer his son, Josh (left), was diagnosed with before his second birthday.

"[Jeff's] funding has allowed us to stay with this line of research and look for new solutions if the drug isn't perfect."

—DANIEL VALLERA, PH.D.

## A powerful partnership

Donor supports leukemia research with funding and ideas

When Jeff Lion's son, Josh, was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) at 18 months old, doctors gave Josh a good chance of survival. When Josh's cancer came back at age 5 ½, doctors were not nearly so optimistic.

"When Josh first got sick, they told me there was a 75 percent chance that he'd be OK, so I didn't really sweat it," Lion says. "Then when he relapsed and they told me he wasn't going to make it, I started sweating it."

But Lion wasn't one to stand by idly while others tried to cure his son's cancer. He wanted to be involved, too, even though he had no formal science training and had to teach himself everything he could about the disease — even its molecular structure.

After months of researching exactly how ALL affects the body and how it's treated, Lion wasn't satisfied. "I thought we could do better," he says.

Having read up on ALL and paid close attention to Josh's treatments, Lion sought out cancer researchers across the country, looking for someone who was trying to develop alternative therapies for leukemia — something to help those for whom nothing else seemed to be working.

Soon he found Daniel Vallera, Ph.D., a basic scientist at the University of Minnesota Cancer Center and professor in the Medical School's Department of Therapeutic Radiology–Radiation Oncology. "Dan was working on a project that I was interested in, and I thought maybe we could collaborate," Lion says.

Although Jeff and Josh Lion live in the Fresno, California, area, they spent a lot of time in Minnesota. Josh received treatment in Minnesota that put his recurrent cancer in remission again, and his father shared research ideas with Vallera at the Cancer Center.

Lion became so confident in the research he and Vallera had discussed that, in 2000, he pledged to help fund it. Since then, Vallera's research has quickly progressed to clinical trials; two drugs have already been approved by the FDA for clinical studies. Lion, who has given more than \$1 million to Vallera's research over the years, continues to support it.

continued on back page

# giving matters



Minnesota Medical Foundation  
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University of Minnesota  
200 Oak Street SE, Suite 300  
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I am honored to begin my term as only the fourth president and CEO since our organization's founding

in 1939. I have some tough acts to follow — Carl Bendorf kept us on track as interim CEO from February to August, and Brad Choate oversaw a decade of strong growth in annual fund-raising production. Those who have preceded me have laid a solid foundation on which to build. I know that, with your help, we can accomplish even more in the years ahead.

We have already accomplished a great deal together. Last fiscal year, which ended this past June, we raised nearly \$55 million for health-related research, education, and service at the University of Minnesota. Forty-five percent of these funds went to academic program support, 25 percent to research, 17 percent to faculty, and 13 percent to student scholarships.

Great stories start here. They arise from your passions, your convictions, and your personal stories — and they feed the passions of our faculty and students, creating positive outcomes and stories for the people we serve. Your stories, and the promise they hold, are why I came to the foundation.

This edition of Giving Matters is a case in point. The story of Jeff Lion battling his son's acute lymphoblastic leukemia has led to a research story that holds out hope for a 100 percent cure rate. And Dr. Philip Gardner has taken his own personal story abroad, funding an endowment to encourage others to follow his path by providing eye care to underserved communities around the globe. Still others mentioned in these pages are funding student scholarships so that positive stories can extend to future generations.

I hope to meet you and hear your stories firsthand in the months ahead — and that together we can create new stories of promise and hope.

**Becky Malkerson**

President and CEO  
Minnesota Medical Foundation

## Alum gives back to honor trusted friend and counselor

He has been called “the medical student’s friend,” the “human face of the Medical School,” and just plain “Sully.” No matter how he was known, W. Albert Sullivan Jr., M.D., holds a special place in the hearts of many Medical School alumni.

