While the Fall Symposium may have primarily been designed to educate the next generation of genetic counselors with knowledge and skills relevant to recent advances in genomic medicine, it also evolved to be a major contributor to our Program’s endowment, thanks to the leadership and generosity of 1988 alum Amelia “Missy” Craver.

Missy traces it all back to a spontaneous lunch with Janice last spring. While traveling through Atlanta, where Missy currently resides, Janice called her up and asked to meet her for an impromptu lunch. “We talked for several hours,” says Missy. “We caught up on life and the happenings at the Program. Janice explained she and the Advisory Board had been thinking of ways to boost the Program’s endowment and financial future.” Janice and Missy discussed the idea of a Fall Symposium and brainstormed ideas of how to bring it to fruition.

And that was just the beginning! After several weeks of thinking of ways that she could contribute, Missy called Janice and offered an idea: in conjunction with the Fall Symposium, she would contribute $25,000 to match dollar for dollar donations received from alumni, friends of the Genetic Counseling Program, and from local, statewide, and national organizations. WOW!!
The Amelia Craver Challenge Grant for Genetic Counseling was born and ultimately stimulated over $75,000 in endowment contributions. “I am so very pleased with how it all turned out. The Symposium was a fantastic event; Janice did a fabulous job. I really really was impressed by the results.” And, as a fun aside, ALL of Missy’s classmates from 1988 attended the Symposium resulting in a mini class reunion! “It was just great seeing every single one of them. It was as if we hadn’t missed all those years,” Missy remembers.

We are so very grateful for the generosity of Missy and all of our alum and completely agree with Missy when she said, “No amount is too small. Consistent giving in small amounts makes a big difference.” Missy reflected on our economic environment saying “With budget cuts, Programs like this can lose a lot if we do not support them. I am so happy to support the Genetic Counseling Program at USC. I am just so proud of its quality.” Thank you, Missy. We appreciate your generosity and look forward to seeing all that will be possible because of it.

Advisory Board: Ready to Secure the Future of Genetic Counseling

At its inaugural September 2012 meeting, the Genetic Counseling Advisory Board committed to establish an endowment to ensure the Genetic Counseling Program continues to provide excellence in the education of genetic counselors for many years to come. The Board adopted a five point strategic plan to achieve this goal through high level education and faculty support, outreach to alumni and friends of the program, increased community awareness, and the development of partnerships with national genetic corporations and the local business and medical communities. When Janice shared that Dr. C. Thomas Caskey offered to come to Columbia to provide specific genome education around whole exome sequencing, the Board rallied around the idea to create a high level continuing education event for genetic counselors. Such an event was an opportunity to meet all of the strategic outreach initiatives, deliver much needed continuing education and generate funding for the endowment.

Dr. C. Thomas Caskey, our Fall Symposium keynote, is the recipient of the 2014 Richard R. Ferrante Friend of the Genetic Counseling Program Award.

Months of hard work and planning culminated on November 14, 2013 with the first USC Genetic Counseling Fall Symposium, “Educating Next Generation Genetic Counselors”. The program featured Dr. C. Thomas Caskey as the keynote speaker and six highly regarded genetics professionals from across the country. Over 100 genetic counselors and geneticists from the southeast and students...
For 2006 graduate Jeanie Schaller Tirch, this past year was a big one both personally and professionally! After getting engaged atop a glacier on an Alaskan cruise, she married her husband in September 2013. If that wasn’t enough excitement, Jeanie made a career move from Myriad Genetics to become a Genomic Counselor for start-up company Personalis, Inc. ‘I was conflicted’, Jeanie remembers, ‘I loved Myriad but was intrigued by exome/genome testing.’ Toward the end of her seven years with Myriad, Jeanie attended an Illumina sponsored symposium ‘Understanding your Genome’. This only piqued her curiosity and ultimately led her to have her own genome sequenced and participate in the ‘Personal Genome Project’. ‘I was so nervous but excited! I felt like there was a lot of potential in genome/exome testing and ultimately decided I wanted to be a part of it rather than watch from the sidelines.’ Thus, Jeanie began applying to companies doing genome/exome testing. While she describes the decision as nerve-wracking, she hasn’t looked back since joining Personalis, Inc. in fall 2013. Jeanie is routinely involved in analyzing patient samples, writing and reporting back results. Thanks to a massive team effort, Personalis, Inc. recently passed its CAP inspection and is now able to accept clinical samples.

