Teaching the arts to children seems a perfect career for Elizabeth Helms. A vibrant student, she knows firsthand how much youngsters benefit from acting, dancing, and learning to express themselves.

It’s no surprise she holds the Samuel J. Wornom III and Sandra Leonard Wornom Award, one of the university’s highly prestigious East Carolina Scholars Awards. The EC Scholars Award brings talented students to ECU, providing up to $10,000 a year toward tuition and expenses. On campus, award recipients become part of an engaging community of other scholars.

“Being an EC Scholar has been so meaningful for me,” says Helms. “I’ve made a lot of friends, but I am still free to be who I am.”

Knowing they’re furthering the education of exceptional students brings a lot of joy to graduates Sam Wornom ’65 and his wife, Sandra ’99. “ECU has meant a lot for both of us,” Sandra Wornom says. “We made a lot of friends and received a good education. We want others to have that chance, too.”

Sam Wornom has a long tradition of service to ECU. He served on the Board of Trustees, and he was instrumental in starting the ECU Educational Foundation, fondly known as the Pirate Club, with a landmark donation in 1983.

“We appreciate the education we got at ECU and love the university,” says Wornom, whose business successes include starting the Pantry Stores in the late 1960s. After selling the chain in 1987, he today serves as president and CEO of Nouveau Investments. “Life has been good to us, and we wanted to make sure we gave back to our university.”

For Helms, who often works with school children, the award will help her make a difference for children through the arts.

“I have really seen the effect it can have,” she says. “For some, dance and theatre classes are the highlight of the day, and that will help keep them coming to school.”