Sullivan worked in the dean’s office for more than 20 years, lastly as associate dean of student affairs from 1973 to 1990. He also was an associate professor in the Department of Surgery. Conversant in 15 languages, Sullivan traveled extensively, enjoyed baking French bread, and — most important — never hesitated to help a medical student in need.

One alumnus was so grateful for the support Sullivan showed him and his family through difficult times during medical school that he set up a scholarship fund in Sullivan’s name. This donor, who prefers to remain anonymous, has been contributing to the Albert Sullivan Scholarship Fund for more than 15 years.

Now he is challenging others to contribute: He will personally match each dollar — up to \$106,500 — donated to this fund.

On top of that, the fund’s “payout” — 4.75 percent of the fund’s market value that is paid out each year to fund the scholarship — will then be matched by the University-wide President’s Scholarship Match. That makes each dollar given to the Sullivan scholarship worth four dollars, quadrupling the impact for today’s medical students.

Created in 1989, the Albert Sullivan Scholarship Fund provides scholarships to University of Minnesota medical students, with preference given to undergraduates majoring in fields outside the sciences.

This year a \$7,900 scholarship has been awarded through the fund. If alumni donations reach \$106,500, the scholarship fund (after the matches) should provide a full ride for one future student.

Sullivan died in 1990, at age 66, from complications of a brain tumor, but one alumnus is encouraging those who benefited from Sullivan’s generosity to help his legacy live on through this endowed scholarship.

To make a gift or for more information, please visit [www.mmf.umn.edu](http://www.mmf.umn.edu). You may also contact Cindy Adams Ellis at the Minnesota Medical Foundation at 612-625-5976 or [cae@mmf.umn.edu](mailto:cae@mmf.umn.edu). Checks made out to the Minnesota Medical Foundation, with “Albert Sullivan Scholarship Fund” in the memo line, may be sent to:

Minnesota Medical Foundation  
McNamara Alumni Center  
University of Minnesota  
200 Oak Street SE, Suite 300  
Minneapolis, MN 55455-2030



Many medical students knew W. Albert Sullivan Jr., M.D., or “Sully,” as a supportive friend in the dean’s office who helped them through difficult times. One alum was so grateful for the support he received that he established an endowed scholarship in Sullivan’s name.

# A passion for public health

Former School of Public Health professor and dean Lee Stauffer, M.P.H., has always shared his passion for public health. During his 36 years on the faculty—12 of them as dean—he often told his students, “You’ve selected a noble profession. You’re going to help people for the rest of your lives.”

Following his retirement from the school in 1991, Stauffer and his late wife, Donna, found another way to share that passion by making a gift to the school that was used to establish the Lee and Donna Stauffer Scholarship.

Lee Stauffer has continued to support the scholarship and in November 2005, he contributed \$25,000 to the fund. That gift was eligible for a University of Minnesota President’s Scholarship Match (see sidebar), which will double the scholarship’s impact.

With the Stauffers’ contributions and gifts from another 137 donors, the fund has provided scholarships for 11 talented SPH students, including Dawn Sillars and John Amuasi, M.D., the 2005 and 2006 Stauffer scholars.

Sillars, a first-generation college student from Wausau, Wisconsin, who is paying for her own education, calls the Stauffer scholarship “an absolute blessing.” After she completes her master of public health degree, Sillars hopes to help increase vulnerable individuals’ access to health care and to develop legislative policies that encourage healthy behavioral choices.

She’d also like to one day support public health scholarships. “I would like to be financially secure enough to be able to give back,” Sillars says.

The Stauffer scholarship is bringing John Amuasi, M.D., closer to fulfilling his dreams. A first-year SPH graduate student from Ghana, West Africa, Amuasi says the Stauffer scholarship made it possible for him to enroll in the public health administration and policy program.

“Without the Stauffer scholarship, I would not have been able to pursue my endeavors,” Amuasi says. “In fact, I had deferred courses until next year in hopes of securing funding. The Stauffer scholarship has made a big difference.”

