

# ALUMNI & PHILANTHROPY

## *tropical* by arlene adams easley **training**

A \$2 million gift from alumni Jeffrey Aresty '77 and Patricia (Pickton) Aresty '76 establishes chair in tropical ecology.

In the spring of 1974, Jeffrey Aresty and Patricia Pickton trekked through the damp rainforest of Ecuador as part of a University of Miami fieldtrip to study tropical ecology. Among the country's colorful birds, unique insects, lush plant life, and one noteworthy three-toed sloth, the pair cemented a friendship and a love of nature that would last a lifetime.

Twenty-nine years later, the couple, who received bachelor's degrees in biology from the University of Miami and Doctor of Pharmacy degrees from the University of Nebraska, decided to give back to the school that they say was responsible for helping them develop an appreciation for the natural world. With a \$2 million gift, they established the Aresty Chair in Tropical Ecology, which will allow the Department of Biology to hire a prominent tropical ecologist who will ensure that undergraduates have opportunities to participate in fieldtrips and research.

"Our inspiration for establishing this chair is a combination of two factors: how we met and how much we appreciated Professor Oscar Owre, who was the former Maytag Chair in Ornithology. He was our most memorable teacher and friend from the University," said Jeffrey. As much as they were inspired by Owre, the couple credits current professor of biology Michael Gaines for his encouragement throughout the process of establishing the chair.

"We hope this chair will allow students to continue to have the wonderful learning experience we had at the University," said Patricia.

With a requirement that the chair holder must demonstrate a strong commitment to undergraduate education by offering regular field courses in tropical locations, the Arestys' gift will do just that. It will also significantly increase the biology department's already strong reputation in tropical ecology

since the donation stipulates that the chair holder must be an outstanding tropical ecologist who will conduct research in tropical ecology and evolution.

"The new chair is of immense importance to the biology department," said the department's chair Kathryn Tosney. "It is a crucial foundation for continuing our eminence in the field of tropical ecology, and it assures that undergraduates can study with a renowned scientist in the tropics, a potentially life-changing experience."

It was a life-changing event in the couple's own lives that prompted their initial gift to the university. In 2002, they gave \$2.5 million to the School of Business in memory of Jeffrey's parents, Gerald and Josephine, who passed away in a tragic car accident that year. The school recognized the generous donation by naming the Gerald and Josephine Aresty Building, which houses the Graduate School of Business and the McLamore Education Center. Gerald Aresty was a 1950 School of Business alumnus.

Now with the Aresty Chair in Tropical Ecology, the couple's commitment to helping students continues. "The chair is a far-sighted and terrific gift from a couple who understands and appreciates the value of engaged learning," said Michael R. Halleran, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Patricia's and Jeffrey's far-sighted vision extends beyond education to the natural world. They are conscientious caretakers of the 70-acre parcel of wooded land adjacent to Northwest Montana's Lolo National Forest that they now call home. "We try to be good stewards of our land and be respectful of the resident wildlife," said Jeffrey. "To this day, we still use the education we received from the University of Miami in our daily lives in Montana."

But while the Arestys now live amongst grizzly bears, mountain lions, and moose, they have not forgotten their south Florida roots. Their careful footsteps serve as an inspiration for future generations to follow. With remarkable generosity and planning, the Arestys are challenging the University of Miami's biology students to learn and grow, as they did, through direct field work. "It is important that students gain a connection and commitment to place and to other people," they said.

**THE NEW ARESTY CHAIR** | *The Aresty Chair in Tropical Ecology will allow the University to appoint an outstanding tropical ecologist who will ensure that undergraduate students have opportunities to study in the tropics.*

