Creating a ripple

Aubrey Dan backs namesake department with second $5-million gift
Research conducted at Western has shown the importance of positive relationships to a person’s health and wellbeing. And while these strong personal connections are important on an individual basis, they also prove vitally important on a grander scale. At Western, we’re grateful for the long-standing relationships we have built with our supporters and friends, and proud of the extraordinary impact we have been able to make together.

Friends like Aubrey Dan, BACS’85, a proud alumnus and long-time donor. Aubrey has again shown his support for Western by making his second $5-million gift to his namesake department, the DAN Department of Management & Organizational Studies. This donation helps position DAN Management as a global leader, enabling it to grow and strengthen research and teaching in key areas of importance to businesses around the world.

You will read Aubrey’s story and many other examples of the power of our amazing friendships in this edition of Impact Western.

Like our continuing work with the Alzheimer Society of London and Middlesex, an organization that has long supported Western’s research into Alzheimer’s disease. Its support helps fund current faculty members, as well as graduate students who will become the next generation of Alzheimer’s experts.

Or Nigel Gilby, BA’77, a personal-injury lawyer who rallied half a dozen colleagues from local law firms to donate $130,000 in support of concussion research. The gift supports the development of therapies and coping strategies for more than 160,000 Canadians who suffer concussions each year.

Or the Salamander Foundation, whose ongoing support is helping to ensure healthy and sustainable water sources in conjunction with our Faculty of Engineering.

These relationships are integral to the success of our work, and to the betterment of society through that work on a local, national and global level. Thank you to all our friends for their continued support.
Aubrey Dan, BACS'85, isn't most people. At age five, he began working for 10 cents an hour at his father's pharmaceutical company and had to negotiate for a raise. He rose through the ranks to become the Director of Sales at 24, and went on to build a Family Investment business with a globally diversified portfolio. He also spent years producing Broadway shows. One of them, Memphis, won a Tony Award.

And now, the 54-year-old Canadian businessman and philanthropist has created a lasting legacy at Western, thanks to a $5-million gift – his second such investment in little more than a decade – that will thrust the DAN Department of Management & Organizational Studies further onto the global stage.
The gift established three endowed research Chairs and two distinguished public lectures.

"It’s like the little pebble you drop into the pond to create a ripple," Dan said. "That’s really what I am. Just that little pebble, trying to have a positive effect on others."

His success in life, and ultimately his desire to give, is rooted deeply in one core belief – people are everything.

"If you look at the management and organization of business, relationship management is critical. People are the foundation of the whole thing," he said. "If you understand how people work, it doesn’t matter what your specialty is, that is the common denominator."

Dan knew the importance of people and relationships when he began working in sales for his father’s pharmaceutical company, Novopharm, while studying Social Science at Western. He organized his classes so he could work one day a week because he’d inherited a territory where his competitor held a 70 per cent market share.

Some people would have slowly built their clientele. Not Dan.

"I worked like crazy. I learned every pharmacist’s name; I bought them all flowers on Valentine’s Day; I visited each one every 28 days and built personal relationships."

A year later, he’d reversed the percentages, and held 70 per cent of the market himself.

"I was selling the exact same thing as my competition – same price, same bottle, same everything," he said. "So, you have to rely on your personality, engage with people and don’t be scared to show yourself."

Dan first started helping Western students understand his people-centric approach to business in 2006, when he made his first $5-million gift to Western to establish the Aubrey Dan Program in Management and Organizational Studies in the Faculty of Social Science. Massive student enrolment, strong work by faculty and ongoing support from Dan helped turn the program into a full department in 2013.

He and Western are a good fit, for many reasons.

"The people at all levels are open to ideas, and I love that," he said. "There’s a receptiveness and openness to being progressive here; I’ve always loved thinking about how to stay on the cutting edge."

To help keep Western on the cutting edge, he directed $4.5 million of his latest gift to establish the three endowed research Chairs in Consumer Behaviour, Change and Innovation, and Corporate Governance – the latter of which will be appointed jointly by DAN Management and Western Law, and is intended to lead to the creation of a new module in Management and Legal studies, pending approval. With $1.5 million dedicated to each Chair, and dollar-for-dollar matching funds from Western, the Chairs each have a $3-million endowment for a total of $9 million.

