

# Etemad Family Program Endowment

## Supporting Arts and Humanities



The Etemad family is rooted in rural North Dakota. Sharon Olson Etemad grew up on a farm near Starkweather with sisters, Merle and Nancy, and brother, Donald. Sharon tells delightfully wholesome stories about childhood adventures with her parents and siblings—getting 4-H projects ready for the fair, working in Quick’s grocery store and creamery, raising chickens for spending money, and her first sewing machine. With an elementary teacher for a mother and a father who was an entrepreneurial farmer, Sharon was prepared to approach the world as an adventurer. Jamestown College opened the doors to a wider world. Equipped with an elementary education degree with minors in English, math, and physical education, Sharon began a life-long career in education. Soon she was married to Firooz Etemad, an engineer of Persian decent who worked many years for DuPont. She continued teaching school, earned a master’s degree with a specialty in reading from Moorhead State College, and had her first adventure

as an administrator serving as the only woman on the school board in Clinton, Iowa. Soon they began a family. They enjoyed opportunities to live in several communities throughout the country including Moorhead, Minnesota; Clinton and Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Ashland, Kentucky; and Bellevue, Washington.

Sharon returned to North Dakota in 1982. She accepted a grant-funded position at Lake Region State College, and the family quickly settled into their new hometown. Devils Lake seemed a good fit for the children, David, Maryam, and Lida, who took advantage of numerous music, arts, and athletic opportunities. They thrived in school, making wonderful friendships and developing exemplary leadership skills. All three of Sharon’s children earned college degrees. David and Maryam completed degrees in electrical engineering, and Maryam went on to earn a Ph.D. in BioMedical Engineering. Lida received a Pharm.D. and an M.S. in Pharmaceutical Economics and Policy.

Devils Lake and Lake Region State College proved to be a good fit for Sharon's skill set. She became a passionate advocate for the institution and helped it grow and prosper. Sharon's leadership was validated in 1984 when the college joined the North Dakota University System as a branch campus of the University of North Dakota. UND president Thomas J. Clifford chose Sharon to lead the college and appointed her executive dean. He also challenged her to complete a doctorate degree, and in 1991, she graduated from the University of North Dakota with an Ed.D. in Educational Administration. Armed with an advanced degree, Sharon continued to provide innovative leadership, helping the college launch new programs and strengthen its educational niches. In 1999, LRSC's status was elevated to that of an independent campus within the university system. As part of this transition, Sharon was given the title of president of LRSC, a role she held until her retirement in June of 2008.

Sharon's love for the arts and sense of aesthetics is apparent throughout the campus. Displays of regional original artwork make a walk through the hallways an educational experience. Many art objects were purchased with funds from an endowment Sharon's family established to honor

their mother, Elsie Erickstad Olson, and each is accompanied by information about the artist and the medium. On a larger scale, Sharon worked to improve campus resources that serve both students and the community as a whole. She led major initiatives to raise funds to revitalize important campus resources—Paul Hohaug Library, Leever's Welcome Center, Robert Fawcett Auditorium—that support arts and education priorities for campus and for all who live in the greater Lake Region area. Sharon's commitment to the arts continued into retirement when she worked part-time as a grant-writer and fund-raiser at the North Dakota Museum of Art in Grand Forks, North Dakota.

For 26 years, the lives of the Etemad family and Lake Region State College were tightly entwined. The children were frequent visitors to their mother's workplace and frequent users of campus resources, including classrooms and the auditorium. Music and dance played important roles in the lives of the three Etemad children and continue to be valued activities for them, as adults. Thus, the Etemad family has requested this endowment be used to support and strengthen music and arts activities at Lake Region State College.