Amuasi — already a practicing physician in Ghana — hopes to use his public health training to help solve health and economic

problems in developing countries. He also dreams of running his own foundation to address the health and nutritional needs of children and young adults in Africa.

Thanks to the Stauffer scholarship, Sillars and Amuasi are on track to help others for the rest of their lives, and the fund is sure to help many other public health students do the same.

And that’s as Stauffer intended. “Federal funding is disappearing. If we want really



John Amuasi, M.D., and Dawn Sillars, recipients of the Lee and Donna Stauffer Scholarship in the School of Public Health, are classmates in the public health administration and policy program.

good people in public health, we’re going to have to offer them some incentive to come to school and to devote themselves to the field,” he says. “Although many fields pay more than public health, I doubt if there are very many more satisfying.”

To make a gift to the School of Public Health, please contact Adam Buhr at 612-626-2391 or [a.buhr@mmf.umn.edu](mailto:a.buhr@mmf.umn.edu), or visit [www.sph.umn.edu/support/home.html](http://www.sph.umn.edu/support/home.html).



PHOTO: COURTESY OF LEE STAUFFER, M.P.H.

Former School of Public Health professor and dean Lee Stauffer and his late wife, Donna, both SPH alumni, shared their passion for public health with gifts that have helped provide scholarships to 11 SPH students.

## PRESIDENT’S SCHOLARSHIP MATCH

Endowed scholarship funds established with gifts totaling \$25,000 or more are eligible for the University of Minnesota President’s Scholarship Match. Once a fund qualifies, its annual payout (4.75 percent of its total market value) is matched by the University. To learn more, please contact Cindy Adams Ellis at 612-625-5976 or [cae@mmf.umn.edu](mailto:cae@mmf.umn.edu).

# A global investment

Resident alum's gift starts endowment for international outreach

Before an old army acquaintance asked him to volunteer his medical services abroad, Philip Gardner, M.D., hadn't given much thought to doing international humanitarian work. But because of his friend's request, Gardner traveled to Guatemala in 1994. And he's been hooked ever since on helping others in developing countries.

An alumnus of the Department of Ophthalmology's residency program, Gardner has taken about 10 two-week volunteer trips to Nuevo Progreso, Guatemala, over the last decade. He joins a team of volunteer surgeons from the United States and Canada, performing procedures that are generally not available to many people in third-world countries.

"Great personal satisfaction comes from saving a child from a lifetime of blindness or from restoring sight to a blind person," says Gardner, who is now in private practice in Alameda, California.

Hoping to spread that feeling of good will, Gardner recently made a \$100,000 stock gift for an endowment to encourage University of Minnesota Department of Ophthalmology faculty and alumni to provide eye care to impoverished people abroad.

The fund should generate about \$4,500 per year to offset volunteers' travel and supply expenses. Usually doctors who make

these trips donate their service and finance their own travel and lodging.

Erick Bothun, M.D., is one of several Department of Ophthalmology faculty members who's done just that. An assistant professor of pediatric ophthalmology and adult strabismus service, Bothun has volunteered in Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Pakistan. He admits that these trips often demand significant sacrifices of both time and money.

"The gifts of serving internationally are immense for both patients in need and providers," Bothun says. "This fund will help prompt and equip us to serve all over the world and share the expertise and quality of care that we sometimes take for granted here in Minnesota."

Gardner, who has worked at Hospital de la Familia in Nuevo Progreso on all of his trips, says nearly half of the hospital's patients are financially destitute, so they pay only a small fee or sometimes nothing for the services they receive. Indigent people come

to the hospital from all over Guatemala, as well as from Honduras and Mexico. "It's not unusual to see 60 to 70 patients in one day," he says.

It takes a special type of doctor to provide eye care in third-world countries, Gardner says. "You need to be flexible because it is common to have instruments that are broken or don't work. You need to be skilled and comfortable as a surgeon because you are operating on people with advanced disease."

The long days and hard work are well worth it, Gardner concludes. "These trips are among the best experiences I have had in my career as a doctor."