"You need to look at all the opportunities to understand people, understand how they think," he said of the Chairs. "The more you understand them, the more you can figure out how they make decisions and how you can help them. It’s good for businesses, and for consumers."

Focusing on change and innovation is also particularly relevant to developing the next generation of business leaders.

"Here’s a whole research component for how to improve change, because change is the only constant in life. Through the social sciences, and through this research, we’re going to give people the
tools to be leaders who affect change. I like the faculty because it deals with change every day.”

Dan believes the Chairs have the potential to elevate Western further onto the global stage.

“In theatre, and the arts, they have the Tony Awards, the Oscars, the Genie Awards – they’re awards of excellence for that sector,” he said. “This type of work will help propel Western to a higher ranking, where others are eager for our intellectual capital. That, right there, is its own award of excellence we can export around the globe, democratizing education.”

Dan draws many comparisons between theatre and education, which makes sense. A significant portion of his career has been spent in the industry. Starting out as a typical theatre-goer, he gradually delved deeper into the genre, to the point of becoming smitten. If all the world is a stage, Dan felt Canada’s was a little too empty.

“I’d seen all these amazing shows in New York, and started asking myself how we could get more Broadway in Toronto,” he said. “And when I ask a question, I find the answer.”

Wearing his private equity hat, he started a theatre production company and went to New York to identify shows to bring north of the border. He secured his longest-running show, Jersey Boys, in 2008. Over the span of the two years it ran at the Toronto Centre for the Arts theatre, more than 1.2 million people saw the Dan-produced show.

And while he has never graced a theatre stage as an actor – he maintains he can neither sing nor dance – he does address DAN Management students annually, returning each year to personally award 25 academic scholarships, which he also funds.

“It’s a privilege,” he said. “You see families gathering around students who’ve been working hard, doing their best. They’re not my children, but being the starter fuel to help their individual rockets to fly into space, so to speak, to achieve their maximum potential, is very gratifying and rewarding.”

“This type of work will help propel Western to a higher ranking, where others are eager for our intellectual capital. That, right there, is its own award of excellence we can export around the globe, democratizing education.”

For more information, or to support the Faculty of Social Science, please contact Maija Craig, Executive Director, Development, Faculties and Divisions, at 519.661.2111 ext. 88811 or mcraig28@uwo.ca
It’s a robust partnership – one that continues to flourish after more than a decade of research and service.

Western has played an important role in the evolution of the Alzheimer Society London and Middlesex (ASLM), and together, the two have established strong ties that continue to foster support and understanding of Alzheimer’s in the community.

Recently, a gift of $160,000 from ASLM bolstered Western’s already robust student awards and research. This gift represents the renewal of the ASLM foundation’s Premier Research Grant, which is awarded on a competitive basis to faculty members across campus engaged in research on Alzheimer’s and related dementias, in areas from biomedical based research to social aspects of the disease. The gift also funds scholarships for master’s and doctoral students in any faculty engaged in related research.

“We are excited to be in the position to invest in research at Western by providing research opportunities to both established scientists, as well as master’s and doctoral student researchers. It is our intent through this program to promote innovation and exploration by opening these opportunities up to all faculties, and with limited restrictions – other than the research needs to relate to Alzheimer’s disease or other dementias,” said Carol Walters, ASLM’s CEO.

“We’re proud to support our well-established local research community in this way and believe our dementia community both locally and globally will benefit from research completed through this program.”

Over the years, and particularly since its move from south London to Windermere Road about a decade ago, ASLM has partnered with and supported researchers at Western, offering funding, outreach and volunteer opportunities to members of the campus community working to understand dementia.

To date, ASLM’s foundation has given more than $1 million to Western in support of Alzheimer’s and dementia-related research. Shortly after the foundation was established, part of its mandate emerged as one of research support.

