Though she isn’t an alumnus, Grace Williams Ceruzzi says she recognized the passion of East Carolina University’s alumni and faculty through her husband Frank’s infectious love for his alma mater. Ceruzzi was so inspired by his unselfishness and generosity towards ECU and impressed with the University’s Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders’ dedication to the field of speech pathology that she has chosen to establish a fund to provide scholarship support to students concentrating in Assistive Technology Learning.

Through her planned gift, Ceruzzi will assist others in a field of study that she feels exceptionally passionate about after helping children with communication disorders for 49 years. Ceruzzi has chosen to designate the College of Allied Health Sciences and the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders as the recipient of a portion of a life insurance policy so that at the time of her passing her legacy and shall live on.

“I chose speech pathology for this scholarship as this has been my profession for 49 years. I attached the Assistive Technology component because this has been my special interest for the last 40 years,” said Ceruzzi, “It was my concentration of working with multi-handicapped children that led me to understand that speech would never be a possibility for some of them but communication was still their right and necessity for a complete life. Technology would be the way for them to have a voice, so using my speech and language background I was able to jump in on the growing movement to offer augmentative communication.”

Ceruzzi said that during her years as a speech pathologist the technology we have today was beyond her imagination. Her excitement at seeing a child learn how to control his or her environment by communicating feelings, wants, and hopes has grown as she has seen how new inventions and methods have aided field workers in making communication a possibility for every person. While her focus during her years in the field was centered on children, Ceruzzi is equally excited about how older adults have been affected by speech pathologists.

“Now, we are also concentrating on the adults who have Lou Gehrig’s Disease, strokes and laryngectomies that require that same creativity and persistence to give anyone deprived of speech that same ability for communication to give them life again,” she said.
Her husband’s passion for ECU may have been a driving force behind her decision to designate a gift towards the University, but that decision was also aided by her experience with other ECU faculty and students.

During a workshop for the ECU Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders led by Ceruzzi around 25 years ago, she was impressed by the University’s dedication to augmentative communication and assistive technology.

“It was exciting to see that the University saw the potential for this specialty by creating a lab in the special education department so that teachers, speech pathologists, and others in allied health could be exposed to this material in their training. This gave me hope that others could continue this vision and create even more exciting solutions,” she said.

During her tenure with Brunswick County Schools, Ceruzzi once again had the opportunity to interact with ECU when she worked with Amber Snyder, an ECU speech pathology graduate intern that left a lasting impression and also a special gift with Ceruzzi.

“When Amber left she framed a saying that I work by and circled it with photos of the children we worked with,” said Ceruzzi.

That saying, which is the credo of the National Center for Learning Disabilities, says “Let no child be demeaned, nor have his wonder diminished because of our ignorance or inactivity. Let no child be deprived of discovery because we lack the resources to discover his problem. Let no child ever doubt himself or his mind because we are unsure of our commitment.”

Ceruzzi is certainly not only teaching that philosophy but living by it as well as she continues to dedicate her time and funds towards the field of speech pathology and assistive technology learning. Through her endowed scholarship, others will be able to do the same.