Contributions to the Ophthalmology Fund for International Humanitarian Care are welcome. For more information, contact Cassidy Titcomb at 612-625-9613 or [c.titcomb@mmf.umn.edu](mailto:c.titcomb@mmf.umn.edu).



ABOVE Ann Kazenberger, O.D., sees a patient in the eye clinic.

LEFT Philip Gardner, M.D. (foreground), and Marlene Griffin, R.N., prepare for a surgical procedure at Hospital de la Familia in Guatemala.

## OCTOBER

**21 SATURDAY 6:30 p.m.**  
**Cooking for a Cure**  
 Medtronic, Inc., Fridley  
 This food- and wine-tasting event benefits cancer-related research and service in the University of Minnesota Cancer Center and the HealthEast Healing Partners Program. Enjoy signature dishes prepared by chefs from your favorite restaurants, a variety of wines, entertainment, a silent auction, and a chance to win a dream vacation, compliments of American Airlines.  
 ① Contact Elizabeth Patty at 612-625-6136 or e.patty@mmf.umn.edu.

**23 MONDAY 6 p.m.**  
**Minnesota Medical Foundation Annual Dinner\***  
 McNamara Alumni Center  
 Contributions from generous donors make much of the University of Minnesota's lifesaving work possible. This event honors those who support health-related research, education, and service at the University. By invitation only.  
 ① Contact Elizabeth Patty at 612-625-6136 or e.patty@mmf.umn.edu.

**29 SUNDAY 6-7:30 p.m.**  
**American Association of Medical Colleges Annual Meeting\***  
 Seattle, Washington  
 A special reception—hosted by the Minnesota Medical Foundation, University of Minnesota Medical School, and University of Minnesota Medical Alumni Society—will be held during the 2006 Annual Meeting of the American Association of Medical Colleges.  
 ① Contact Sue Clark at 612-626-0619 or s.clark@mmf.umn.edu.

## NOVEMBER

**11 SATURDAY 11 a.m.-1 p.m.**  
**Scholarships: Investing in a Healthier Future\***  
 McNamara Alumni Center  
 A key factor in the success of many students is scholarship support made possible by the generosity of donors. This luncheon honors Health scholarship recipients and those who have made their scholarships possible.  
 ① Contact Sue Clark at 612-626-0619 or s.clark@mmf.umn.edu.

**12 SUNDAY 5-9 p.m.**  
**Party in the Park\***  
 The Park at MOA™, Mall of America  
 This one-of-a-kind event, which raises money for pediatric research, education, and service, provides a magical evening for kids and adults alike. Festivities include exclusive use of The Park at MOA™ with unlimited rides on select attractions, a silent auction, live entertainment, dinner and dessert, and an indoor fireworks display. Guests may also participate in a VIP shopping experience with a complimentary Mall of America coupon book. Hosted by the University Pediatrics Foundation.  
 ① Contact Elizabeth Patty at 612-625-6136 or e.patty@mmf.umn.edu.

## JANUARY

**25 THURSDAY 6 p.m.**  
**Diamond Awards\***  
 The Depot, Minneapolis  
 Enjoy an evening of food, baseball, and fun while supporting ataxia research (see story below). Hosted by the Bob Allison Ataxia Research Center and the Baseball Writers Association of America.  
 ① Contact Heather Shetka at 612-624-4444 or h.shetka@mmf.umn.edu.

go to:  
[www.mmf.umn.edu](http://www.mmf.umn.edu)

For event descriptions, updates, links, and contact information.

\* Sponsored by the Minnesota Medical Foundation

## Help strike out ataxia

Diamond Awards benefit set for January 25

Don't miss the chance to mingle with Minnesota baseball greats and help raise money for ataxia research at the same time. On Thursday, January 25, 2007, the Bob Allison Ataxia Research Center (BAARC) will host its second annual Diamond Awards—a high-profile evening of baseball, food, and fun—at The Depot in Minneapolis.

