Richard and JoAnn Eakin’s dedication has continued into their retirement years. As ECU’s former chancellor, Dr. Eakin found it difficult to retire. “He’s not a good person to have at home. He got pretty grumpy,” says JoAnn. “The dog and I were glad when he came back over here part time.”
Dedicated to Academic Excellence at East Carolina

Richard and JoAnn Eakin Believe in ECU’s Scholars for Tomorrow

For nearly 15 years, Richard and JoAnn Eakin were East Carolina University. As chancellor, Richard Eakin led East Carolina University through a period of great growth and expansion, and JoAnn worked with him, representing ECU in a myriad of ways. Now, in their “retirement,” they continue to work to ensure that current and future students have access to a world-class education that is particularly and uniquely East Carolina.

“I am pretty poor at retirement,” Dr. Eakin said. His wife, JoAnn, echoes that sentiment.

After serving as chancellor from 1987 to 2001, Dr. Eakin taught higher education administration in the College of Education’s Department of Educational Leadership for five years, took time off, served as the interim chair of mathematics, science and instructional technology education for one year, took time off, and then accepted the position of interim dean of ECU’s new Honors College. Now in his second year as interim dean, he sees his tenure with the Honors College as a natural progression in his career.

“Just before I retired, we kicked off the notion of a merit scholarship program, so in some real sense, the EC Scholars program was started while I was chancellor, and for that I am thankful. It’s come back around, if you will, because there I was involved in the first initiation of the EC Scholars, and here I am working with the EC Scholars. That’s been a real joy.”

And he admits that working with ECU students is more fun than ever. “I say, without exaggeration, this is probably the most fun that I’ve ever had in my professional career. First, the Honors College is serving academically gifted students of the highest caliber and they make it fun, and second, we’re building a new college and every day brings new opportunities for further development of the college.”

Upon his retirement in 2001, friends and family helped fund an EC Scholars award in honor and recognition of his time as chancellor. Today, that scholarship is one of a growing number of merit-based scholarships in the EC Scholars program. However, the Eakins will tell you that number is not increasing rapidly enough. One of Dr. Eakin’s major projects, something he sees as imperative to the future of the university, is to increase the amount of private funding for the Honors College and the EC Scholars program.

“This year we awarded 15 new EC Scholar awards,” he said. “Next year, if things work out well, we hope to give out 18 awards. In all candor, we are far behind most of our competition in terms of the number of awards we can give. I’m trying to let people know how important it is to have merit scholarships, in particular EC Scholar awards, and see if I can enlist them in increasing that opportunity for our students.”

Dr. Eakin believes that the Honors College and the EC Scholars program not only enhance the university’s reputation, but they also enhance the education that all ECU students receive. “If you have even one or two really bright students in a class, it raises the tenor of the entire class. I believe that fervently. We’re delighted to have the EC Scholars here because of their talent, we’re delighted to have them here because they will contribute to the learning of their peers, and we believe that their presence is a source of pleasure for faculty members that have the opportunity to work with them. Many faculty have a chance to work one-on-one with these very bright and very able students.”

The Eakins believe wholeheartedly in ECU’s academic prowess and ability to train tomorrow’s global and community leaders, and see the potential in the merit-based Honors College and EC Scholars program.

“East Carolina has always prided itself on being able to do things under the most dire of circumstances, accomplish in the face of adversity.”

—Dr. Richard Eakin

“East Carolina has always prided itself on being able to do things under the most dire of circumstances, accomplish in the face of adversity,” he said. “As I look at the university and its ambition, as described by one of the local television stations recently, to raise the academic reputation of the institution through the EC Scholars, the Honors College, or other merit scholarships, there could be no greater gift to this institution than a gift that would support academically gifted students. We have had a fabulous reputation and experience in terms of raising money in support of our athletics program, and I’m hoping that same energy, zeal, and fervor could find its way into the support of academics. I would encourage everyone to support the academic mission of the institution and to help us build an academic reputation in which each of us can take great pride.”

JoAnn Eakin has recently joined the board of directors of the ECU’s Women’s Roundtable, which works to encourage leadership and philanthropy by women and to raise funds for ECU’s Access scholarship program. In this role and as the wife of a former chancellor, she has firsthand, intimate knowledge of the deep need for private support for scholarships. She is quick to point to the need for a significant contribution to name the EC Scholars program and endow the scholarships in perpetuity, citing examples such as the Park Fellowships at NC State University or the Morehead-Cain Scholarships at UNC-Chapel Hill. Dr. Eakin agrees.

“That’s something that East Carolina University needs to aspire to, and I hope that someday, not too far in the future, we would have somebody that has the capacity to do that for East Carolina. It would be a terrific blessing for East Carolina University.”