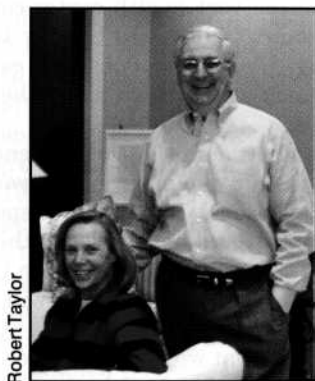


The Ferrettis of HSC

BY JUDITH WALL



Joe and Marti Ferretti found a home at the Health Sciences Center that has been good for marriage, family and dual careers.

Joe and Marti Ferretti could be a poster couple for academic marriages.

He is provost of the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center and an internationally recognized geneticist. She is director of the HSC's Division of Rehabilitation Sciences at the Health Sciences Center and has played a major role in improving services for people with disabilities in Oklahoma. They have been married for nearly 34 years, raised two children and are each other's best friend.

In their highly visible role as the center's first couple, they graciously represent the HSC at banquets, receptions, ribbon cuttings. Life is a continual balancing act for them, with administrative, professional and family responsibilities to fulfill—and enjoy.

Enjoyment is evident as they speak about the many facets of their lives. The OU Health Sciences Center is growing and prospering. They are proud of their children and dote on their grandchildren. They have achieved professionally. They share a passion for learning and travel.

They laugh when asked if they

have arrived at this point in their lives by following some sort of preconceived plan. Neither one had any intention of becoming an administrator. They never expected to become permanent residents of the Sooner state. Things just worked out this way—except they always knew that theirs would be a two-career marriage. Joe chuckles at the thought that it could have been otherwise.

Yet, in the 1960s when Joe and Marti first met at the University of Minnesota, most young people still had traditional expectations for marriage. The wife would put her education on the shelf at least long enough to raise the children and support her husband in his chosen career. *Ms.* magazine was a decade away. Young

wives were still being awarded PHT (putting-hubby-through) degrees.

Joe, a Chicago native, was a biochemistry graduate student at the time. Marti, who grew up in a military family, was an undergraduate in physical therapy. They dated for three years before getting married. Their son had been born by the time Joe finished his Ph.D. and received a post-doctoral fellowship at Johns Hopkins.

When Joe accepted a HSC faculty appointment in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology in 1969, they were expecting their second child. Marti continued to work as a hospital-based physical therapist and entered graduate school when their two children were preschoolers.

With small children and busy



Robert Taylor

The influence of their adopted Southwest is reflected in the Oklahoma City home of HSC Provost Joe Ferretti and his wife, Marti, director of the Division of Rehabilitation Sciences.

schedules, it was a hectic time for the Ferrettis, and it took both of them working together to keep the home fires burning. Yes, Joe changed diapers and car pooled, Marti says, and he is quite competent in the kitchen. They both agree that they and their children benefited greatly by having two fully participatory parents.

"I never would have been able to do what I've done if we'd had a more traditional marriage," Marti says.

"And I never would have been able to have achieved what I have without her," Joe says. "There's no question in my mind about that."

When asked what kept them in Oklahoma, Joe explains that when the time came to decide whether to move on or stay, Marti had a position at the University, and his research was going well.

"One of the reasons I came here was because there was an opportunity to do things on my own, to be more independent. I didn't have to be

part of some big machine here. And the people were so friendly and nice. I know everyone always says that," Joe adds with a smile, "but it's true."

Even though the Ferrettis received attractive offers from other institutions, they found the Health Sciences Center to be a good match for them professionally. And they had come to think of Oklahoma as home—until they someday retired to the desert Southwest, which had become their favorite travel destination. Now they doubt if they will do that. After all, their children and grandchildren live in Oklahoma City, and they enjoy their north Oklahoma City home.

Their love for the Southwest is evident in their home, where they display an outstanding collection of Indian pottery and art and enjoy describing the history of their favorite pieces. Joe explains that the affinity they feel for the region and its people evolved out of their desire to recruit minority students to health careers.

When Joe first arrived at the HSC, his lab was not ready. He had some time on his hands and asked then medical school dean Robert Bird for \$3,000 to start a summer program for minority high school students that would expose them to health careers.

The program he launched has grown and expanded over the years. Among the alumni of the program are Oklahoma State Senator Angela Monson and Vicky Lampley, an OU internal medicine faculty member.