Festivities begin with a silent auction and reception where guests will have an opportunity to talk baseball with former and current Minnesota Twins players. An awards dinner follows with Twins baseball commentators Dick Bremer and Bert Blyleven.

Proceeds from the Diamond Awards—a team effort of the Twin Cities chapter of the Baseball Writers Association of America, Minnesota Twins, and BAARC—directly support world-class ataxia research at the University of Minnesota. Last year the event attracted nearly 500 people and raised \$715,000 for BAARC, an affiliate of the Minnesota Medical Foundation.

BAARC was founded in 1990 by the family of Bob Allison, a legendary Twins outfielder who died from complications of ataxia in 1995.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE MINNESOTA TWINS

Thirteen awards will be presented to members of the Minnesota and Upper Midwest baseball community at this year's Diamond Awards event.

Today, thanks to private philanthropy and events such as the Diamond Awards, the University is a leader in ataxia research. Scientists here identified five genes linked to hereditary ataxia and are exploring new therapies for treating ataxia and other neurodegenerative diseases.

For tickets or more information about the Diamond Awards, contact Heather Shetka at 612-624-4444 or h.shetka@mmf.umn.edu.

To learn more about the Bob Allison Ataxia Research Center—or to make a gift to further ataxia research—visit [www.mmf.umn.edu/ataxia](http://www.mmf.umn.edu/ataxia) or contact Shannon Birge Laudon at 612-626-3186 or s.birge@mmf.umn.edu.

## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

The Minnesota Medical Foundation (MMF) recently mailed a survey that asks for donors' opinions about supporting health-related research, education, and service at the University of Minnesota. The survey was mailed to a random sample of 1,817 donors who contribute to these areas through MMF.

If you received our survey, we encourage you to complete and return it. Your feedback will provide valuable guidance on how we can enhance your giving experience and, most important, help you fulfill your philanthropic goals.

For more information, please contact Emily Heagle at 612-624-9161 or e.heagle@mmf.umn.edu.

# A special thanks

We'd like to extend an extra thank-you to the following individuals and organizations who have made commitments totaling \$100,000 or more between June and September 2006 to health-related research, education, and service at the University of Minnesota.

American Medical Systems, Inc., Minnetonka, Minnesota, pledged \$100,000 to help establish the Timm Urologic Surgery Research and Education Fund. This fund honors Dr. Gerald Timm — an alumnus of the University of Minnesota's Institute of Technology, cofounder of American Medical Systems, and professor of urologic surgery — and provides his colleagues with the means to make significant progress in their work. American Medical Systems specializes in treatments and therapies that restore the pelvic health of women and men and has long been a supporter of the Department of Urologic Surgery.

Children's Cancer Research Fund, Minneapolis, contributed an additional \$2,920,300 to help the University develop effective treatments and cures for childhood cancers. The Children's Cancer Research Fund's longtime support has provided funding for renowned faculty, research in blood and marrow transplantation, and other initiatives.

Mary E. Dempsey, Ph.D., of St. Paul, has made a planned gift of \$230,000 to support the Mary E. Dempsey Fellowship for Women in Biochemistry. Dr. Dempsey received her Ph.D. in biochemistry from the University of Minnesota in 1961. She was also the first woman to join the Department of Biochemistry, Molecular Biology, and Biophysics faculty, which she served on for more than 40 years. She established the Dempsey Fellowship to assist the department in recruiting female scholars interested in basic biochemistry research.

Fairview Health Services, Minneapolis, made gifts totaling \$565,000 — \$550,000 of which benefits the Medical School's Dean's Discretionary Fund and \$15,000 of which benefits the Medical School's Department of Pediatrics. Fairview's longtime support has helped foster innovations in blood and bone marrow transplantation, stem cell research, urology, pediatric cardiology, and other areas in the Medical School.

The estate of Harriet N. Goulson, Montevideo, Minnesota, has made gifts totaling \$171,154 to further Alzheimer's disease research at the Medical School. A graduate of the State Teacher's College in Mayville, North Dakota, Mrs. Goulson taught at several schools in rural Minnesota until her retirement in 1978.