Jeanie describes her new job as amazing. ‘It is mind-blowing how much information you have to learn in a new technology—my brain hurts some days! There has been a significant learning curve, but I love it.’ We are so proud of you Jeanie—you have set a great example for us as counselors—rather than always sitting back and watching technology develop, let’s help to actually develop it!!

Genetic Counseling Program Receives Full Accreditation

As many of you know, our Program recently underwent the process to achieve Reaccreditation by the Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling (ACGC). The progression of events began with an intensive self study late last summer. Several committees volunteered their time and energy in an internal review of our Program’s administration, curriculum, clinical rotations, and thesis work. The findings and suggestions for improvement were presented and discussed at a Self Study retreat this past November and ultimately transformed into a large document of short and long term Program plans submitted to the ACGC. Representatives from ACGC visited our Program in February 2014. We are proud to report full reaccreditation for the maximum eight years (through 2022!!) and count each of you a part of our Program’s success!!

Founding Director, Dr. Robert Young, shares a smile and delightful conversation with Dr. Caskey and Missy Craver at the Fall Symposium Reception
Katie Berrier Sheets (‘09) has wasted no time in making an impact in the genetic counseling community. Her accomplishments in research surrounding the Down syndrome community led to her being honored at the Annual Black Tie White Coat Gala as the 2014 USC School of Medicine Distinguished Master’s in Genetic Counseling Alumni Award.

Katie’s Master’s thesis “Defining essential information in a balanced description of Down syndrome” served as a jumpstart for Katie’s involvement in multiple publications and presentations which are shaping the way the medical community addresses a new diagnosis of Down syndrome.

In 2011 Katie played a crucial role in the development of NSGC Practice Guidelines for communicating a diagnosis of Down syndrome. These guidelines were a long time coming and involved the collaboration of many different perspectives.

Katie is currently the Clinical Research Coordinator at Duke University where she has coordinated many grant-funded research efforts. Recently, she and Blythe Chrissman, MS, CGC, are spearheading the Down Syndrome Prenatal Diagnosis Study, researching the experiences of parents during the process of facing this diagnosis. Katie and Blythe were awarded the Jane Engelberg Memorial Fellowship in 2013 for their proposal of this study.

Not only is Katie active in national efforts to advocate for the care of these patients but she has been an invited speaker for many local regional events. If you have ever seen her present her research to families, you can see her zero-in on the issues that are truly important to them. When Katie accepted her award, she made time to present at our Contemporary Issues class and inspired yet another group of budding genetic counselors.

Katie is dedicated to her passions. Her mentor, Cam Braisington (’88) says “I have been impressed with Katie’s incredible work ethic, her organization and her attention to detail, her ability to work well with others as a team and her keen intellect.”

Katie would like to thank her mentors, advisors and everyone who encouraged her along the way. In her own words, “I truly appreciate the opportunities and professional networks I was afforded in the USC Genetic Counseling program. I know I would not have accomplished all that I have without the solid foundation I received.”

Congratulations Katie Berrier Sheets!

“I truly appreciate the opportunities and professional networks I was afforded in the USC Genetic Counseling program. I know I would not have accomplished all that I have without the solid foundation I received. I am very honored to receive the Distinguished Alumni Award and especially thankful to my mentors, advisors and colleagues for their encouragement, guidance and support which have helped to stimulate and nurture my personal and professional growth and my desire to give back to the community and to future generations of genetic counselors.”

Katie Berrier Sheets

Katie Berrier Sheets was honored with the 2014 Distinguished Master’s in Genetic Counseling Alumni Award.
from four genetic counseling programs as well as prospective students were treated to the latest information on next generation and whole exome sequencing and its impact on clinical care. Education outreach was also extended to the medical community with the incorporation of Dr. Christopher Robinson’s discussion of non-invasive prenatal testing to the USCSOM Departments of OBGYN and Pediatrics Grand Rounds.

