April 14, 1990, marks the 25th anniversary of the American Occupational Therapy Foundation (AOTF). The past quarter century represents a period of unprecedented professional growth and expansion. The Foundation's scope and impact have grown concomitantly through the generosity of donors and a strong and creative partnership with the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA). Through jointly focused efforts, AOTF and AOTA have addressed the strategic priorities for the profession more effectively than either could have done alone.

Early in 1960, new demands were placed on AOTA to provide additional lobbying and professional advocacy services, thereby endangering the favorable 501(c)(3) tax status granted by the Internal Revenue Service in 1954. Because this designation is reserved for organizations whose purposes are wholly charitable, scientific, literary, or educational, AOTA wisely voted to establish the Foundation as a 501(c)(3) organization to accomplish such activities. Chartered in 1965 as a philanthropic organization, the Foundation has committed its resources to advancing the science of occupational therapy, supporting education and research, and increasing public understanding and acceptance of the profession. These purposes have clearly distinguished the Foundation's activities through the years as separate from, although closely allied with, the Association's services. During its first decade, in accordance with its articles of incorporation, AOTF developed programs to provide scholarships and fellowships, to finance and conduct research that contributes to the profession's body of knowledge, and to disseminate information concerning the value of occupational therapy to the health and well-being of society.

To provide the necessary organizational management for AOTF, AOTA contributed the services of its executive director and business administrator. Relying on the seemingly limitless energies of its corps of committed volunteers, the Foundation then embarked on its journey to assemble the financial resources necessary to support the programs for which it was created. Desiring to further encourage the Foundation's initiatives, AOTA's Delegate Assembly voted in October 1966 to transfer to AOTF all bequests previously designated for charitable and educational purposes. The Assembly also decided to give AOTF an amount equal to one fourth of AOTA's unexpended income for the 1965-1966 fiscal year. This contribution of approximately $8,000 was intended to advance the objectives of the Foundation, exclusive of operating expenses.

By June 1967, bequests and memorial funds totaling more than $13,000 had been transferred to the Foundation. Annual income from the investment of these bequests was approximately $800.

Late in 1967, the Delegate Assembly approved the allocation of a yearly sum in AOTA's budget for the Foundation's operating expenses. It was not until June 1969 that the Assembly adopted a resolution stating that 2% of the annual fees of each member of the AOTA would be contributed to support AOTF operations. From this modest beginning, the resources of the Foundation grew to a fund balance of more than $1 million in 1989. These funds are used to support the Foundation's expanding education and research enterprises.

Milestones in Education

In March 1969, AOTF announced the availability of its first scholarship award, the Gundersen Scholarship for study in the field of mental health. The Foundation's scholarship and education initiatives grew steadily through additional bequests and the 1974 infusion of approximately $48,000 in securities contributed anonymously to establish the Occupational Therapy Development Fund. The donors stipulated that the income from this fund was to be used to advance the continuing and graduate education initiatives of the Foundation. During the past 25 years, AOTF has granted nearly 350 educational...
awards totaling $341,000 to promising students and scholars wishing to further their education in occupational therapy.

In 1990, the Foundation will award more than 50 scholarships, a record number. A growing number of these awards are made possible through a collaborative program established with state occupational therapy associations. As of this writing, 15 states participate in this program, and AOTF sponsors eight named scholarships that are offered in perpetuity. At its June 1989 meeting, AOTF's Board of Directors voted to encourage graduate education by offering at least 50% of the AOTF-sponsored scholarships to students studying at the graduate level in occupational therapy. This action was followed in November 1989 by an extension of the previous motion, thus also making graduate scholarships available to occupational therapists studying at the graduate level in related fields.