The estate of Arlys M. Heinecke, Montevideo, Minnesota, has given \$239,878 to help advance medical research. A 1948 graduate of the University of Minnesota Carlson School of Management, Mrs. Heinecke worked in the insurance industry until her retirement in 1985, serving as manager of the Shible Mutual Fire Insurance Company for more than 20 years. She was also a member of the VFW Ladies Auxiliary.

The estate of Hyman Horwitz, St. Paul, has given \$333,892 to establish the Hyman Horwitz Endowed Scholarship in the Medical School.

The Hubbard Broadcasting Foundation, St. Paul, continued its ongoing support of the Medical School by pledging \$100,000 to help establish the John S. Najarian, M.D., Surgical Chair in Clinical Transplantation. The Hubbard Broadcasting Company also committed \$50,000 to this position. The Najarian Chair pays tribute to Dr. Najarian's lifesaving work in organ transplantation and will enable the Department of Surgery to continue to attract top-caliber faculty.

The Masonic Cancer Center Fund, Roseville, Minnesota, pledged an additional \$649,705 to support cancer-related research at the University of Minnesota. This fund has helped advance the University's cancer-related work since 1955.

Medtronic, Inc., Minneapolis, made gifts totaling \$104,000 to support fellowships in the Medical School's Division of Cardiology and Cardiac Arrhythmia Center. Medtronic — a global leader in products and therapies for cardiovascular diseases and conditions — is a longstanding advocate for these programs.

Jerome H. Modell, M.D., and Shirley Graves Modell, M.D., Gainesville, Florida, have made planned gifts totaling \$150,000 to support the William and Frieda Modell Endowed Scholarship and establish the Drs. Jerome H. and Shirley Graves Modell Endowed Medical Student Scholarship. Dr. Jerome Modell, a member of the Medical School Class of 1947, chaired the University of Florida College of Medicine's Department of Anesthesiology from 1969 through 1992. This October, he will be presented with the American Society of Anesthesiologists' Distinguished Service Award, the society's most prestigious professional recognition. Dr. Shirley Graves Modell practiced and taught both anesthesiology and pediatrics.

Dwight D. Opperman Foundation, Minneapolis, contributed \$100,000 to the Department of Ophthalmology to help further research on macular degeneration. This is the foundation's fourth gift in support of such research. Mr. Opperman — a former chairman of West Publishing who later founded Key Investments — has supported health-related research, education, and service at the University of Minnesota for 20 years.

The estate of Syvilla M. Turbis, Faribault, Minnesota, has given an additional \$1,565,583 to the Diabetes Institute for Immunology and Transplantation and the University of Minnesota Cancer Center's Director's Research Fund. Ms. Turbis worked for the Northern States Power Company for many years and was an active volunteer in her community.

# Welcome new members!

Because of their generous support, the following donors became members or rose to a higher giving society of the University of Minnesota Presidents Club between June and September 2006. Their gifts have been designated (all or in part) to the Medical School, School of Public Health, Cancer Center, or other areas served by the Minnesota Medical Foundation.

## BUILDERS SOCIETY

(\$1 million or more)

Roger L. and Lynn C. Headrick

+Henry, +Myrtle and +Syvilla M. Turbis

Wurtele Family Fund

## REGENTS SOCIETY

(\$500,000 to \$1 million)

American Medical Systems, Inc.

## TRUSTEES SOCIETY

(\$100,000 to \$500,000)

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Zimmer, Inc.

