

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Stone Geology Fund established at UW-River Falls

February 13, 2018 -- University of Wisconsin-River Falls alumni David and Patricia Stone have made a generous gift of \$100,000 to the university to establish the Stone Geology Fund. The fund will support scholarships, equipment, student recruitment and program activities in geology.

“This donation is very deeply appreciated and comes at an excellent time for the geology program, corresponding with some curricular improvement,” said Ian Williams, professor of geology. “This money will allow us to strengthen the foundation of our program by supporting student involvement and providing equipment that will enhance student learning.”

“The Stone’s commitment to our program has also included teaching a specialized course in petroleum geology,” said Holly Dolliver, associate professor of geology and soil science. “We are grateful to them for sharing their extensive professional experiences which has given students rare insight into the industry and business side of geology. We are thrilled that they have chosen to provide this additional support for the geology program which will greatly enhance our teaching and research capabilities and high-impact experiences for our students.”

The origins of the geology program at UW-River Falls can be traced back to 1910 when the first geology course was offered as part of a program in the earth sciences. As the program evolved, it was eventually given a home in the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences at UW-River Falls. It might be the only geology program in the U.S. housed within an agricultural-based college, but this allows for close interdisciplinary connections with environmental science and soils faculty and programs.

When the term geology comes up, most people think of rocks, especially unique and/or beautiful rocks they found on vacation or sometimes in their own backyard. It’s no surprise, that even though geology is a broad field, many students studying geology report that it all started with rocks for them.

Ethan Dahl, a geology major from Emmons, Minn., remembers being fascinated by rocks as a child.

“I was immediately excited when my uncle told me that there was a career for people who like rocks – geology,” she said.

“I don’t remember, but my dad said we came to the UWRF campus when I was young to get help with identifying a rock. Like me, my dad was a rock collector,” said Stephen Slivicki, a geology major from River Falls. It wasn’t until he came to UW-River Falls though that Slivicki made the connection between his interests and a potential career path. He was undecided about a major until he took the Introduction to Geology course with Dolliver and found a fit.

Slivicki described how a whole new world opens up once students get into the geology program.

“You don’t see the world the same after you learn about geology and the natural environment,” he said. “I can now see where there were once oceans, I don’t just see the features of the land that exist today.”

The geology program already offers a variety of extracurricular experiences for their students, but the gift from the Stones will create new opportunities and help offset the cost to students for things like regional field trips. The program has traditionally offered field trips to different regions of the country and has even arranged for students to conduct research projects overseas.

These new funds might also support student collaboration with a faculty member on a research project. Slivicki is currently studying thin sections of rock from the Chippewa/Eau Claire complex under the microscope to identify the constituent minerals and textures of the rock which helps determine how it was created.

Some geology students opt for internships to help focus their areas of interest in geology. Katie Thoreson of St. Paul has had two internships. The first was at the University of Nevada and involved a lot of data processing for a geochemistry project studying the ratio of iron to nickel in Martian meteorites. Her second internship was with Superior Silica Sands in Barron which offered more variety and gave her a real sense of field work and lab work.

The Stone’s donation will have an immediate and visible effect on the program. Some of the funds will be used to invest in an array of basic, up-to-date equipment and instrumentation that will enhance the student experiences in a number of classes. In instances where the purchase of sophisticated equipment is simply not cost-effective, these funds may allow for rental of equipment, a demonstration by professionals, or help with gaining access to equipment at academic research institutions.

For more information about the geology program, visit www.uwrf.edu/PES/Geology/Index.cfm or email laura.walsh@uwrf.edu.

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Photo: UW-River Falls student Leonel Turcios, a geology major from Minneapolis, uses one of the new microscopes purchased by the Stone Geology Fund.