Late in 1980 it became apparent that there was a need to create a professional library. With the assistance of a restricted contribution to AOTF for this purpose, the occupational therapy library became a reality in March 1981. A part-time librarian was hired to catalog and organize the collection of approximately 1,500 volumes. Today, the Wilma L. West Library of AOTF and AOTA houses more than 3,600 volumes, including monographs, textbooks, master theses, and doctoral dissertations as well as the personal collections of Mary Reilly and A. Jean Ayres. In 1988, AOTF purchased the computer equipment needed to create a computerized bibliographic database as part of the multiverse information system (OT SOURCE) that AOTA established for its members. This system enables AOTF to further its commitment to education and research by increasing accessibility to published and unpublished professional resources.

Milestones in Publications

The Foundation's publication program, which was initiated immediately after incorporation, began with the dissemination of three informational brochures. Each of these was designed to document the Foundation's purposes, major programs, and need for financial support. Published in 1967, 1970, and 1975, these brochures were distributed to all AOTA members.

It was late in the first decade before the Foundation's directors moved to implement the objective of increasing public knowledge and understanding of the profession through the production and dissemination of public service information. The directors chose as the first in a proposed series of such materials a brochure aimed at meeting the urgent need for increased public awareness of learning disabilities. Although there were already a number of technical publications available on this subject, few were helpful to the many parents, teachers, and agencies who were becoming increasingly concerned about this issue. In 1974, with a matching grant from the Lavanburg Corner House Foundation, AOTF published a pamphlet entitled The Child With Minimal Brain Dysfunction. National distribution of the initial printing of 100,000 copies was effected through the cooperative efforts of interested occupational therapists, local parent-teacher associations, public and private institutions, state and local government agencies, and offices of individuals and organizations in health care.

AOTF published the geriatrics pamphlet, Growing Old, in 1975. This second publication proceeded from the Foundation's advocacy role for senior citizens. Growing Old included an inventory of resources available to the elderly to help them meet their financial, social, recreational, independent living, and other needs, and it provided a checklist of services that communities should initiate for the elderly. Dissemination of this pamphlet was coordinated with a film produced by AOTA entitled And When You Grow Old.

Watch Me Grow, a poster, is the Foundation's third publication in advocacy of groups served by occupational therapists. It was made possible by a memorial gift to AOTF for the sole purpose of producing a follow-up poster or brochure to the previous pamphlet, The Child With Minimal Brain Dysfunction. Watch Me Grow was designed to help parents detect unusual delays in cognitive, perceptual, and motor development in children from 1 month to 6 years of age. This foldout chart, suitable for hanging on the wall of a child's room, includes a physical growth chart listing appropriate developmental milestones; a place for recording height and weight at 6-month intervals; and the alphabet, numerals, shapes, and colors as additional learning aids.

Watch Me Grow was published in early 1977 and later that year was awarded Best of Competition in the Ninth Annual International Typographic Composition Association's Gold Medal Awards Competition. As a result of this award, Watch Me Grow was displayed in typographic galleries and art gatherings throughout the United States and Canada. It was selected by the U.S. Information Agency for display at several embassies and foreign galleries throughout the world. This publication was revised in 1987, and the combined distribution of both editions of the chart totals more than 200,000 copies.

Milestones in Research

In 1976, AOTF convened a research seminar in St. Louis to examine the profession's current research status. The goal of the seminar was to initiate a plan to develop appropriate research activities within the profession. The 18 occupational therapists who attended were actively engaged in research and developed a research agenda that has greatly affected the profession. Most of the programs described below have been developed in response to the deliberations held at this seminar.

In 1978 and 1979, the Representative Assembly adopted resolutions that provided support for many of the ideas generated at the research symposium of 1976. Funds were allocated in 1978 to sponsor a research program for the profession. These funds, totaling $43,500, were to be used to support part-time staff who would develop a program of research services and to award research grants totaling approximately $20,000. To this amount, AOTF added $7,000, and the profession's Small Research Grants Program was launched. By the end of
1989, this program had awarded over 90 grants, representing an investment of approximately $200,000 by AOTA and AOTF.