The Amelia Craver Challenge Grant helped to build momentum and excitement among alumni in preparation for the event. (See accompanying article featuring Missy’s generosity.) In an effort to keep registration costs low and to capitalize on the opportunity to obtain funding for the endowment, sponsorships were obtained through partnerships with national genetics corporations and the local community. In addition to efforts to engage the community through sponsorships and promotion of the symposium, our USC Genetic Counseling Ambassadors, Board member Cathy Novinger and her sister, Donna Jumper, were present. As Ambassadors, the sisters share their personal experience with BRCA testing in the Columbia community, to promote the importance of knowing genetic information in achieving healthy outcomes.

The Fall Symposium and the Amelia Craver Challenge Grant were successful in allowing us to establish the Genetic Counseling Endowment. However, the event was more than a financial success. The Symposium provided a great opportunity to showcase the USC Genetic Counseling Program and an opportunity for alumni to reconnect with each other and with their alma mater. These connections were a highlight of the event, especially the reunion of the class of 1988. Another memorable connection occurred at the Private Reception held the night before the event, graciously hosted by alumna Debbie Zvejnieks and her husband, Peter. Twelve years prior, Dr. Caskey had been instrumental in making a life-saving diagnosis of sucrase-isomaltase deficiency in a Columbia infant. Today the patient is a healthy 13 year old. She and her family were able to meet Dr. Caskey and personally thank him for all he had done. The meeting was described by Dr. Caskey as “a joy” in an article featured in The State newspaper. The article, by Joey Holleman, promoted both the Genetic Counseling Symposium and the impact advancements in genetic testing have on clinical diagnosis.

With the success of the event in building the Endowment and in valuable education outreach, we look forward to the Fall Symposium becoming an annual event.

We hope you will plan to join us in Columbia on November 14, 2014!
Watch this webpage for details
http://geneticcounseling.med.sc.edu/Fall.Symposium.asp

Karen Brooks is retiring!.....Really?!!
Consummate counselor and educator, Karen has invested herself deeply in the USC Genetic Counseling Program. She has always brought her whole self to work, and over her career has served countless families in pediatrics, prenatal and cancer realms. Her cancer genetics course is central to genetic counselor education and her clinical rotation, coveted by students.

Yet, she isn’t really retiring.....she’s with us down the street, building new avenues for genetic counselors as she integrates in a private oncology practice. We look forward to continuing to serve the community together collaborating as always, as neighbors rather than down the hall, and look forward to watching her work and family life continue to shine.

Thank You Karen Brooks Continued p. 7
Dr. Richard Ferrante, center, with a couple of favorite Genetic Counseling Alumna, Emily Rosebrough Jordon (2010), right and Melissa Bennett (1997) left.

The Class of 1988 honored Missy with their attendance at the Fall Symposium. Pictured left to right: Ken Loud, Kerry Crandall, Cam Brasington, Debbie Costakos, Missy Craver with Program Director, Janice Edwards.

Karen Brooks continued from page 7

Thank you for 25 wonderful years of service!

Hear a bit of what her former students have to say in reflection and gratitude:

I still remember Karen encouraging our class to value ourselves and our training when interviewing for a job and to have courage to negotiate. Best of luck to you, Karen, on your new adventure. Thank you for being a great mentor and colleague! Sheri Babb 1990

Karen personifies “cancer genetic counselor” and I’m betting most of us who chose that specialty did so with the hope of emulating her knowledge and excellence. I was fortunate as a “new” cancer counselor in SC to have Karen a phone call away for insight and support, and we burned those wires with regularity as many of our cases involved a relative or two seen by the other. The USC Program will miss her daily presence, but with Karen still in Columbia, all sorts of changes and new ventures become possible now; best of luck to all of you!! Lyn Hammond Smith 1990

Dear Karen, I have very fond memories of your mentorship during my genetic counseling training. I wish you all the best in your next adventure! All the best, Karen! Ellen Schlenker 1991

