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Contact: Megan Sexton, Public Relations
803-777-1421, msexton@mailbox.sc.edu

Gift will create an aging institute at UofSC's Arnold School of Public Health

The University of South Carolina Arnold School of Public Health will create a new institute focusing on how to age well from cradle to grave by addressing issues faced by the most vulnerable in our population – young children and older adults – thanks to a \$7 million gift from the school's largest benefactors.

The Gerry Sue and Norman J. Arnold Institute on Aging will be dedicated to scholarly research and the sharing of accurate, consumer-friendly health information resulting from aging-related science important to children and the elderly. It will include work in areas such as childhood obesity prevention, chronic stroke recovery, nutrition and food safety, Alzheimer's disease and other forms of senile dementia.

The discovery and promotion of ways to achieve sound physical and mental health as people age is a key mission of the Arnold School. The gift will allow the Arnold School to expand its considerable national expertise in areas such as children's physical activity, brain health over the lifespan and long-term recovery of speech, balance and other physical abilities following stroke recovery.

"The Arnold family made a very generous gift in 2000 of \$10 million to the *then* USC School of Public Health which was key in moving us to the record levels of grantsmanship, scholarship and student achievement that we are experiencing today," Arnold School Dean Thomas Chandler said. "Our doctoral program in exercise science was just ranked No. 1 by the American Academy of Kinesiology. These additional resources will enable more of our programs to become top ranked, and promote more collaborative efforts across more disciplines. It also will empower our faculty to begin new research projects in promising but unproven directions, and continue the nationally recognized outreach and community service we provide to the people of South Carolina."

Over the past several years, the Arnold School has strategically hired more than 30 expert faculty members with expertise in lifestyle and age-related prevention of cancer, heart disease, diabetes, obesity and stroke through creative intervention and education programs, health policy development and environmental assessment.

Among the Arnold School research leaders is Julius Fridriksson, a health sciences endowed professor in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders. His work centers on improving brain functions and communication abilities in people who have suffered a stroke.

“The Institute on Aging has great potential to stimulate ongoing research as well as foster new cutting edge studies in the area of brain health in both normally aging individuals as well as those who have been affected by age-related brain damage,” Fridriksson said. “It is my expectation that work in the Institute on Aging will allow us to conduct new studies that are highly innovative and not as likely to gain immediate funding from federal agencies that tend to focus most of their efforts on incremental research. More specifically, the Institute on Aging brings resources that enable us to look beyond the next step and conduct studies that are perhaps ‘higher risk’ but also bring ‘higher yield’ compared to our work already funded by the National Institutes of Health.”

The institute also will tap into the Arnold School’s extensive research into children’s physical activity. USC researchers are dedicated to expanding the body of knowledge on physical activity and its many benefits to children and adolescent health. Arnold School faculty work to enhance the health of young people by generating the knowledge needed to design and implement effective public health policies at local to national levels.

Chandler said the gift also will be key to faculty leveraging major research center grants from the National Institutes of Health and other federal and foundation agencies.

“Norman and Gerry Sue Arnold were adamant in particular about one use for this generous gift. They believe these funds should be leveraged -- doubled or tripled at every opportunity -- by major competitive grants from across the U.S. and abroad,” Chandler said. “This is a very tall order for the Arnold School faculty. But these faculty members achieved record grant dollars in the past year of almost \$37 million, with much of that from the NIH. As a young and growing faculty, I believe they are poised to do much more.”

The institute also will enable the Arnold School to increase engagement of students in research.

“The Arnold endowment already supports a large number of PhD student-scientists; the Institute on Aging will further boost this funding, giving even more students access to cutting edge research that is ongoing in the Arnold School of Public Health,” he said.

The Arnolds, for whom the Arnold School of Public Health was named in 2000, said they hope this gift of \$1 million a year over the next seven years will help improve the health of South Carolinians, especially those in the greatest need.

“Gerry Sue and I have always been interested in being helpful to other people, especially people who are not always able to help themselves. If I can do something that can be useful to others, then that’s what I want to do,” Norman Arnold said. “Often poor people or less affluent people don’t get good advice -- on healthy eating, exercise. If we can help in that regard, that’s wonderful. It’s a real blessing. Good health, eating and exercise go hand-in-hand. It’s easy to do if you have resources, but you’ve got to know what to do.”

When the Arnolds established the original endowment for the school in 2000, the university honored the couple by naming the School of Public Health after Norman J. Arnold. The University of South Carolina established a school of public health in 1975, becoming the 19th public health school in the United States. It remains the only school of public health in South Carolina.