

UNMC alumnus transforms public health

Throughout his distinguished career, College of Medicine alumnus Carruth Wagner, M.D., '41, transformed the field of public health for the United States. Now, a \$1 million gift to benefit UNMC will extend his influence to public health education in Nebraska and beyond.

The Carruth J. Wagner, M.D., Foundation made the gift to the University of Nebraska Foundation in February to establish the first endowed chair in public health at UNMC.

"The Wagner Chair gives the College of Public Health the tremendous opportunity to attract a leading scholar in public health," said Jay Noren, M.D., former dean of the UNMC College of Public Health. (Dr. Noren became the new president of Wayne State University in Detroit on Aug. 1. Keith Mueller, Ph.D., has been named interim dean.)

"The college's goal is to recruit an individual who will contribute substantially to our efforts in developing enhanced and innovative public health interventions and programs consistent with the legacy of Dr. Wagner's distinguished career in public health."

The Wagner Chair is the first endowed faculty position in the College of Public Health, UNMC's newest college and one of only 38 colleges of public health in the country. Income earned from the endowed fund will support the work of renowned researchers and educators named to the position. The Wagner Chair is one of 82 endowed chairs and professorships at UNMC.

The College of Public Health presently is recruiting an individual for the position.

Born in Omaha in 1916, Dr. Wagner's career took him across the country, around the world and even to the White House.

He served under four U.S. presidents – Dwight Eisenhower, John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon – and held the position of assistant surgeon general, among others. In 1962, at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Dr. Wagner was responsible for health mobilization in the event of nuclear, biological or chemical warfare.

Later that year he became the second director of the Indian Health Service. During his tenure Dr. Wagner was responsible for changes and improvements in the comprehensive health care system for American Indians and Alaska Natives. The programs he initiated dramatically improved infant survival and the overall health of the Indian nations.

In 1965, Dr. Wagner was named director of the Bureau

of Medical Services. There he was responsible for the Indian Health Service's involvement with several Peace Corps training projects. Dr. Wagner also administered a number of international development projects in Korea, Liberia and other countries.

Dr. Wagner retired from public service in 2001 at the age of 84. He died the following year at his home in Sacramento, Calif.

"Dr. Wagner was devoted to public service from the time he left medical school until his death," said Alan Spilker, president and CEO of the Wagner Foundation. "Through his work, he influenced a countless number of people and improved the quality of life for many.

"Dr. Wagner was one of the greatest people I've met. But if you cut through all the accolades, you realize he was an even better person." ☺☺☺



In 1965, Dr. Wagner was appointed chief of the Bureau of Medical Services of the Public Health Service with the rank of Rear Admiral in the United States Navy.