Originally named the Fish Award (after one of the bequests), ASLM’s Premier Research Grant, valued at $100,000 over two years, supports research, personnel and infrastructure for Alzheimer’s research at Western. The inaugural recipient was Clinical Neurological Sciences professor Elizabeth Finger, who is studying the effectiveness of oxytocin, a hormone and neuropeptide in the brain shown to play an important role in social behaviour and empathy, as a possible treatment for patients with frontotemporal dementia.

With early support from ASLM’s research grant, Finger’s work is now in clinical trials.

Through its foundation, ASLM also supports graduate students working on Alzheimer’s and dementia-related research, offering two $15,000 scholarships to students at the master’s level and another $30,000 scholarship over two years to a student pursuing related doctoral research.

But the partnership between Western and ASLM goes far beyond research funding. It boils down to an established network of diverse individuals working together towards the same goal – understanding Alzheimer’s and dementia, and supporting those living with it within our community, Walters explained.

The broad spectrum of social and recreational programming offered through ASLM to clients in the community is largely staffed by Western students, some who give days, months and years of their time.

At the governance level, a connection with Western has always existed. ALSM and its foundation are overseen by boards that include Western researchers and faculty, ensuring both entities align to best tackle the unknowns of dementia and best support those living with it.

Walters is looking to strengthen the society’s partnership with Western by first defining the system of dementia services available in the community and working to fill gaps that emerge.

“I’m hoping to form new partnerships with Western from an analytics perspective. We need to start to understand what the area looks like and look for outcome-based information. We provide good programs and services but we need to understand how that is trickling down and supporting the broader health-care system and serving our clients,” Walters said.

“If we become more proactive in the region, not just the society, it should have a more positive effect on health-care costs, and the number of people needing space in long-term care homes should go down. Continued research is an imperative for that,” she continued.

“These are exciting times from a research perspective as it relates to dementia. There is a lot of new information coming out that is positive for individuals being able to be more proactive for their self-care.”

To donate to Alzheimer’s research at Western, please contact Carole Stinson, Executive Director, Development Programs, at 519.661.2111 x85696 or cstinson@uwo.ca

For more information on Alzheimer’s research at Western, visit: extraordinary.westernu.ca/alzheimers/
Art, Friends and Memories

The Flora and Ian Tripp Collection

by Debora Van Brenk, BA’86, MA’87 / photos by Scott Woods
It’s probably not surprising that financial analyst and accountant Ian Tripp, with a predilection for precision, would have kept a monthly tally of household cashflow: income, mortgage, food, kids’ summer camps, education.

But those who didn’t know Tripp or his wife Flora in those early days might have been surprised the family budget always included one more column: art.

This, they agreed, was as important to the family as dinner on the table. “Right next to the food budget we would have a budget for art – food for the body and nourishment for the soul,” Tripp recalled.

During the course of 40 years, they collected more than 165 pieces that became as welcome a group of friends as the London-area artists who created them.

About 125 of those works went on exhibit at Western’s McIntosh Gallery in April and May, after the Tripps made their eclectic collection a bequest to the gallery.

The planned gift represents some of the best contemporary art created in the Forest City: works of dozens of artists, including Gilbert Moll, Greg Curnoe, Silvia Clarke, Brian Jones, Tom Benner, Paterson Ewen and Helmut Becker.

And, as suggested by the title of the exhibit – The Flora and Ian Tripp Collection: Art, Friends, Memories – the works highlight the kinship the couple has had with both the art on the wall and the creative souls who made them.

“The really sweet part of collecting is that if you like the work, it’s a bonus to like the artist as well. And that happened more often than not,” he said.

From the time he graduated Western with a BA in Economics in 1965, until his retirement as comptroller 30 years later, Tripp kept financial order for several departments at Western. His portfolio included the McIntosh Gallery, which necessitated frequent contact with artist Maurice Stubbs, the gallery’s first permanent curator and its executive director from 1969-1989.

Tripp says he never considered any other recipient for the donation; his affinity for Western and Stubbs made McIntosh not just the best option, but the only one.

The Tripps’ love of art began the day Stubbs invited them to a McIntosh exhibit of works by Rudolf Bikkers, whose bold creations would soon grace collections around the world. The Tripps found themselves, unexpectedly, entranced.

