

Why I Give: James Peacock, MD

James Peacock, MD, first came to the University of Rochester in 1989 after connecting with Seymour I Schwartz (Res '57), world-renowned surgeon and former Chair of the Department of Surgery. Peacock first met Schwartz at an American College of Surgeons Congress, and credits the organization, along with the University of Rochester, for much of his success. After an incredible career spanning more than 30 years, Peacock has retired and is working as a part-time faculty member. To ensure that future surgeons have the same opportunities to make valuable connections, as Peacock did, he has established an endowed fund that allows chief surgery residents to attend the annual conference of the American College of Surgeons in their final year of study. Peacock reflects on the importance of ACS, the influence of the University of Rochester on his career, and his hopes for the next generation of surgeons.

How has the University of Rochester impacted your life?

It's been my entire professional life. I came here for my first and only job as a professor after finishing my residency and training, and I stayed here for the entirety of my surgical career. It was the reason that we came here from North Carolina, where my wife and I are originally from, because of Dr. Schwartz and the reputation of the University of Rochester. We stayed not only because of the professional aspects of working at the University, but the city itself was a great place for my family.

You were one of Dr. Schwartz's first hires in the Department of Surgery, correct?

Yes. There were three of us that started in 1989. At the time, a number of surgeons were closer to retirement, so Dr. Schwartz was looking to hire the next generation. We were all from outside of Rochester, and we brought in different ways of doing things and different perspectives on surgery. It was fun! We were starting a new frontier in the surgery department. The three of us, Dr. Harry Sax, Dr. David Krusch and myself, worked together for nearly a decade. It was a great experience to reinvigorate the department, to be part of Dr. Schwartz's vision for the department. Dr. Schwartz opened the world of academic surgery to us, and his influence nationwide brought us opportunities. We became acquainted with various surgical dignitaries from around the country who would come to Rochester and visit. And when we would go elsewhere, people would recognize Rochester and Dr. Schwartz. It gave us instant credibility to be working at a place like this.

What do you think makes the University of Rochester special?

It has a strong academic environment. The hospital and the Medical Center are strongly integrated with the University. You have the sense when you come on the premises that you're part of an academic mission, just by the fact of the proximity of the Medical Center to the University for starters. But it's more than that, it's a sense of academic purpose that URMH has. The people that work in the Medical Center also make it special. I have a lot of lifelong acquaintances, people that have come into my life because of URMH. The fact that it's a medical

center and an academic center that is known nationally and internationally is special because it draws people to come here to be educated and to train in specialties like surgery. Those acquaintances that you make in other departments, trainees and students that come along, they are high-quality people. It's a privilege to work with them and study with them and train them, as I've been able to do.

Why did you decide to create this endowed fund?

I'm fortunate enough to have the means to support the University and the department, to fulfill a philanthropic mission. The University of Rochester has given me professional opportunity for 30 years, so I wanted to give something back. I have long thought the way I would give back to the department was through support of the mission of training residents in surgery. This is because a big piece of my professional career at the Department of Surgery was as an educator for surgery residents and medical students. I was the residency director for a period of time. The mission of taking medical students and training them to become surgeons is important to me. All along I thought that would be my focus for any kind of philanthropic support.

I married that to the American College of Surgeons, which came about spontaneously after a meeting of the American College of Surgeons in 2018. I had just retired from my clinical practice, and I began to think about how I might give something back to the department. We had a dinner for the Rochester residents who were attending the meeting, as well as some of the graduates and faculty. It was a wonderful gathering. Maybe because I was in a retirement phase and thinking more globally about my purpose in life, I reflected on that gathering more than I had previously. For whatever reason, I came away from that dinner going, "Wow! I'd really like to put together an endowment that would benefit our residents, but also enhance their experience with the American College of Surgeons." That evening struck me as something that I would like to see happen in perpetuity. That germinated the idea.

FEATURED QUOTE: This gift put together two strong priorities for me: the training program at Rochester and the American College of Surgeons.

How have residents responded to the opportunity to attend a conference of the American College of Surgeons?

I've been thrilled with the response that I've gotten. Each class of residents since this started that has experienced this has been so grateful. It's been a special part of doing this, feeling the gratitude that the residents have. What's also been fun is that some of my colleagues that find out about the fund and go, "Wow! What a good idea!" Because it wasn't too grand, it was within my financial means, within the scope of what a person could do.

INSERT QUOTES FROM RESIDENTS