

Beyond Imagining: Research and Innovation

Building springboards for the future

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PHOTO CREDIT: SCOTT RIPLEY / UNH

When Andrew DeMeo '18 came up with an idea for a business he suspected might really have legs — or wings, as the case may be — he knew just where to take it: the Peter T. Paul Entrepreneurship Center.

The heart of ideas, innovation and entrepreneurship at UNH, the [ECenter](#) was established in 2016 with a generous gift from Peter

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T. Paul '67 as an independent, co-curricular, cross-college resource providing programs, mentorship and financial support to students who have business ideas they want to pursue outside of an academic context. Just two years into its existence, the ECenter has already been recognized internationally as an outstanding emerging entrepreneurship center and launched both its successful (and also donor-funded) [i2 Passport Program](#) to encourage undergraduate students to engage in a variety of innovation and entrepreneurship activities around the Durham campus and an Idea and Innovation Society for first-year students. It's also helped dozens of students turn promising ideas they brought to or developed at UNH into viable business enterprises, many with revenue and investor interest.

In DeMeo's case, the idea was a CSA-style beekeeping operation that would allow Seacoast New Hampshire-area customers to purchase shares in honeybee hives



located on nearby farms in what amounted to an ecological win-win-win. DeMeo and his partner, Jessica Waters, would maintain the hives; customers would have their own raw, local honey without the responsibility of owning and caring for bees; and both the farms, which rely on honeybees to pollinate their crops, and the local bee populations would thrive. With support from ECenter executive director Ian Grant, DeMeo and Waters developed a business model for Half-Acre Beekeeping that took first place in UNH's 2017 [Social Venture Innovation Challenge](#) (SVIC). They used the prize money they earned to launch their business earlier this year and sold out their hive shares almost immediately. Now, thanks to an ECenter connection to Planet Fitness CEO Chris Rondeau '94, DeMeo has some ideas for franchising the enterprise.

“Andy’s story is typical to the extent that there is no typical story for the types of students we mentor and the types of ideas they bring,” says Grant, who notes that DeMeo graduated from the College of Life Sciences and Agriculture — proof positive that UNH’s undergraduate entrepreneurs hail from all corners of campus. And while ECenter-mentored projects have earned top honors in the last two cycles of both the SVIC and the Paul College Holloway Prize Competition,

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—Jan Grant, executive director of the ECenter

Grant emphasizes that the end game is about much more than just winning. “The ECenter helps students become better problem-solvers and shows them that entrepreneurship is a career

path. It’s not about a line-item on their resume; it’s about creating a springboard for their future that works in lock-step with the academics they receive from their colleges.”

Creating springboards for the future is a widely shared vision when it comes to research and innovation at UNH, and donors to CELEBRATE 150 responded generously to fund a variety of initiatives. Not only are some these projects changing how students learn, many of them have far-reaching implications for changing lives in New Hampshire and around the world, in keeping with UNH’s mission as a public research university. With large gifts in the areas of sustainability, interdisciplinary sciences and a number of projects that harken back to UNH’s agricultural roots, 502 donors stepped up with gifts totaling \$23.7 million.



PHOTO CREDIT: JEREMY GASOWSKI / UNH

Peggy Stockwell Cole '72 returned to UNH to finish her degree in [sociology](#) after starting a family, but imagines she might have majored in neuroscience — an interdisciplinary program housed in both the [College of Liberal Arts](#) and the [College of Life Sciences and Agriculture](#) — if she were a student today. It's one of the reasons she and her husband, Bob, jumped at the chance to fund faculty research through the establishment of the Cole Neuroscience and Behavior Faculty Research Fund when the then-new program was launched in 2010, and subsequently expanded their gift in support of CELEBRATE 150.

“Thanks to Peggy and Bob’s support, our faculty in both colleges are able to gather the data they need to pursue funding at the national level, which will continue to raise the profile and visibility of our program,” says Jon Wraith, dean of the College of Life Sciences and Agriculture. “ We are incredibly grateful to them for their foresight and for providing UNH with an opportunity to position itself strongly within this emerging field.” ~

Given UNH’s top national standing in sustainability, it

comes as no surprise that many donors were inspired to support research initiatives related to a range of sustainability-related efforts. Large gifts to the university's seagrass monitoring program and the regional estuaries partnership, the Sustainability Institute climate fellows program and Food Solutions New England, among others, will continue to support student and faculty research into addressing our region's most pressing questions about climate change and its impact on the ecosystem.



FOR SOME 35 YEARS, RESEARCH PROFESSOR OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND MARINE SCIENCE FRED SHORT HAS BEEN MONITORING THE QUALITY AND DENSITY OF A TYPE OF SEAGRASS KNOWN AS EELGRASS IN NEW HAMPSHIRE'S GREAT BAY, A RELIABLE INDICATOR OF THE BAY'S OVERALL HEALTH. DURHAM PHILANTHROPIST TOM HAAS' GIFT TO ESTABLISH THE UNH SEAGRASS GIFT FUND SUPPORTS SEAGRASSNET — A GLOBAL SEAGRASS MONITORING PROGRAM THAT SHORT DIRECTS. BASED AT UNH, SEAGRASSNET HAS 38 SITES IN 15 COUNTRIES. (PHOTO CREDIT: LISA NUGENT)

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