A Bikkers painting Without Sight became the first of their collection; a stunning pointillist painting, Winter Goldenrods by Klaas Verboom, became the second.

“Up until then, we probably had Elvis Presley posters on our walls,” Tripp quipped.

Eventually, art adorned every wall of the couple’s home. “I would describe it as growing like Topsy. The collection grew – and we grew with it.”

Sometimes they bought from dealers; more often, directly from artists with whom they connected. Most have London connections, and many have links to Western’s visual arts community and legacy.

“The most important thing about collecting for us was to really like the work to begin with. That was the primary criteria in terms of acquiring a piece. There was absolutely no consideration at all about the future investment value.”

The couple set their parameters early: both had to agree on the purchase; only one purchase per show; it had to fit within their budget; it had to speak to the other pieces they owned; and the couple, ideally, wanted to have an affinity for the artist.

“We’ve come to realize artists have a special gift – they’re able to see the world and many of the things in the world many of us, or most of us, can’t or don’t see. Not
only that, they have the need to share their vision and view of the world with others.”

In 1990, there came what Tripp calls “the epiphany,” a shift towards abstracts, from representational art.

The work that changed him remains his favourite today: a small piece made with molten metal on gypsum board, with red dots and a vessel circling the ancient Egyptian universe. Ra’s Voyage to the Red X, by Ed Zelenak (assistant professor of sculpture at Western from 1979 to 1988), had captured his heart.

A recent acquisition, Pat Gibson’s Winter, shows the couple’s evolution as collectors; this small abstract, by a female artist, could not be more different in style from the Verboom piece with a similar name. These two paintings, he says are ‘like bookends’ of the collection.

Over the years, the Tripps compared notes about different pieces and where to hang them “so that works could talk to each other without fighting.”

Bold primary-colour pieces congregated on an expansive living room wall like extroverts at a cocktail party, while a small grouping of sepia-toned works adorned a smaller wall, where they could chat in more subdued voices.

The couple’s conversations with the artists have been similarly loud, contemplative and collegial as they visited one another’s homes, studios and summer cottages, and even travelled the world together on vacation.

Flora, who died in June 2015, surrounded by the family and art she loved, had the artistic eye of the family, Tripp said.

She most likely would have identified Fenwick’s watercolour Lilac (on the road to Big Bay) as her most prized piece. Ian had first seen it in Fenwick’s home, had asked to buy it and been gently rebuffed.

Years later, with Flora in the final stages of a rare neurodegenerative disorder called multiple system atrophy, Fenwick presented Lilac to Flora as a gift and inscribed on its back, “To Flora, with love.”

It was fitting, then, that artists were the first to see the McIntosh exhibit, in April. “It was the first time I saw them all in one spot,” Tripp said of his old friends, the artists and their art.

He returned to the gallery often during the show, which ended in May, to conduct formal and informal tours.

After the exhibit, McIntosh installers returned the paintings to the Tripp family home, where he and visitors will enjoy them, until the time comes again to share them more widely.

“This is such an important part of our life. The one constant passion we’ve had over the past 40 years has been collecting art,” Tripp said.

“It’s not so much about the art itself, but about the relationships we’ve developed with the artists. I think it’s safe to say, apart from family – that is, children and grandchildren – the love of our life has been the relationships and friendships we’ve had with artists we’ve come to know over the years.”

For more information, or to donate to the McIntosh Gallery, please contact James Patten, Director, McIntosh Gallery, at 519.661.2111 x84602 or jpatten2@uwo.ca

Tripp’s collection includes works of dozens of local artists, including Gilbert Moll, Greg Curnoe, Silvia Clarke, Brian Jones, Tom Benner, Paterson Ewen and Helmut Becker.
While Canada has one of the largest renewable supplies of freshwater in the world, it is heavily used and overly stressed, putting the ecosystem out of balance. On top of that, municipal, agricultural and industrial waste continues to pollute waterways, causing serious harm to the environment and threatening human health.

Western Engineering is leading the charge to mitigate the effects of pollution on the environment, especially in our water supplies, and the Toronto-based Salamander Foundation has been an ardent supporter of these efforts.

