

Gift of a lifetime

Jack Moermond '56 wanted to make a difference.

He has.

Dr. Moermond, who died on Thursday, Oct. 17, after a battle with cancer, was retired from a full career as a patent attorney with Dow Corning in Midland, Mich. He was equally highly regarded, however, for his expertise in waterfowl and taxidermy.

Diagnosed in February, he had spent the past months considering carefully how best to bequeath the museum-quality collection that he had created. The answer: Hope College.

He donated 110 ducks and geese to the college, representing every species of waterfowl in North America. The collection is an important addition to the new science center, part of the *Legacies: A Vision of Hope* campaign, one that will significantly enhance the college's biology program.

"It's one of the top collections, certainly, in North America," said Dr. James Gentile, who is dean for the natural sciences and the Kenneth G. Herrick Professor of Biology at Hope. "This will really be a centerpiece for the building."

Every gift has a story. Behind each is an experience, or a connection, or a memory, or a combination of the three.

Dr. Moermond had spent more than three decades perfecting his craft and developing the collection from which his gift to Hope is drawn. He had work displayed at the Smithsonian and at other museums, and had worked with the state's Department of Natural Resources to help train agents involved in poaching enforcement.

He had traveled throughout the continent—Alaska, Canada, Maine, Mexico, Texas, as well as Michigan and points between—to acquire not only elusive species, but examples within species by season.

He reflected on the experience just a month before his death, during a September visit to campus with his wife Jean that provided a chance for him to see the collection's new home taking shape.

"Putting this collection together has certainly been a great learning experience for me," Dr. Moermond said.

LEGACIES

A VISION  OF HOPE

Legacies: A Vision of Hope is a \$105 million fund-raising effort that has four primary components: renovating and expanding the science center, constructing the DeVos Fieldhouse, increasing the endowment, and addressing short-term and long-term facility and space needs.

For more information about the campaign, please visit the college on-line at www.hope.edu or call (616) 395-7393.

"I think the collection is unique in that it not only includes adult plumage birds, but also many birds in juvenile and eclipse plumages," he said. "This is something that I think is often overlooked in collections, but is an important part of the educational nature and value of the collection."

Early in his professional life, he was a high school teacher. It was for a relatively brief three years—before he took a job with the U.S. Patent Office in Washington, D.C., that eventually led to his work at Dow Corning—but hear its echo as he reflected on his reason for supporting Hope:

"This is something that I've had in mind for a long time, as to what happens with [the collection] ultimately," Dr. Moermond said. "One long-term goal is to have them end up in some place, some situation, where they would continue to provide the public with education."

He had given away segments of his collection for years: some to Hope previously, and to other schools, a local nature center, and a museum in Homer, Alaska, among others—more than 150 pieces in all.

This time, though, he carefully selected a major portion of his collection with an eye toward comprehensiveness—for what it could teach as a whole. He found in Hope a way to assure that others will enjoy and benefit from it for years to come.

Hope in particular made an appropriate destination on multiple levels—even though Dr. Moermond's coursework at Hope was in chemistry, not biology. "Hope has always been very close to all of us," Jean noted.

Three of the couple's four children are alumni: Linda Moermond '80 DeGross of Holland, Mich.; Deborah Moermond '84 Petersen of Princeton, N.J.; and Chaplain Timothy Moermond '89 of Elmendorf Air Force Base, Alaska. As it happens, Dr. Moermond's first gift of birds followed a visit to the department of biology during Linda's freshman year.

"And he saw some of what they had, for study skins and such, and what specimens they had in the case, and he said, 'I've got that. I've got some that look better than that,'" she recalled. "We started looking around, and Eldon [Greij, of the biology faculty] was there, and he started talking with him and said, 'How would you like some more?' And he said, 'I'll take what you can give me.'"

The new collection will play a central role in the college's biology program, according to Dr. Kathy Winnett-Murray, professor of biology.

For students of zoology, Dr. Winnett-Murray noted, there is no substitute for having actual examples for study and comparison.

"We use them a lot in the zoology courses to show examples of the different species, and also the plumage differences that can exist," Dr. Winnett-Murray said. "We also use them in outreach programs tremendously."

The outreach reflects the central, historic identity of the college as not only a place of learning for its students, but a resource for the community. Last year, more than 1,800 area school children toured the science museum in the Peale Science Center.

"They don't have resources like that at all



Diagnosed with cancer in February, Dr. Jack Moermond '56 sought to make a difference through the donation of the museum-quality collection of ducks and geese that he spent more than three decades developing. The 110 birds he has given to Hope will be a centerpiece in the new science center, an important resource for Hope students as well as young visitors to the college's science museum. Dr. Moermond is pictured during a visit to campus just a month before his death on Thursday, Oct. 17.

at their own schools," Dr. Winnett-Murray said. "So kids of all ages, from college right down to pre-school, are going to see what wildlife looks like—and for a lot of the younger kids, that's their first encounter."

The number of visiting students has climbed steadily through the years, according to Lori Hertel, director of biology laboratories at Hope. "It's been growing a lot every year because of word-of-mouth by the teachers," she said.

Demand has grown so much that the new science center will include an enhanced museum for visitors, and Dr. Moermond's collection will be a major part of it.

In fact, without the new science center, Dr. Gentile noted, the college wouldn't have been able to appropriately apply such a significant gift. Just as new Hope students have been drawn to the college because of the imminent new facility, so has its promise provided opportunities for the program—even as fund-raising for and construction of the building continue.

Earlier this fall, Dr. Gentile and other college officials met with the building's architects to determine how best to configure a prominent display area to feature the collection. The waterfowl will be presented

in two massive, glass-sided cases on the third-floor landing in the building's main atrium, with the geese and other large birds visible from both the landing and the main floor below.

To help visitors understand what they are seeing, an interactive CD-ROM will run on a computer being integrated into the display area. "So while you're standing in front of the collection, you'll actually be able to pull up information about the birds—natural history, range...," Dr. Gentile said.

Editor for the CD-ROM project is Dr. Eldon Greij, founder of *Birder's World* magazine, who is now retired from the Hope biology faculty. Details are still being worked out, but Dr. Gentile hopes to make copies of the CD-ROM available to the public in some way.

Every gift has a story. When he learned that the collection was going to Hope College, Dr. Moermond's young grandson became worried. Thinking of the happy times he had spent with his grandfather in the bird room in Midland, he wondered: could he visit them at the college?

The answer? Definitely.

That's why they'll be there. For everyone. 