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(\$50,000 to \$100,000)

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National Sports Center — Stick It to Cancer Tournament

Dr. Theodore R. and Lynette Thompson

Clark J. and Sharon L. Winslow

## HERITAGE SOCIETY

(Future Gifts)

Dr. Roland K., '40, and Helen Iverson

Dr. John R., '47, and +Tekla Ylvisaker

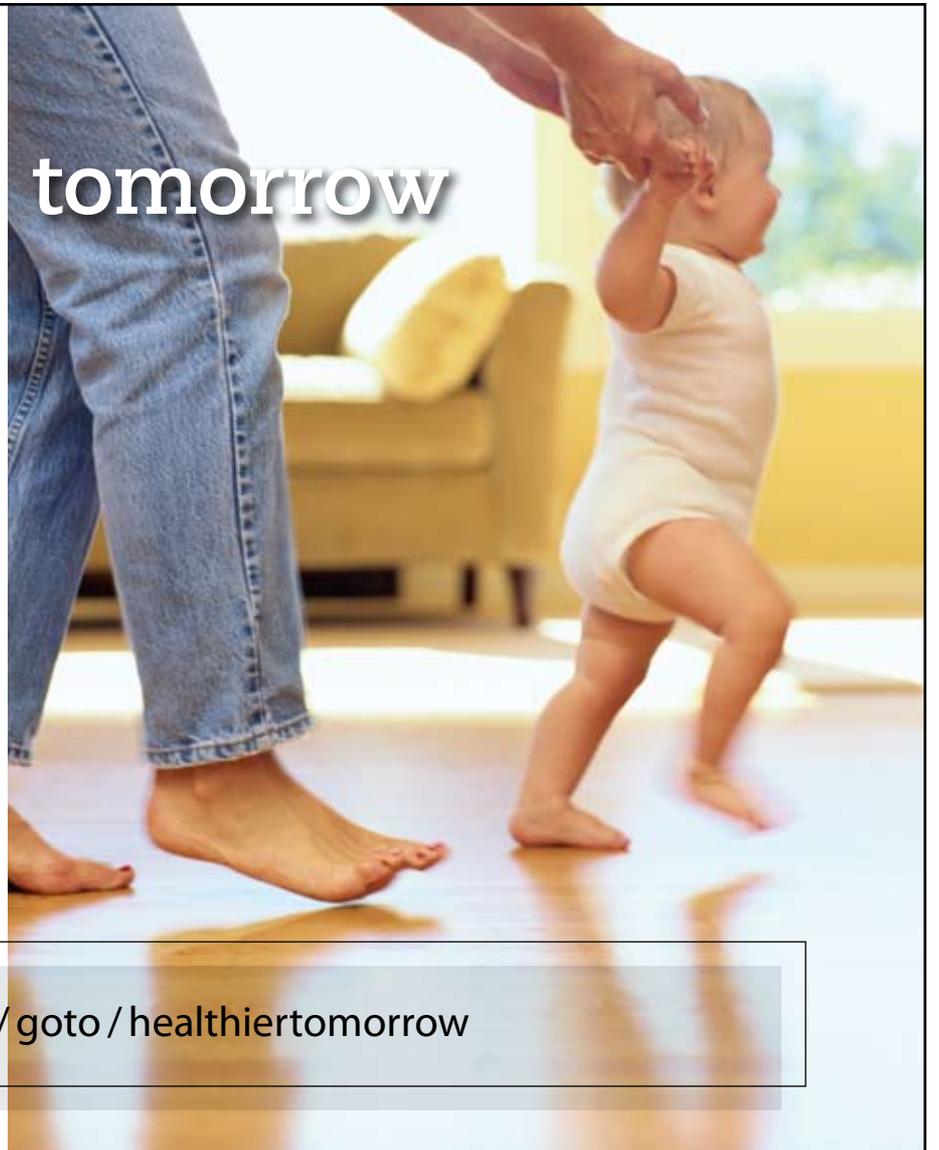
+Deceased

## Support a healthier tomorrow

At the University of Minnesota, we are working to secure a better quality of life — from training the next generation of health care leaders to investigating ways to prevent disease, find cures, and respond effectively to such global problems as bioterrorism and addiction. But we can't do it without your help.

