

Professor Sir Murray Brennan keen to give back to help develop tomorrow's leaders

Monday 17 December 2018

After a remarkable career distinguished alumnus Professor Sir Murray Brennan is keen to give back to Otago University, which he says helped prepare him to be a future leader.

The rowing scholarship that bears his name has recently been launched and is an exciting development for the University.

“The scholarship is all about attracting the sports men and women who have the drive and ability, but could use some financial assistance to support their studies at Otago,” Sir Murray says.



Otago University Rowing Club (OURC) Vice-President Alister Robinson says initial discussions for the scholarship began early last year. He says it's hoped to offer the inaugural scholarship, which is worth \$8,000 per year for two years, soon.

"The scholarship is one of the most significant things to happen to the University rowing club in recent times.

"It is a hugely valuable development for the club; it is very important to us. The problem we have is that many of the specialised rowing facilities in New Zealand are based in the North Island, so we must offer an incentive to attract top young rowers to Otago," he says.

OURC General Manager Glen Sinclair says it is the first scholarship offered by the club.

"We've always wanted our sport to go alongside high level academic achievement."

Tied in with its 90th anniversary and the University's 150th celebrations the rowing club is hosting an international rowing regatta next year, with rowers from Russian, Japanese, Chinese and Canadian universities coming to Dunedin to compete, he says.

Sir Murray says given that rugby is a preeminent sport in New Zealand the Alumni of University of Otago in America (AUOA), of which he is a past president, wanted another means to provide young leaders a great education and chose rowing.

Sir Murray started out planning to do engineering and to go to the Otago's mining school but headed to Otago from Auckland to medical school, and completed degrees in maths and medicine.

"I was a rower at the West End club when I lived in Auckland, but at Otago I didn't have time for it as I was busy playing rugby, and working as president of the students' association.

"I had an amazing education at Otago, I cannot speak highly enough of my time there it was a truly wonderful experience.

"Everything at Otago prepared me for my career in medicine and to be a future leader.

After completing his residency at Otago and spending a year as an Assistant Lecturer, Sir Murray won a Fulbright Scholarship to Harvard University, where he studied as a clinical research fellow in surgery before becoming a resident in surgery at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston. He then spent six year as an oncologist at the National Cancer Institute, before moving to New York where he spent 21 years as Chairman of the department of surgery at the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Centre where he has trained more than 300 surgical oncologists. In 2015 he was knighted by the then Governor General Sir Jerry Mateparae for service to the medical profession.

He never forgot Otago, however, and brought his family back to New Zealand on many occasions. He laughingly says he “gave back” to Otago in the form of two of his four children coming to the University for their education, while his eldest son now operates a winery in Central Otago — Brennan Wines.

“I love to give back, and I have given New Zealand my first born son, so that’s the ultimate thing that someone can give back to their country of birth.”

Sir Murray tries to spend at least two weeks every January at his son’s vineyard in the Gibbston Valley.

“The biggest thing I learned from my time at Otago was how to grow into an adult and how to deal with people from a variety of backgrounds.

“Of course I have worked very hard, but I have been extremely fortunate and I’ve been well rewarded for my achievements, and now it’s time to give something back.

“I’m not interested in making new buildings - I’m interested in developing tomorrow’s leaders.

“The greatest pleasure that I can have is helping train the young people that I work with, and seeing the next generation of doctors growing and developing.”

