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Ronald and Ann Wooten— *A public health crisis too close to home*

Recently, Ronald and Ann Wooten were in the audience when an administrator at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill reported some startling news. About 97 percent of the university's violent crime, student-on-student assaults and rapes are connected to alcohol and drug abuse.

The Wootens already were familiar with World Health Organization data showing alcohol to be associated with four percent of the global disease burden, a factor in more than 60 diseases, and in mental disorders, car crashes, high-risk behaviors, and economic and educational failures. But as UNC alumni, they didn't like a major public health crisis being so close to home.

"We know that the Gillings School of Global Public Health is a leader in tackling health challenges such as these," Ann Wooten says. "UNC public health students travel around the world, developing solutions wherever they go. We wanted to call upon these young leaders to educate and motivate people here on campus to help put a stop to unhealthy patterns of alcohol abuse."

The Wootens met with Kurt Ribisl, PhD, professor of health behavior at the Gillings School. Ribisl has stood in staunch opposition to tobacco and alcohol abuse, especially among minors. Together, they devised a program through which students would lead the charge against alcohol abuse on campus.

Jessica Boten, master's student in health behavior and one of the students who received funding for the project, believes the work of Ribisl's team is important.

"My efforts have focused on town policies and interventions such as better enforcement at bars and increased server training," Boten says. "I feel confident that our research will give town and campus leaders the information they need to develop effective policy changes."

"The Gillings School of Global Public Health is one of the most influential educational environments in the world," Ronald Wooten says. "We're confident that Dr. Ribisl and others at the School can help UNC students reach their highest

potential and develop healthy habits needed for a lifetime of success."

Ann Wooten agrees. "Ronald and I have always been passionate supporters of the Gillings School. It has been a tremendous honor knowing that our university's public health school maintains a superior reputation around the world. We are happy to be part of the School's mission."

—Linda Kastleman



PHOTO BY LINDA KASTLEMAN

Dr. Kurt Ribisl (left) and Jessica Boten

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