Because the program was so successful, Joe was approached in the mid-1970s about starting a similar program for Native American high school students. The Headlands Indian Health Career Program is now in its 25th year.

Marti and Joe made their first trip to the Southwest in 1974 to recruit students to the new program. "We recruited all over the country, but it was the Southwest that wowed us," Joe says. "We keep

going back. We will always go back.”

“We got to know the students and their families and began to understand where they came from philosophically as well as physically,” Marti adds. “And we became informed about their culture.”

“We’re still friendly with some of those families,” Joe says, recalling a Navajo family whose two sons went on to become physicians after participating in the Headlands program. An impressive 70 percent of the young people who participated in this program have gone into health careers, he points out.

senior vice president and provost and then to accept the position on a permanent basis, he became a man with two workplaces—his lab and the provost’s office.

It would be hard to find another chief executive officer of a major academic health sciences center who still puts on a white coat every day and heads for the lab, who still is actively involved in research and has daily contact with students. “I think these roles are very compatible,” the provost says, adding that he believes he is a better administrator because he also is involved as a faculty member and a researcher.

The genome program he helped establish has brought the University international recognition. The OU Health Sciences Center is ranked second in the world in the number of microbial genomes being sequenced.

Joe’s research has focused on streptococcus since his graduate student days. When it became possible to determine the complete DNA sequence for the bacteria responsible for strep throat, rheumatic fever, scarlet fever and the dreaded “flesh-eating disease,” he knew it was a project he wanted to tackle.

“If we know everything about the biology of an organism, then we will be better able to control it and make new drugs for therapy and new vaccines,” he says. “This is really exciting work, and I can’t let go of it.”

The streptococcus sequencing will be completed this coming year, an event that will be recognized internationally. “It will be a significant contribution to my area of research,” Joe admits, “but it’s only a tool to use in answering the next set of questions. It just keeps getting more exciting.

“Ten years from now, I’ll still be in the lab,” he predicts. “I’m not sure about administration.”

Marti also has met with gratifying success. Her research interest is developmental disabilities, and the professional achievement of which she is most proud is moving the Division of Rehabilitation Sciences solidly into the realm of developmental disabilities.

“We are making a real contribution in an area that society has shied away from,” she says. “OU is way ahead of other programs in this regard.”

Oklahomans with disabilities are able to maintain or improve function and learn to use devices that encourage independent living through the Division of Rehabilitation Sciences’ Assistive Technology Center, the state’s most comprehensive program for people with disabilities. The division has been able to supply incredible learning opportunities for students because of the many contracts it has with various state agencies, Marti says.

Like Joe, she believes that getting out of the office is the key to being a good administrator. While she no longer sees patients on a regular basis, she maintains an ongoing commitment to the division’s various clinics.

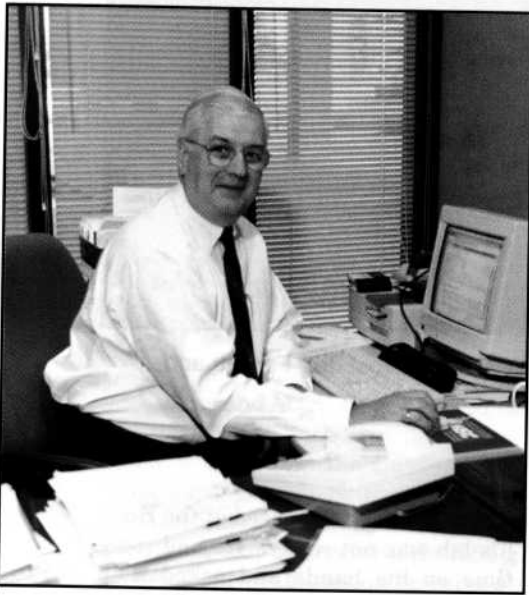
Joe points out that Marti has been an administrator longer than he has; she became chair of the Department of Physical Therapy in 1975, and he did not start up the administrative ladder until 1982. And he boasts that Marti has been on the national accreditation committee for physical therapy since 1964 and recently served as its vice-chair.

Her work with accreditation is a major commitment, she says. “Seeing other departments across the country has been helpful. I always feel like I’m learning more than I contribute.”

With their various responsibilities and zest for travel, the Ferretti’s lives always have required careful scheduling. When the children were younger, they either covered for each other or took them along.