One memory I have of Karen is the fact that she shared “more than genetic wisdom” with me. She actually loaned me her wedding dress which has led to 23+ years of marriage and 3 kids! When I think of Karen, I am always reminded of how generous she was to help a “poor” graduate student wear a beautiful wedding dress on her special day. Ginny Vickers 1991

My memory of Karen as a supervisor and mentor is that she was unfailingly positive and encouraging! I would look forward to counseling with her and always found her feedback to be helpful and collaborative. I enjoyed working with Karen very much and am sure that her new co-workers will as well!! Good luck in all your future endeavors, Karen! Jodie Asher 1992

Karen is an amazing teacher, mentor, and genetic counselor. She has been a true inspiration! Thank you for all the pearls of wisdom that you have shared. Karen Charles Baker 2000

Karen is a trailblazer. Not only in cancer genetic counseling, but in the art and science of living well. How can she possibly have been working as a genetic counselor for 25 years when she’s only 32! I want whatever she’s having! Best wishes and many thanks, Karen! Lindsay Metcalf 2000

Karen had a way of teaching cancer genetics that really stuck with you. She was passionate, knowledgeable, and creative in her counseling skills. She is responsible for cultivating my own passion for cancer counseling. We’ll miss you, Karen! Jade Cognetti 2013

Karen helped to inspire my interest in cancer genetic counseling and I am thankful to all the experience and expertise she shared with us. I still carry her guiding words with me and, although it’s been 8 years since I graduated, I still use her thoughtful approach to a difficult family as a teaching tool in my lectures to genetic counseling students.

Michele (Jacobs) Gabree 2006

I think Karen exemplifies the true spirit of genetic counselors leading the way for genetics in medicine with the way she moved into cancer genetics when it was new and made herself an expert. She has educated numerous other healthcare providers as we all aim to do and served so many families along the way. How lucky we all have been to learn from her! Thank you, Karen! Kellie King 2009

Something I so appreciated about Karen during my time in the program is how she treated me more as a colleague rather than just a student in training. She instilled in me a sense of confidence, and I felt included and valued as a genetic counselor. Also, I’m still using part of her BRCA1/2 spiel to this day…because it is that good! Thank you, Karen for serving us so well. Many blessings in your next chapter. Madison Thomason 2010

Cancer genetics was my favorite class. I felt like Karen always sent us home with something to think about besides homework. Sometimes, yes, it was a paranoid terror that we might have cancer of the skin, colon, pancreas, etc., but more often it was a fascinated appreciation for the complexities of hereditary cancer syndromes and respect for the difficult decisions faced by those at risk. Kim Hamann 2013

When I first interviewed at USC, I told Karen that I was aspiring to be a cancer genetic counselor and I remember how supportive and excited she was. During my training, she was my mentor during one of my cancer rotations and helped to build the foundation of the professional that I am today. I accomplished my goal, and through Karen’s support and guidance, am now a cancer genetic counselor! Darcy Berry 2013

I remember Karen as a counselor who would go out of her way to help patients no matter how busy she was. Stephen White 2013

Karen sparked my interest in cancer genetics. I don’t know if I’d be seeking a cancer genetic counseling position today if it wasn’t for her contributions to my education. Hannah Warren 2014

I was only able to interact with Karen for a brief time in her long career, but I appreciate the clinic focused approach she takes to all of her lessons which sure to make us the most are prepared cancer counselors possible. Andrew Alfonso 2015
Sonja Eubanks Higgins (’95): My husband Robert and I welcomed a son into our family on December 17, 2013. Connor Caldwell Higgins was born at MUSC and has two half sisters who are ages 11 and 14 and are adjusting to having a baby around the house. Connor is a happy baby and gives his parents much joy.

Libby Malphrus (’01): For me personally, I am still full-time prenatal and also clinical genetics instructor for the OBGYN/internal medicine residency programs. I am also helping the Hemophilia treatment center at our Children's hospital by providing genetic counseling for the monthly bleeding disorders clinic. Finally, my non-profit organization (Help the Hoo-Hahs) has raised over $60,000 for local women with GYN cancers. www.helpthehoohahs.org

Christina Laning Alamillo (’04): I recently left Northwestern Reproductive Genetics after 5 years, where I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to develop multiple pre-counseling iPad applications for patients as well as author a number of research articles. In February I accepted a position as a whole exome reporting counselor with Ambry Genetics, and I’m very excited to begin this new chapter in my career. My girls are growing up quickly and I have been constantly striving to achieve the perfect work/life balance- I think I am finally there!

