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NEWS RELEASE

Feb. 23, 2009

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BLUE CROSS, BLUE SHIELD GIVES UM \$125,000 FOR ENDOWED CHAIR

MISSOULA -

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Montana (BCBSMT) has pledged \$125,000 to The University of Montana Foundation toward an endowed chair in cardiovascular sciences at UM. The gift brings the University closer to the goal of \$2.5 million to secure the endowed position.

“As Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Montana focuses on our mission to help people lead healthier lives, it made perfect sense to support a program that we believe will help continue the cutting-edge research that is resulting in better health for all Montanans,” said Sherry Cladouhos, BCBSMT president and CEO.

The endowed chair holder will be a physician or combined M.D./Ph.D., and will serve as a Department of Biomedical and Pharmaceutical Sciences professor at UM’s Skaggs School of Pharmacy.

David Forbes, dean of UM’s College of Health Professions and Biomedical Sciences, said the chair holder will take over leadership of a collaboration between the University and partners in the medical community who have “changed the face of cardiac care and research in Montana since 1995.”

One of those partners is the International Heart Institute of Montana (IHI), which is helping Montana become a national leader in cardiac care. Tim Descamps, executive director of IHI, said this collaboration has led to state-of-the-art cardiac care, healthier populations and a strong link between research and applied science in academic and hospital settings.

"In a state with no medical school, this model is as close as Montana will come to having the best of both worlds – top medical staff and top biomedical researchers combining their efforts for the long-term well-being of the community," he said.

The new chair holder will perpetuate the legacy of former IHI director Dr. Carlos Duran, who is internationally known for his pioneering research and whose contributions have been critical to IHI's effectiveness. During his tenure as director, Duran guided the institute to world acclaim for heart-valve surgery expertise.

Forbes said the importance of cardiology cannot be overstated. "It's easy to see why improved cardiac care is so vital when you look at the numbers," he said. "Nearly 5 million Americans currently live with congestive heart failure. And heart disease is the No. 1 killer of women as well as men. In fact, more women die of heart disease than of all cancers combined. With gifts like this, our UM researchers can continue working hard to help reduce these grim statistics."

George Lambros, co-chair along with Jim Coté of the Endowed Chair in Cardiovascular Sciences Committee of Volunteers, said the public doesn't always recognize the prevalence of cardiovascular care. "Most people are surprised to learn

that more than 400 open-heart surgery procedures are performed each year in Missoula and Kalispell alone," he said. "This is possible because of the great collaboration of surgeons, scientists and researchers that have chosen to make Montana their home. And the new endowed chair holder will help keep all elements of research, education and application advancing at the highest levels possible."

For more information or to learn more about supporting UM's endowed chair in cardiovascular sciences, call Mark Schleicher, UM Foundation's director of development for the College of Health Professions and Biomedical Sciences, at 406-243-4222.

The UM Foundation is a nonprofit organization that raises funds and manages assets and relationships for the University to help ensure excellence, access and affordability. More information about the foundation is online at

<http://www.umt.edu/umf>.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Additional professional contacts include Tim Descamps, executive director, International Heart Institute of Montana, TimD@stpatrick.org; and Vernon Grund, chair, UM Department of Biomedical and Pharmaceutical Sciences, 406-243-4770, vernon.grund@umontana.edu.

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