Recently, the organization donated $1 million to help continue the important task of protecting and preserving our precious natural resources and safeguarding public health.

Founded in 1997 by Nan Shuttleworth, BA’65, the Foundation made its first gift to Western in 1999, donating $750,000 to establish the Salamander Chair in Environmental Engineering. The Chair oversees research activities in environmental engineering with a focus on water quality and processing, including wastewater, drinking water and source water contamination.

Since that time, it has continued supporting the Chair with additional gifts.

The Foundation’s latest gift was matched dollar-for-dollar by Western. Directed to the Salamander Chair, it boosts the existing Chair fund and creates an endowment of approximately $3.4 million. Each year, the endowment generates income to support research and activities of the Chair.

“As the time of our original donation, the Chair in Environmental Engineering could be established for $1 million, but over the past several years it has become standard practice for most universities across Canada to commit $3 million to establish any Chair,” said Shuttleworth, who also serves as Foundation President. “The Salamander Board made the decision to augment the original endowment with an additional $1 million to ensure Western continues to provide national leadership in this area.”

The current holder of the Salamander Chair, George Nakhla, a professor in the departments of Civil and Environmental and Chemical and Biochemical Engineering, has worked for years on the biological treatment of toxic organics.

Municipal and industrial wastewater can cause untold damage to the environment. Disease-causing pathogens, such as bacteria and viruses, can make water unfit for human use. Excess nutrients can overstimulate the growth of aquatic plants. Decaying organic waste can threaten aquatic life. Toxic chemicals can harm aquatic organisms, not to mention the aesthetic concerns of odours and discolouration.

Nakhla’s research interests lie in the general area of environmental engineering and water and soil pollution control with expertise in municipal and industrial wastewater treatment, biological nutrient removal processes, soil and ground water bioremediation and detoxification of hazardous contaminants.

The Salamander Foundation has made a significant impact on his work. With the Foundation’s long-standing support,
Nakhla has been able to expand the scope of the Chair’s activities while advancing his research. He has set up collaborations with both established and new researchers; led the National Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) CREATE initiative, in conjunction with Trojan Technologies, that addresses the shortage of wastewater process engineers; supervised graduate students; published in scientific journals; and shared research results through public and conference presentations.

“This latest gift will keep the Chair current with university practices and provide Professor Nakhla with the flexibility required to continue this important work and achieve the goals of the Chair,” said Shuttleworth.

Shuttleworth saw the matching fund opportunity as a definite bonus. “It’s particularly satisfying to know Western is matching the Foundation’s additional $1-million donation. The resulting endowment will really give the Chair the strength it needs and support the extraordinary work being accomplished by Dr. Nakhla and his team in environmental engineering.”

Nakhla is pleased with the Western partnership and thrilled to see the Foundation make the decision to continue its support. “I am grateful to the Salamander Foundation for its commitment to preventing or remediating environmental damage, and its steadfast support of the environmental research done at the Faculty of Engineering,” said Nakhla.

Shuttleworth is the daughter of the late Lorraine Shuttleworth, and granddaughter of Richard and Jean Ivey. The Salamander Foundation, one of the successor foundations to the former Richard & Jean Ivey Fund, has continued the family’s longstanding history of philanthropy, and currently has two areas of interest: arts and culture, and the environment.

For more information, or to support the Faculty of Engineering, please contact Terra Ahrens, Director of Development, Faculty of Engineering, at 519.661.2111 x83743 or tahrens@uwo.ca
The yelling woke Keith Gibbons, BA’76, and his friends. It was an early morning in 1973. Having set off from Western’s campus the day before, he and five pals were in Florida for the last weekend of Spring Break. With no hotel room booked upon arrival, they tried to spend their first night sleeping on the beach.

“Sure enough, the police saw us and we were told to move along around midnight,” said Gibbons. “But we happened upon this couple in their 50s or 60s who had just left a bar.”

They struck up a conversation, and the couple offered their living room floor to the students for the night. All was well until the next morning.

“The woman woke up, and it seems she’d had more to drink than we thought because she didn’t remember a thing,” said Gibbons with a smile. “She just starting screaming, ‘Get out! Get out!’ So we grabbed our stuff and ran.”

