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UNIVERSITY OF
SASKATCHEWAN

Planned gift with deep roots in AgBio

BY COLLEEN MACPHERSON

Although still in the prime of their lives, **Mike Solohub (BSc'88, BSA'92, MSc'97)** and **Dr. Colleen Christensen (BSc'93, PhD'99)** have laid the groundwork to ensure they can support future generations of graduate students in the College of Agriculture and Bioresources at the University of Saskatchewan (USask).

The college alumni have arranged planned gifts in their wills that will establish annual scholarships in their names for domestic and international MSc and PhD students. The future awards, to be aligned with the annual domestic

tuition fees of the day, are a nod to both their experiences at and connections to the college over the years, but also to the successful careers they've built from their university education.

"This planned gift is all kind of new for us," said Christensen. "We just put this together in the last few months, but we've been talking about it for a long time."

Solohub added they were both lucky to have benefited from scholarships while doing their graduate studies, and they both also know the financial pressures students face.

“When you’re going through grad school, you’re just so poor,” said Christensen. “A scholarship could mean a student won’t have to get a part-time job and can really focus on school.”

Christensen and Solohub, who met at a grad student mixer at the Kernen Crop Research Farm, are specific about the eligibility requirements for each scholarship. The Christensen award will go to a student in the Department of Animal and Poultry Science whose thesis work is directly relevant to the agricultural producers of Western Canada, a reflection of her own studies and career path.

“I was a farm kid from Young,” she said. “My parents had a mixed farm, then moved to just dry-land agriculture so driving grain trucks became my specialty, but I really loved science.”

Christensen’s first degree was a BSc majoring in physiology. After a year teaching English in Japan, she secured a job as a technician at the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization (VIDO) on the USask campus “where I realized I really loved lab work.”

Her experience at VIDO led her to the Department of Animal and Poultry Science where, after one year in a master’s program, she was elevated to a PhD in animal physiology doing research on a vaccine for pigs designed to increase litter size. While the results were promising, the vaccine ultimately proved to be impractical for producers, “and I realized there are all kinds of science that never make it into the real world. I loved doing that PhD, but I wasn’t sure how to put it all together to get a job.”

It all came together while she was working at the college’s Virtual College of Biotechnology

and also taking classes for a business certificate. “I realized science could be business,” she said.

Christensen went on to serve as general manager of the Saskatchewan Colostrum Company, a spinoff from the Western College of Veterinary Medicine that collected and freeze-dried dairy colostrum for sale around the world.

From there, she moved to the Canadian Light Source (CLS) to help establish the Biomedical Imaging and Therapy Beamline before joining its business development unit to introduce agriculture companies to the possibilities of synchrotron science.

She returned to the college, to the Feeds Innovation Institute, to work on by-products from processes like biofuel production and oilseed crushing, which again made use of both her science and business skills. It was satisfying “to work with dozens of companies producing products out of our own western Canadian grains,” she said.

Christensen again combines her scientific and business background in her current position as a research grant administrator working with agriculture companies in Saskatchewan.

For Solohub, soil has been at the heart of his studies and his career, so the scholarship in his name will go to a graduate student in the Department of Soil Science whose research is relevant to mapping, genesis, or fertility of soil.

Even as a young man growing up in Wynyard, Solohub knew he wanted a career that would take him outdoors. To that end, he completed his first undergraduate degree at USask in physical geography. After “bouncing around for a couple of years,” he headed back to university,

this time majoring in soil science, a discipline that complimented his geography training.

With his BSA in hand, Solohub spent a year in Calgary doing soil surveys as a contractor. It was there he learned two things: "I liked the college, and Calgary was too big."

Most of Solohub's work involves sophisticated instrumentation "but I also like digging holes and looking at soil." In fact, there's a photo in their home of him standing knee deep in a hole in an open field, decked out in hard hat and high visibility vest, and being keenly observed by a semi-circle of cattle. His smile says it all

about Solohub's love of soil and the outdoors.

Solohub and Christensen have deep roots in the college, having both spent about a dozen years there as students and employees, and their planned gift is a very personal way to give back. Solohub acknowledged that donations come in many forms "but the idea of being able to help out a student was most important to me."

Christensen agreed. "It was important to me too," she said. "This could change someone's life." ♥

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Visit alumni.usask.ca for more details.



Student bursaries: A powerful affirmation

“Donors play an important role in transforming lives by providing opportunities for education,” said **Bristine Teneng**, a fourth-year computer engineering student at USask. “Their generosity goes beyond financial assistance; it instills a sense of belief and support in students. By investing in education, donors contribute to the development of individuals who, in turn, contribute to society.”

Teneng, originally from Bamenda, Cameroon, was a 2023-24 recipient of the **Peter Lewochko Bursary** and is set to graduate in 2026. Peter Lewochko, a lifelong Saskatchewan farmer, established the award in 2015 to assist students with financial need. He later enhanced the endowment through a gift in his will. The Peter Lewochko Bursary has proudly supported USask students an impressive **454** times, allowing them to thrive in their academic journeys.



Bristine Teneng, College of Engineering

“Donors play an important role in transforming lives by providing opportunities for education.”

“This award holds great significance for me, as it not only alleviates the financial burden of my education as an international student but also serves as a powerful affirmation of my hard work and dedication,” said Teneng. ♥



(L-R) **Savannah Zalik**, Development Officer, Legacy Giving;
Sacha Tegenkamp, Director, Legacy Giving

Questions? We're here to help.

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