Erlens Carry on Legacy with Scholarship for Doctoral Student

“M"y father and mother believed in working directly with people. That's what I want to do by establishing a scholarship that directly benefits a student,” said Jonathon Erlen, Ph.D.

Jonathon and his wife, Judith, of Pittsburgh, Pa., continue to exemplify his parents. The Erlens are endowing a $50,000 scholarship for a deserving doctoral student in the College of Social Work who is interested in community service. They have also provided an extra $2,500 to make the scholarship immediately available.

Though Jonathon's parents worked in polar realms, they both were compassionate people who dedicated their lives to the betterment of as many people as they could reach. His father, Alexander Erlen, earned a bachelor's degree and a master's degree from Ohio State. He continued his education at Columbia University, where he earned a master's degree in social work. An active participant in the civil rights movement, Alexander—whose hometown was Columbus, Ohio—worked as a social worker for more than 50 years, primarily in Louisville, Ky.

“My father didn't want to be remembered by a plaque or a building; he would have valued a living legacy,” Jonathon said. “He really loved Ohio State.”

His mother, Selma, gave back by sharing her passion for movement. For four decades, she educated students at the Jewish Community Center in Louisville about modern dance, a distinct style of experimental dance developed in the United States and Germany in the early 20th century. “She was a hands-on person,” he added. Jonathon has discovered that, in his teaching, many of the characteristics of his parents come through. It's these qualities that he hopes will be carried on within the College of Social Work.

The Erlens are both on the faculty at the University of Pittsburgh. Jonathon teaches history of medicine and has published four books within his field. He also oversees the university's database of recent dissertations in the medical humanities. Judith is a nurse and oversees the doctoral program in the School of Nursing. Her research focus is the fight against AIDS and Alzheimer's disease.

Jonathon and Judith Erlen pose with Stella Resko (center), the first recipient of a scholarship established by the Erlens for a deserving doctoral student in the College of Social Work who is interested in community service.