It was Gibbons’ first trip outside of Canada.

Since that time, he has traveled extensively around the globe in a career involving senior level roles at London Life and spice giant McCormick Canada, where he served as CEO until his retirement in 2016. Despite decades of travel, that first trip stands out.

“We’re still talking about it 40 some years later,” he laughed. “It was fun.”

Gibbons believes there are many unique lessons to be learned from international travel. And so, eager to ensure today’s students can experience those lessons, he has donated $100,000 to Western to establish the Keith and Cathy Gibbons Global Opportunity Award.

Global Opportunity Awards are $1,000 or $2,000 scholarships for international learning provided through philanthropic donations that are matched dollar-for-dollar by Western. The scholarships enable more students to participate in exchanges, study-abroad programs, international field courses, summer programs, international community engaged learning, field research and more.

“There are so many tremendous benefits to international travel,” said Gibbons. “It helps you become more adaptable – you experience different cultures, ethnicities, different ways of doing business, of communicating with people – you have no choice but to adjust your way of thinking. I wanted to help create opportunities for individuals to be exposed to things that are totally different from what they grew up with.”

Raised in the northern Ontario town of South Porcupine, Gibbons didn’t have many opportunities to travel far from home.

He came to Western with aspirations
of a career in law, but soon realized numbers were more to his liking. After graduating with a BA in Math, he obtained a CA designation and began his career. While an early role at Clarkson Gordon (now Ernst & Young) provided some opportunity to travel, it was his time at London Life and later at McCormick as CFO and then CEO of Canadian Operations where his globetrotting really got going.

“I had responsibility for our operations in Asia, as well as here at home, so I spent a lot of time travelling, particularly to cities in China” he said. “One year I spent 60 per cent of my time overseas – I took a trip every other month.”

The lessons and resultant benefits were almost immediate. “You’re immersed in a different place with different people, so you learn to be flexible very quickly. I became much more receptive to different opinions and to this day believe I’m a better listener. I appreciate more perspectives and am far more adaptable in my approach to working with people and solving a problem.”

One of his passions, said Gibbons, has always been looking at different philosophies and approaches to business. Travelling to new cultures offered him ample opportunity to indulge that interest.

“I remember in Taipei Taiwan with one of our partners, on the street he was always a couple steps in front of me. One day, he asked if I ever wonder why he was going faster than me? He said, ‘Because I want to get to the next corner first. Right around that corner is another opportunity, and I want to be there before you.’”

The comment stuck with Gibbons. “That was probably 1995 and I never forgot the conversation,” he said. “I applied it wherever I could – new product development and speed to market, new or different distribution opportunities for McCormick – everywhere.”

The rate of change in certain cities and countries was also particularly enjoyable. “It happens almost right in front of your eyes – you take one trip to a big city, and six months later you’ll see buildings that were never there before, or highways, or high-speed trains – the pace of change is so rapid; it’s really exciting to see.”

Gibbons’ gift of $100,000 is an endowed donation, meaning combined with matching funds from Western, it will provide four $2,000 awards each year to students from any area across campus, for as long as the Global Opportunity Awards program exists.

He hopes to see the students benefit personally, but also make a difference in whatever country they choose to visit. As a believer in social responsibility, he is hopeful many will use the award to work on relief or community-oriented projects that give back to a community or region.

In addition to benefiting individual students, Gibbons – who is also a member of Western’s Board of Governors – knows the value an international perspective brings to the university as a whole.

The first objective of Western’s current International Action Plan is to increase the participation of Western Students in international experiences from 3 to 10 per cent.

“I understand Western’s strategic direction when it comes to international growth and internationalization, and I truly believe it is the right way to go. I felt providing some assistance to that goal would be one way of me helping to contribute to its success,” said Gibbons.

His strong affinity for Western stretches back to the days of that much-talked-about trip to Florida as an undergrad. In fact, he credits the school for much of his success, which was a key factor in his decision to support the university financially.

In the future, he hopes to see more endowments like his aimed at providing students international opportunities, and hopes his gift is the beginning of many wonderful global experiences for students.

