

# A Time to Give Back

Bill and Dee Brehm help lead the advancement of medicine at Michigan

In 1949, Delores “Dee” Soderquist was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes at the University of Michigan Hospital. It was a frightening time for the young EMU student and her devoted boyfriend, Bill Brehm, a student at U-M. Jerome Conn, M.D., then division chief of endocrinology at Michigan, treated Dee and set up her original treatment program. When she told him she was engaged to be married, Dr. Conn sat the young couple down and shared with them what to expect from a lifetime with diabetes.

Fifty-two years, two children and six grandchildren later, Bill and Dee Brehm have not forgotten the wisdom and caring they received at the University of Michigan. They decided last year that it was time to give something back to the institution that had helped them deal honestly and practically with a situation that seemed anything but encouraging.

“It has been our dream for a long time that some day we might be in a position to be helpful in the area of diabetes research and especially in the search for a cure,” says Dee. Her husband Bill (B.S. 1950, M.S. 1952) is board chair of SRA International, a leading information technology consulting and systems integration company based in Fairfax, Virginia. The company has been named for three years in a row by *Fortune* magazine as one of the 100 best companies to work for in America, and just recently became a public corporation listed on the New York Stock Exchange.

“About a year and a half ago, we began to think more deeply about our interest in helping to advance diabetes research at Michigan,” Dee says. “We visited the campus, met with Dean Allen Lichter and several other faculty members, and



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began to think about establishing a professorship, and possibly something beyond that.”

The resulting Brehm Professorship for Diabetes Research expresses the Brehms’ passionate hope for a cure for Type 1 diabetes, and their equally strong confidence in the University of Michigan Health System and the research that is taking place there. “At U-M, collaboration is in,” Bill notes. “And today one must have collaboration to make significant progress in medical science. Michigan has an incredibly collaborative atmosphere. You don’t find that everywhere, but it’s definitely a part of the culture at Michigan. It is in the water!”

For the Brehms, their philanthropy has not stopped with a gift alone. Bill Brehm has also been generous in sharing his

expertise in information science. “If we really put information science to work in medical research, and in diabetes research in particular, we can speed up the research process,” he says. “We have some heavy conversations going on about how to build a program around an initiative that gives greater information science support to our talented investigators. We feel we are part of the family. This goes way beyond the gift-giving thing. Michigan has welcomed our ideas. It’s a wonderful privilege not only to have the opportunity to provide financial support, but to trade ideas as well.”

As inaugural members of the 28-member Health System Development Task Force, the Brehms have also been making regular trips to Ann Arbor over the past several months to help chart the course of the Health System’s future. As members of the Task Force, they hope to share their boundless enthusiasm for the future of medicine at Michigan with other potential supporters, to help them discover their own areas of passionate concern in medicine and then to match them up with the physicians and scientists at Michigan who are doing leading work in these areas. Brehm says, “People generally get excited and enthusiastic through observing the enthusiasm and commitment of other people.

“The Task Force represents a wonderful diversity of caring individuals,” he adds. “Their variety of life experiences in health matters, and the breadth of their business, personal, and philanthropic backgrounds have contributed significantly to shaping the direction of Task Force work and plans. It has been a genuine delight to come to know the Task Force members and to work with them as colleagues on this important mission.” [m](#)

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