When George Williams was working as a statistician at the National Institute of Mental Health in the 1960s, he became interested in the application of statistics to public health problems. A “numbers man,” with degrees in both mathematics and statistics, Williams wanted to add a medical component to his academic discipline. So in 1970, he came to Carolina’s School of Public Health to get a PhD in biostatistics.

Now, with almost four decades of leadership experience under his belt, Williams continues to credit his time in Chapel Hill for his success. “There is no doubt in my mind how impactful UNC has been to my career,” he says. “From the educational component to the breadth and quality of research that I was able to consider... a lot of the things I’ve done were nurtured by the excitement and enthusiasm I saw from my days at Carolina.”

Williams is vice president of Global Biomedical Data Sciences at Amgen, Inc., a global biotechnology company that discovers, develops, manufactures and markets human therapeutics based on advances in cellular and molecular biology. Previously he worked in various leadership positions at Merck & Co., Inc., and Bristol-Myers Squibb. He also spent almost a decade in the academic sector as a biostatistics professor at the University of Michigan.

Today Williams continues to collaborate with people he met while a student at Carolina. He says one of the best things about going to Carolina is the connections that continue beyond the classroom. “It’s not just the experience you have while you’re on campus. It’s also the opportunity to interact with faculty and students in various ways over the course of a long-term career,” he says. “Even now, I continue to benefit from their wisdom.”

— BY MARGARITA DE PANO

When Thomas Ricketts came back to North Carolina in search of a job in medical journalism, he didn’t know that years later, he would influence government decisions on health policy and administration in the state.

“One of the first stories I ever did for a local newspaper in Chapel Hill was about rural health policy in North Carolina. I didn’t know at that time, but that should have told me something,” says Ricketts, who earned a bachelor’s in history from Carolina as a Morehead Scholar and worked as production and design manager at the Washington (D.C.) Monthly before returning to the Tar Heel state.

Ricketts is now professor of health policy at Carolina’s School of Public Health and director of the North Carolina Rural Health Research Program at UNC. He also is chairman of the Scientific Advisory Committee for United Health Foundation’s annual review, “America’s Health Rankings: A Call to Action for People and Their Communities.” UNC’s School of Public Health is the academic partner to the review, which also is sponsored by the American Public Health Association and the Partnership for Prevention.

Ricketts says he started his public health career writing proposals for the North Carolina Heart Association. Goaded by a need to know more about how the system worked, he decided, in 1976, to pursue a master’s in health policy at the UNC School of Public Health. Since then, his academic pursuits and passion for health care administration have led him on a journey punctuated by degrees, awards and national recognition. He earned his doctorate in health policy from the School in 1988. He speaks French and Russian and, as a side note, is an avid bicyclist who has successfully completed amateur stages of the Tour de France.

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These days, as director of the North Carolina Rural Health Research Program in the UNC Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Ser-
Leaders continued from page 6

- The leaders profiled in this issue tell us that success does not come from one person’s efforts and abilities alone, but from their ability to inspire others to work with them, and with each other. Working together — as a team — is a theme that other UNC leaders also emphasized.

When Michael Jordan was a UNC freshman — long before he became a superstar athlete — his coach, Dean Smith, told him, “Michael, if you can’t pass, you can’t play.”

Smith, one of the most successful coaches in college basketball history, helped his players develop their skills by giving them the same three goals every year, as chronicled in his book, The Carolina Way.

- Play Hard: Insist on consistent effort.
- Play Smart: Execute properly. Understand and execute the fundamentals.
- Play Together: Play unselfishly. Don’t focus on individual statistics.

- By Prashant Nair, PhD

facilitate cooperate

Perhaps the strongest definition of leadership that emerged from our research was that leaders who lead by example are inspiring.

“I think the one true form of leadership is leadership by example,” says Dr. James Porto, clinical assistant professor of health policy and administration and director of the School’s Executive Master’s Program. “You don’t become a leader by holding a certain position — leadership has to be earned. And it starts with ‘self-leadership,’ which is self-discipline and self-management. That’s manifested by success, but also by how a person handles failure. Socrates summed it up — ‘Know thyself.’”

So read about our alumni, faculty and students in this issue of Carolina Public Health. We hope you’ll be as inspired by these stories of leadership as we are.