“Forty years from now there’ll be a lot of individuals out there who benefited from this, and who gained that broader point of view. When these people are done postsecondary schooling, whenever that may be – one, two or even three degrees later – having an international perspective will only benefit them, no matter what they’re pursuing,” he said.

“And none of them will have had to sleep on someone’s floor.”
Local law firms band together in the fight against concussion

When explaining brain injuries to a jury, Nigel Gilby BA’77, LLB’78, often invokes his egg-carton example. “Why do you open up the egg carton before you buy the eggs? Because even though there are no signs of damage to the carton, we all know that sometimes you’re going to find a cracked egg,” said Gilby, a partner at Lerners LLP in London. Same goes for individuals with an acquired brain injury, he stressed. They might not appear damaged, but that doesn’t mean there isn’t a crack.

Having seen first-hand the damage these injuries can do to the lives of concussion sufferers and their families, Gilby rallied a group of London law firms with expertise in personal injury to join together and support concussion research at Western.

He arranged for representatives from the firms to sit down to a
private dinner to hear Anatomy and Cell Biology professor and Robarts Scientist Dr. Arthur Brown discuss ongoing research initiatives. As part of Western’s Brain Injury Group, Brown and his collaborators are developing biomarkers to aid with diagnoses and therapeutic strategies to treat concussion. The work has the potential to change how concussion is treated and arrest its short and long-term devastating effects.

Gilby’s effort to unite local attorneys in support of local research worked.

After the dinner, Lerners agreed to donate $25,000 to the project. Many firms followed suit, including Siskinds, McKenzie Lake, and Harrison Pensa, all contributing $25,000. Legate & Associates, Wallace Smith, and Beckett Personal Injury Lawyers contributed $10,000 each.

Collectively, the group donated $130,000 to further advance this research.

“I'm a huge believer in giving back to the community that supports you,” Gilby said.

The Brain Injury Group was formed in 2011 when a group of scientists working across Western began a series of collaborations on concussion research. The breadth of expertise in this group ranges from basic molecular biology, cellular biology, biomechanics, immunology and exercise physiology to state-of-the-art imaging, public health and clinical sciences. More recently, the group has focused its efforts on seeking solutions to the problem of sports-related concussion.

No other institution in Canada or around the world has the broad array of clinical, neuropathological, neuroimaging, neurochemistry, neuropsychological, sports medicine and engineering expertise under a single roof that’s required to address the problem of sports-related concussion.

Donor support is an integral part of the group’s success, said Brown.

“Making a philanthropic gift like this is a special and selfless act,” he said. “These funds are used to advance our research and move it ahead at a far greater pace. It helps us build for the future and we are incredibly grateful for this type of support.”

Gilby has long been involved in the area of acquired brain injury. When he started practising law in 1980, he was a member of a group trying to set up a treatment facility for people with acquired brain injury. At that time, when you got discharged from the hospital, there were no services available locally. We have a group of approximately 10 lawyers who do personal injury work so we were happy to support it.”

Others felt it was important to support and champion the great work being done in our community.

“I was impressed with the innovative nature of the research being conducted at Western and its potential to impact how we assess and treat concussion in the future,” said Erin Rankin Nash, BSc’84, LLB’08, of McKenzie Lake. “It’s important to endorse the world-class work happening in our local community. We often tend to look for the next big breakthrough beyond our borders when, in fact, this game-changing work is happening in our own backyard.”

To support concussion research at Western, please contact Kristen Lesko, Senior Development Officer, Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry at 519.661.2111 ext. 84338 or kristen.lesko@schulich.uwo.ca

For more information on concussion research at Western, visit: extraordinary.westernu.ca/concussion/
At one point, it was a darkroom. Later, it turned into a room where librarians counted coins from photocopiers. It also served as a storage closet. And then, more than a decade ago, with few changes to the space, the small room on the ground level of The D.B. Weldon Library became an access lab for students with disabilities.

"I remember when we first got that space provided to us by the library. It was dark and dingy," said Wendy Dickinson, Acting Associate Director of Services for Students with Disabilities at Western. "We worked with the University Students’ Council (USC) and got some money and equipped it with technology students didn’t have access to anywhere else. It worked fairly well, but it was dark and not welcoming. It didn’t have an automatic door opener for the longest time."