Resolution 537–79 delegated to the Foundation the responsibility for developing a program of research services for AOTA members, and Resolution 587–82 adopted the recommendation of the Research Advisory Council to house the research program permanently in AOTF. Mechanisms to ensure collaborative funding of research activities by the two organizations were also established.

Long-term guidance for the research program, its goals, and its structure has been dictated by a series of documents. A milestone was achieved in 1986 when the boards of both AOTA and AOTF approved the new Research Priorities for the Profession of Occupational Therapy: These priorities called for the commitment of research funds to study the following:

- The development and standardization of instruments for both clinical and research purposes.
- Clinical intervention strategies.
- Concepts of occupation and adaptation.
- The effects of occupational therapy services.
- The development and testing of theories of occupational therapy.
- Alternative research methods that are appropriate for the complex issues that occupational therapists seek to examine through research.

Research priorities, however, cannot be addressed without qualified personnel. The Research Advisory Council has determined that the shortage of highly qualified, tenure-eligible faculty to staff occupational therapy programs in universities is a major crisis in the field. Thus, milestones were accomplished with the initiation of the doctoral and postdoctoral fellowship programs. Beginning in 1981, AOTA funded an annual doctoral fellowship award, and AOTF initiated the postdoctoral fellowship in 1983. Whenever possible, AOTF seeks external funds to support additional fellowships. The recipients of these awards are required to sign contracts agreeing to accept positions in which they will contribute to occupational therapy education and research for a minimum of 3 years.

Perhaps the Foundation’s proudest accomplishments lie in the area of professional research. Since its inception, AOTF has invested more than $1.5 million in developing our growing body of knowledge and validating our practice through scientific study. Various programs have been used to promote research within the field. Consultation services, workshops, and conference programs have been focused on different populations of occupational therapists. Considerable effort is made to encourage promising young therapists to return to graduate school. Although continuing education services may be effective in increasing one’s awareness of the significance of research, competence in research methods is only acquired through advanced education.

One highly successful program, the Special Interest Section Research Symposium series, not only yields outstanding research results but also recruits clinicians for graduate programs by increasing their awareness of the satisfaction that can be gained through clinical investigation. This program, which evolved through two previous stages, was initiated in 1984 and has been scheduled biannually since then. The program funds three to five research studies through a competition open to qualified investigators in a particular practice area. Grants of $7,500 to $10,000 are awarded. Each investigator agrees to serve as team leader and mentor to 5 to 15 therapists who join the team and research process. These teams come together in the summer for 3 work intensive days; the team leaders serve as faculty members during the symposium. Each team member develops a good understanding of the complexities of a specific research study and assumes some aspect of responsibility for the successful completion of the research. As of this writing, approximately 150 AOTA members have shared this learning experience.

Two additional milestones in the research program should be noted. Both serve to promote research while honoring those who have committed their careers to scholarship and research. First, in 1983 the Foundation established the prestigious Academy of Research, the profession’s highest honor for its scholars. To date, 10 people have been admitted as charter members. Second, the Foundation has established the Center for Scholarship and Research. These centers are to be located in major research-oriented universities through equal contributions from AOTA, AOTF, and the designated university. Support is available for an initial 3-year period with the expectation that each center will become self-sustaining thereafter. The first two centers were established in 1989 at the University of Illinois with a focus on measurement issues in occupational therapy, and at Boston University, with a focus on studies in neurodevelopmental science.

Research can be a significant force in the profession only if the results of the studies are published. In 1981, AOTF launched a new publication, the Occupational Therapy Journal of Research (OTJR). Now in its 10th year, OTJR has exceeded all expectations in both the quality and the number of manuscripts submitted. This journal is an accurate reflection of the progress the profession has made in its effort to promote research.

As AOTF celebrates the end of its first quarter century of service to the profession, the future is bright. Having hired a full-time executive director in 1986, the Foundation now has the resources to move forward in actively promoting programs for occupational therapy. We salute with gratitude the vision and leadership of our many valued supporters, whose investment through the Foundation in people, ideas, and services will make possible continued professional advancement, innovation, and excellence.