- by Ramona Dubose

Greenberg continued from page 17

Especially in universities, where there is a hierarchy, most of what gets done is more by personal persuasion. A lot has to do with creating enough excitement, enough enthusiasm that other people voluntarily subscribe.

Shortly after HSSC got underway in 2004, South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford awarded Greenberg the Order of the Palmetto, the state’s highest civilian honor, for exceptional service to the state and nation. “During your time as its president, MUSC has enjoyed national recognition in the areas of education, research and patient care,” Sanford said at the time. Still to come, the governor predicted, were even greater achievements, “whose seeds have been planted through your efforts to build alliances with health and educational institutions, both public and private, through the state of South Carolina.”

In building those alliances, Greenberg has drawn on the examples of his parents, whom he calls one of the greatest blessings of his life. His father, the late Dr. Bernard Greenberg, has a graduate degree in chemistry from Yale. She says her son was a very determined person from the time he was very young. In retrospect, his ending up in public health may seem preordained, but he insists he had no clue as a Carolina undergraduate or in medical school at Duke that he would take that route. While doing a master’s in public health at Harvard, he developed a passion for epidemiology, which led him back to the Carolina School of Public Health for a PhD in that field. But he started to develop much earlier the leadership skills he relies on today.

“From my earliest memories, I was always around academic people, and it always felt very comfortable to me to interact and understand the culture and the values that make you successful in an academic setting,” he says. “A lot of that I just absorbed growing up. It’s hard to say whether I inherited it or acquired it being Bernie Greenberg’s son.”

He took away some specific lessons from his father’s experience as dean during the turbulent early 1970s, when there was much anti-establishment sentiment.

He said of his father, “He worked very hard during this time to be perceived for his true values, for promoting equal opportunity, for helping the underserved population.”

Especially where there are differences of opinion or emotional issues, solutions are not quick,” he says he came to understand. “You have to be persistent and consistent. You have to listen a lot. It’s important for people to be heard and to allow them to feel they’re engaged in the decision-making.”

Ray Greenberg took the lesson to heart. Colleagues like Larry Mohr say he is a leader who lets people know he’s heard them. “He has done a remarkable job in putting together very creative collaborations that have really had a multiplier effect, a synergistic effect in enhancing the effectiveness of what we’re doing here,” Mohr says.

“We don’t have a lot of advantages in South Carolina,” Greenberg says. “But our recent ability to partner effectively — I hope that will be an important legacy.”

- By Kathleen Kearns

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Dr. Raymond Greenberg

Our.... Continued from page 19

The two real professional loves of my life are veterinary medicine and education. Nothing gives me more pleasure than to see a student ‘get it,’” he says, adding that he’s been thrilled to see his students go on to experience success in the veterinary and public health fields.

Weedon was appointed to New Hanover County’s Board of Health in January 2005 — while still completing his MPH — and in 2007 was elected vice chairman. He is also a 2009 fellow with the Southeast Public Health Leadership Institute, a program administered by the School’s North Carolina Institute for Public Health (see page 7).

Weedon and McNeil now organize an annual public health forum for the local veterinary community on specific issues like rabies awareness. Most recently, he has spearheaded an effort to monitor the quality of the county’s water supply, an endeavor involving the New Hanover County Health Department, the County Commissioners, and UNC-Wilmington. “We’ve ruffled some feathers,” he admits. “Learning how to play the political game has been an important aspect of my education, because you may know how you think it should be done, you may know how you want to do it, but getting elected officials to see what you see can be a challenge.”

Weedon forsees many more opportunities for leadership, given his particular interests and skills developed through the four separate UNC School of Public Health programs he’s completed. “Of the top eight infectious bioterrorism agents,” he notes, “seven of them are zoonotic diseases (transmitted between animals and people) — bird flu, tuberculosis, West Nile virus, anthrax, botulism, Ebola and plague.

“This illustrates the importance of veterinary medicine being involved in the public health community,” he says. “Ultimately, I’d like to finish my career doing something at the state or federal level, perhaps in policy development or bioterrorism preparedness — something that would impact a larger section of the population. When the right thing comes along, I’ll know it, and I’ll jump on it.”

- By Paul Frelick