**Jim and Lyra Watwood Educational Excellence Scholarship**

This Fund is established by Dr. Maribeth Watwood (Founder) to honor her parents, Jim and Lyra Watwood, who regarded education as essential for equipping citizens with the skills necessary to both elevate society and succeed individually. Their generosity and humble spirits were an inspiration to many throughout their lives. A description of their lives and values follows.

 The Jim and Lyra Watwood Educational Excellence Scholarship rewards NAU graduate students in the fields of biology, chemistry, and forestry who have succeeded academically, made positive contributions to their communities, and have financial challenges. It is hoped that, through this award, students will be supported in their own educational journeys, so that they can achieve personal success and make positive contributions to their communities and the world.

Dr. Maribeth Watwood serves as dean of the Graduate College at Northern Arizona University.  Prior to this assignment, she was chair in the Department of Biological Sciences for over 8 years.  A microbiologist by training, her research has focused on better understanding microbial processes and how they can be manipulated to clean up contaminated environments.  Maribeth is grateful for the love of learning instilled in her by her parents. It is her privilege to honor them by supporting NAU graduate students through scholarships recognizing academic achievement.

Jim and Lyra Watwood valued higher education as a fundamental vehicle for achieving individual goals and addressing societal needs. Lyra Peavy Watwood earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Biology from Shorter College in 1949, just prior to the discovery of the structure of deoxyribose nucleic acid (DNA). She often commented on this, acknowledging how rapidly the science of genetics had advanced since then. She worked for the State of Georgia Department of Health for a decade, retiring once she had children. She imparted her love of learning to both of her children throughout their upbringing. Her respect for higher education was nurtured by her own parents, who also held higher education in the highest regard. Lyra’s mother and namesake, Lyra Cook Peavy, had earned a chemistry degree in 1920, which was quite notable for a woman of that era.

Lyra’s husband, James Gasoway (Jim) Watwood, earned a Civil Engineering degree from Auburn University, where his father, Vernon Bell Watwood, had graduated and served as a faculty member. After service in the US Air Force and a lengthy career in the textile manufacturing sector, he retired to immerse himself in his true passion, growing pine trees for lumber in Georgia and Alabama. He spent many long days roaming through his tree farms, planting seedlings, conducting land surveys, and participating more in the management of the farms than he had been able to prior to retirement.

Jim and Lyra were also committed to community engagement and service to others. This dedication was manifest through outreach activities with their church, participation in fundraising for charity organizations, and important community leadership roles. They were keenly aware of the trying circumstances experienced by those less fortunate, and much of their community service focused on providing resources to people in need. One of Jim’s commitments, for example, was delivering Meals on Wheels in the Macon, Georgia area. He was deeply affected by these experiences, and he would draw on them to inform dinner conversations about our responsibility to serve people struggling with poverty.

The principles most strongly held by Jim and Lyra were personal integrity and responsibility, compassion and kindness, and thankfulness for the blessings of family and friends. They regarded education as essential for equipping citizens with the skills necessary to both elevate society and succeed individually. Their generosity and humble spirits were an inspiration to many throughout their lives.