Today, with support from former
Western staff members Linda and Walter Zimmerman, that same space has been revamped, brightened and modernized to improve accessibility and comfort for the roughly 3,000 students with disabilities at the university. In recognition of their support, the recently opened space now reflects the Zimmermans in its name – The Linda and Walter Zimmerman Access Lab.

“Our history with students with disabilities on campus goes back to the early 1980s,” said Linda Zimmerman, who worked at Western’s Computing Centre as an Arts & Humanities Specialist, and volunteered to read with students with disabilities on campus.

“We always had respect for how much extra effort students with disabilities put into their education. We’ve really been inspired by them and the effort, dedication and courage it takes to undertake a university program when you are facing your own challenges. It was something that always stayed with us. So, when it came time to do something special for Western, this was an area we presented as a priority.”

Linda’s husband, Walter Zimmerman, worked as a reference and subject librarian at Western’s D.B. Weldon Library, and was particularly inspired by Alexandra Papaiconomou, a blind student he met in 2001.

He helped Papaiconomou with research throughout her Sociology and History undergraduate and Master’s Degrees. He also helped her complete an application, which had been in an inaccessible format, to law school. Today, Papaiconomou, who graduated from Western Law in 2012, works at Cohen Highley LLP in London.

Her story of perseverance and dedication stayed with Zimmerman, motivating him to look for a way to help other students like her.

“We are hoping it will be an inviting place where students feel they can invite professors and TAs and introduce the technology they are using to make their education possible,” Linda added.

“Sometimes, if you are just aware to put the course notes in one format so they are accessible, it could make a big difference to the student. It’s part of the teachers’ learning experience, as well.”

The access lab features numerous upgrades. Its ceiling was raised to make it feel bigger. Its walls were painted to make it brighter. It features adjustable and dimmable lights for students who are visually impaired or may have suffered a brain injury; a CCTV system to magnify print; speech-to-text and text-to-speech software installed on modern computers. There are whiteboard tables, height-adjustable desks, ergonomic keyboards and chairs; and cushioned seating.

“We are hoping it will be an inviting place where students feel they can invite professors and TAs and introduce the technology they are using to make their education possible.”

Linda Zimmerman, donor and former Western staff member

And because the room lacks a window, there is a plan to include a video feed to outside, so students can see weather conditions and have a sightline of campus.

Ashton-Nicola Forrest, who is pursuing a Master’s Degree in Philosophy, was diagnosed with scleroderma – an autoimmune disease that affects the skin, blood vessels, muscles and internal organs – as an undergraduate at Western. She is regular in the lab and is overjoyed with the changes made.

“I tried to use the room before; the computers were not working properly and they were out of date. It was dusty, dark. I couldn’t print in this room and I have issues with walking. The space is a big difference. Now they have an access door – when I first came, there was no access door, which defeated the purpose of a space for students with disabilities,” she said.

“I used to have to abandon my scooter and hope no one sat on it, moved it or took things off of it. Now the space has been redesigned, so I can bring and charge my scooter here. I like how it can be a community space, not just a space to sit alone. I have circulation issues, and the padded seats are a good option for me.”

The lab is open during regular library hours. Students using the lab are issued a key to the space for three hours at a time.

Prior to this year, the average annual use of the access lab – over eight years – was 427. Since its completion, the lab was used more than 710 times this past academic year, representing a 60-per-cent increase in the lab’s use since upgrades were made.

Philanthropic support, like that of the Zimmermans’, is incredibly important in helping students with disabilities achieve their personal, academic and professional goals, said Dickenson.

“All students would report – disability or not – that study space is hard to come by. This room was needed, but under-utilized because it wasn’t a good place to be. Now, thanks to this support, it is a space to be envious of and says to students with disabilities, ‘We not only value you, but we have a space for you to work with your peers and mentors.’”

For more information, or to support students with disabilities, please contact Wendy Dickenson, Acting Associate Director, Student Development Centre, at 519.661.2111 x82147 or whdickin@uwo.ca
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