Alumnus Gives to Support Fellow Veterans Pursuing Physical Therapy Degrees

After serving a combined nearly 60 years in the United States military, Colonel Thomas Duquette, B.S. ’83, M.S., and his wife, Lieutenant Colonel Sherri Maxwell, O.D., are now spending their retirement raising alpacas on their 143-acre ranch in West Central Texas. The couple looks back on their years of military service with pride and desire to give back to the next generation of veterans by supporting their education, which is why they recently made a significant donation to the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine’s physical therapy program.
support veterans pursuing physical therapy degrees at the Miller School.

The gift will be designated toward scholarships for military veterans pursuing degrees in physical therapy.

“The Department of Physical Therapy is so honored to receive this donation to create the Colonel Thomas Duquette and Lieutenant Colonel Sherri Maxwell Endowed Scholarship that will support veteran students pursuing a degree in the field,” said Neva Kirk-Sanchez, Ph.D., PT, associate professor, chair, and program director of the Department of Physical Therapy at the Miller School. “It is especially important to honor our students who served their country by supporting them throughout their education.”

Miller School’s Strong PT Program

Duquette, an alumnus of the University of Miami’s second graduating class of physical therapists, joined the Army straight out of high school. After serving three years in Germany during the Cold War, he decided to pursue a career in physical therapy and attended the newly formed program at the University. The first postgraduate DPT and Ph.D. program in the Southeast, the physical therapy program has ranked in the top 10% by U.S. News & World Report since 1995.

“Physical therapy is a rigorous program that can require summer semesters to graduate on time, but the GI Bill doesn’t provide coverage during that period,” said Duquette. “This scholarship is meant to help fill in that gap in funding for these students. We are so honored to be helping veterans who are starting out their career in this rewarding field.”
After graduation, Duquette was commissioned as an officer in the Air Force, which he credits for giving him leadership and career advancement opportunities beyond what was available in the medical field as a civilian.

Now retired, Col. Duquette and Lt. Col. Maxwell raise alpacas on their Texas ranch.

“In the military, you are given a higher level of autonomy to practice than in the civilian setting. There is also a leadership path that you can follow,” said Duquette. “At one point in my career, I was a commander running a hospital, even though I’m not a physician or administrator. It was very satisfying to have the ability to orchestrate the best health care for Airmen and their families.
‘We Hope to Leave a Legacy’

The military is also where he met his wife, Sherri, who was serving in the Air Force as an optometrist.

“We never had children, by choice, but through this scholarship we hope to leave a legacy by helping this younger generation of veterans get into the medical field without financial burden,” said Maxwell.

“We also hope that this donation will inspire other alumni to give to the physical therapy program, to help the next generation of professionals in the field,” said Duquette.

The donation is part of the University’s Ever Brighter: The Campaign for Our Next Century. The most ambitious in the University’s history, the $2.5 billion campaign is set to conclude in 2025, when the University will celebrate its centennial.

If you would like to contribute to the PT program, contact Carol Shipman at carolshipman@miami.edu or 305-284-4931.