Joe and Marti began indoctrinating their children into the wonders of travel at an early age. Joey and Anne-Marie accompanied their parents on those early trips to the Southwest, usually as willing participants, but not always. The Christmas Eve they spent snowbound in Amarillo was traumatic, but fortunately Santa managed to find the family.

The highlight of the family’s travels was the 1982-83 academic year they spent in Paris. Joe was a visiting professor at the Institut Pasteur, and Marti spent the year researching rehabilitation for people with head injuries at institutes in



Robert Taylor

A popular choice as provost of the Health Sciences Center campus, Joe Ferretti is a scientist who never envisioned himself as an administrator, a post that he feels is enhanced by his continuing participation as a faculty member and researcher.

Joe is no longer involved in the day-to-day operation of the Headlands program, but it definitely has a friend in the provost’s office. Of course, that probably could be said of most HSC programs. Provost Ferretti exhibits a remarkable awareness of every aspect of the vast seven-college center he administers.

His administrative career began at the departmental chair level, then as vice president for research. When the opportunity came to be interim



Joe Ferretti's microbiology and immunology research colleagues, Michael McShan, center, and Dragutin Savic, seated, expect to see the provost, left, in the laboratory on a daily basis. Savic is a visiting professor from Yugoslavia, whose lab technician wife, Gorana, is pictured in the background.

Paris, Glasgow and Stockholm. The family saw a lot of Europe, and the children became fluent in French.

"We didn't have a television that year," Joe recalls. "Our family life consisted of doing things together. We played games and visited places."

Both children have gone back to

for a great many scientists behind the Iron Curtain, who were isolated from the rest of the scientific world, she adds. In the late 1970s, linking Soviet-bloc colleagues with the rest of the scientific world became a personal crusade for Joe, and he paved the way for many of them to come to

sian Academy of Medical Sciences awarded Provost Ferretti an honorary doctoral degree in recognition of his fostering of international research collaborations and his contributions to genetic research.

Both Ferrettis are optimistic about their future at the Health Sciences Center and about the future of the center itself.

"Joe would have never allowed his name to be considered for provost if he didn't have confidence in what is going on there," Marti says. "He has a

science career that is quite successful and would not have taken on the other job if he didn't feel confident about the future of the Health Sciences Center."

That is true, Joe says, admitting that he feels a lot better about that future now that the merger between

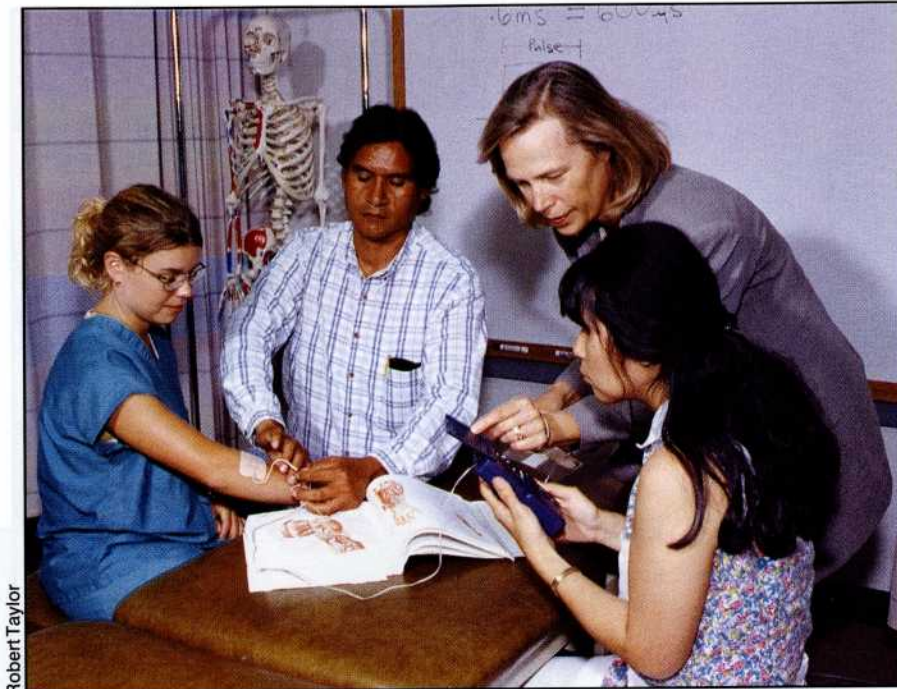
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France many times since and visited other foreign locales. Anne-Marie lived in France for four years, working as a model. Joey studied at Oxford and taught law in Azerbaijan. "We opened up the world for them," Marti says.