Anne Baughman Bandholz (’04): My husband, Eric, and I welcomed our first born, Eleanor Jensen Bandholz, to the world on November 17, 2013. She weighed 7lb 10oz and is so much fun to love and cuddle. I have decreased my hours a little at Signature and am now working 3 days a week.

Bridgette Aufmuth (’05): I left my part-time clinical position at Greenville Health System Cancer Institute in November to be a full-time mom to my two daughters, who are now 2 and 4. I remain on staff as a PRN GC working on various projects.

Leigh Daidson deHoll (’10): I’m still working at MUSC as a prenatal counselor. Andrew’s job in Columbia finally wrapped up last July so after a 2 1/2 year commuter marriage we finally live in the same city again! But the most exciting news is the arrival of our daughter! Mary Sims deHoll (“Mary Sims”) was born November 6, 2013. Andrew and I are enjoying every minute of being new parents!

Erin Demo (’05): We had a new addition to the family in Jan. Ann McHaney Demo was born 1/14/14 and is so sweet! Her big sister Katherine loves her to pieces! I am still working half time at CHOA-Sibley Heart center in pediatric CV genetics.

Anna Edens Hurst (’07): I am finishing pediatric residency at Wake Forest in June will start medical genetics residency at University of Alabama - Birmingham in July. I am really excited to be working with some USC alums, and I hope to be involved with the genetic counseling program and students!

Rebecca Eells Evans (’08): Nate and I welcomed our beautiful son Elijah Matthew Evans on October 12. He was born with a bilateral cleft lip and palate. He is recovering wonderfully from his first of many surgeries. We live in Indianapolis, and I am working part time with a rural genetics clinic in the heart of the largest Amish settlement in Indiana.
Alumni News

Sarah Hash (‘08): On July 3rd, 2013 we welcomed our son, Nolan James. Life is busy as a family of four, but we have so much love and joy in our home.

Kristen Rohrer Wood (‘08): I am not currently working as a genetic counselor, although I hope to get back to it one day. I miss the field a lot, but am immersed in mommy life for now. Our daughter Emma is 14 months old and doing great, about to be a big sister! Baby #2 is due in September. I hope to eventually be able to get away to a conference again and catch up with everyone.

Kellie King (‘09): I’m still the lab counselor at the Greenwood Genetic Center - going on 4 years now! I love GGC and working with the lab. My big news is that I got engaged right before Thanksgiving! We are getting married in January and are so excited!!

Emily Rosebrough Jordon (‘11): In Fall of 2013 I accepted a position with the USC genetic counseling program! I am enjoying working as a prenatal genetic counselor and learning the ropes of teaching. Max and I spent the summer transitioning from Jackson, MS back to Columbia, SC!

Elizabeth Ziglinski Turner (‘12): 2013 was an exciting year for us. I worked part of the year as a genetic counselor here in Louisville and passed the boards. I married the love of my life, Stephen, and we began a new chapter together. On December 28, we joyously welcomed our sweet daughter, Emery Elizabeth, into the world.

With Appreciation to our Alumni and Friends of the Program

Donors for the 2013-14 Academic Year

Myron and Victoria Vincent (1987)
Amelia Craver (1988)
Mr. Jeffrey & Dr. Deborah Costakos (1988)
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Bridgette Aufmuth (2005)
Peggy Walker (2008)
Jaime Lynn Natoli (2011)
Karen Brooks

Drs. Richard & Ruth Ann Ferrante
Dr. Michael D. Pavy
Dr. Joshua T. Thornhill, IV
Dr. Samuel Robert Young

And thank you for a special contribution in honor of Karen Brooks!!

Vicki Vincent (1987)
Kerry Crandall (1988)
Brent and Sherri Babb (1990)
Peggy Walker (2008)
Kellie King (2009)
Leigh deHoll (2010)
Emily Jordon (2010)
Jaime Natoli (2010)