Support a healthier tomorrow by including the Minnesota Medical Foundation in your estate or financial planning. For more information, call 800-922-1663 or 612-625-1440 and ask for Gift Planning. You can also e-mail us at [legacy@mmf.umn.edu](mailto:legacy@mmf.umn.edu).

Visit our Web site: [www.mmf.umn.edu/goto/healthiertomorrow](http://www.mmf.umn.edu/goto/healthiertomorrow)



**MINNESOTA MEDICAL FOUNDATION**

at the University of Minnesota

The Minnesota Medical Foundation is a nonprofit organization that raises funds for health-related research, education, and service at the University of Minnesota.

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Minnesota Medical Foundation  
McNamara Alumni Center  
University of Minnesota  
200 Oak Street SE, Suite 300  
Minneapolis, MN 55455-2030

612-625-1440

800-922-1663

mmf@mmf.umn.edu

www.mmf.umn.edu

**A quick progression**

As its name suggests, acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) tends to progress quickly. This blood cancer, the most common form of leukemia occurring in children, can lead to anemia and impaired organ function.

Radiation and chemotherapy are common treatments for ALL, although Vallera says the body can handle those therapies — especially radiation — only in low doses over an extended period.

That’s where his research comes into play. Five years ago, Vallera started working with anti-cancer proteins that are naturally produced by the body. He’s attempting to engineer those proteins, also known as antibodies, to bind to cancer cells, where they would deliver small, direct doses of radiation to the cells themselves—without harming the surrounding tissue. “It would localize radiation treatment to the site of the cancer,” he says.

This idea has been around for years, Vallera says, but with changing technology and new research, using the body’s own proteins to treat leukemia is becoming a more promising alternative therapy.

Vallera is currently working with the National Institutes of Health to design a “chemical arm” to help the antibodies stick to cancer cells.

In just five years, two drugs Vallera developed have received FDA approval for testing in clinical trials. Vallera says much of that progress can be attributed to Lion’s continuing support. “His funding has allowed us to stay with this line of research and look for new solutions if the drug isn’t perfect,” says Vallera.

Linda Burns, M.D., a hematologist/ oncologist at the University, is leading a Phase I clinical trial for the first drug, which is designed for adults. Pediatric oncologist Brenda Weigel, M.D., is leading a new clinical trial for the second drug, which is used to treat children. (New therapies are tested in adult clinical trials before they are tested in pediatric clinical trials.)



PHOTO: TIM RUMMELHOFF

Researcher Daniel Vallera, Ph.D., is developing new drugs to deliver small doses of radiation directly to cancer cells. In just five years, two of these drugs have received FDA approval for Phase I clinical trials.

**True teamwork**

Now in sixth grade, Josh Lion is cancer-free again and doing well. He has minor heart damage from his chemotherapy, but his dad says he’s still allowed to play the sport he loves: football.

Vallera and Lion still talk regularly about the research. Lion wants to know that the work he’s supporting is still progressing.

“Dan came up with some ingenious ideas,” Lion says. “He took a small idea that I had and made it a great idea.”

And Vallera says none of this would have happened without Lion’s generous support. “Jeff has thought so much about Josh’s therapy that he knows the drug and what we’re trying to do,” Vallera says. “Not all donors need to be as involved as Jeff on the front lines. However, it’s wonderful that he is.”

Pleased with the progress of the research so far, Lion hopes to see these drugs become viable therapies for those who don’t respond to typical therapies or who relapse as Josh did.

“Our hope is to take the cure rate from 75 percent to 100 percent,” says Lion. “I want to see it happen. Five or six years from now, we’ll know if it will.”

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Meredith McNab  
EDITOR

Nicole Endres  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR AND WRITER

Lesley Schack  
WRITER

Woychick Design  
DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

Sexton Printing  
PRINTING AND DISTRIBUTION

Reader comments and suggestions are welcome. Please send to:

Giving Matters  
Minnesota Medical Foundation  
200 Oak Street SE, Suite 300  
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Or contact the editor directly at 612-625-0657 or m.mcnab@mmf.umn.edu

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