Joe also was able to open the world

Oklahoma City and work in his lab and those of other OU researchers. A piece of the Berlin Wall resides on a shelf in their house, a symbolic gift to Provost Ferretti from an Eastern European scientist.

Earlier this year, the Institute of Experimental Medicine in the Rus-



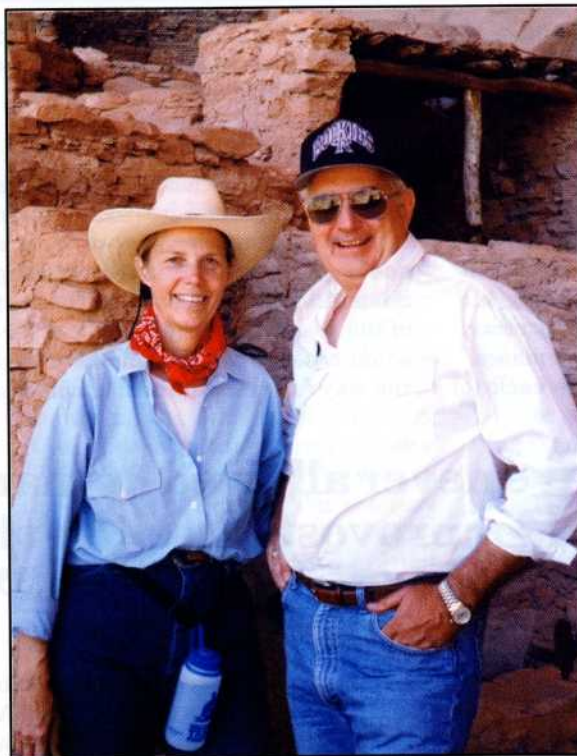
Robert Taylor

Her administrative career predating that of her provost husband, Joe, Marti Ferretti, second from right with students Stacy East, left, Gary Spottedhorse and Momoko O'Brien, has moved the HSC physical therapy program solidly into the realm of developmental disabilities as the Division of Rehabilitation Sciences.

University Hospitals and Columbia HCA finally has been accomplished. The joint operating agreement assures the future of the hospitals that supply the patient base for OU health training programs, while providing much needed capital that will allow the HSC to expand its facilities.

The greatest problem now faced by the Health Sciences Center is fiscal. "Our institution is tremendously underfunded," the provost says. "We operate at about 65 percent of the average funding level of our peer institutions. Despite this, however, we are surprisingly good. The amount of research and clinical work we do is equal to that at some of the very best schools. I take comfort in that, but just imagine what we could do if we were funded at a higher level!"

When asked about the prospect for increased funding, he says, "That depends on where the state places its priorities in the future. The Health Sciences Center has had two good years, in great part because of the efforts of President Boren, who is a first-rate promoter and fundraiser.



The Ferretti's first trip to the desert Southwest was a student recruitment mission. Now they return at every opportunity to the area that has captured their hearts and imaginations.

"We need a statewide recognition that higher education and particularly the Health Sciences Center need more support," the provost adds. "Many people have called our institution the best kept secret in Oklahoma, but I think many people are now realizing that it is really the crown jewel of health care in Oklahoma."

Marti says that her division's greatest need is faculty support. "We recently received our first endowed professorship, which is really a landmark. This will be the first time we can recruit a faculty member with a little more than just a bare-bones salary."

Having David Boren as president is one of the best things that has happened to the HSC, Joe says. At the recent accreditation review of the College of Medicine, the review committee was greatly impressed by how knowledgeable Boren was about the college. "They found it unusual for a university president to be so completely committed to the health sciences."

The exit interview by the accreditation committee was excellent, the provost adds. "The College of Medicine is a source of great pride. We've got seven strong colleges. We have a better faculty than we deserve. We train the next generation of health-care providers and improve the lives and health of Oklahomans. It's quite a place!"

In 1969, when the Ferrettis first arrived in Oklahoma City, they planned to stay three to five years. OU was to be a stepping stone to more challenging opportunities elsewhere. Almost 30 years later, they are still at the OU Health Sciences Center. As it turned out, they found challenge and opportunity aplenty.