



(From left) Fran Peskoff,  
Art Peskoff '56 (VI), SM '58 (VI),  
PhD '60 (VI), and their Peskoff  
Fellow Lauren Yates PhD '22 (VIII-D).

# Art '56, SM '58, PhD '60 and Fran Peskoff Support the Physics Department

by Erin McGrath Tribble

“We want to start supporting future superstars during our lifetime.”

ART WAS BORN IN 1936, in New York City, where he attended elementary and high school. In 1952 he entered MIT. He received SB ('56), SM ('58) and PhD ('60) degrees in Electrical Engineering. His PhD dissertation was in plasma physics. When asked about his MIT experience, Art writes, “As a 16-year old MIT freshman, for the first time I was surrounded by students who were at my own level of mathematical ability and professors who were on an even higher level. This was an exciting environment to be in, and my eight years at MIT were a life-changing experience.”

In the 1960s he was employed as a physicist in the aerospace industry, initially at General Electric in Philadelphia. In 1963 the memory of a 1957 summer job in California brought him back to TRW Systems

in Redondo Beach, where he worked in the physics department on a variety of projects: radio wave propagation in the ionosphere, atmospheric image degradation, detection of clear-air turbulence, and more. In 1970 he went to UCLA where he began applying his physics background to problems in biology and physiology in collaboration with experimental physiologists. He also taught courses on mathematical modeling in biology. He was an Adjunct Professor of Biomathematics and Physiology until 2016. He has authored or co-authored publications on electrical modeling in biological cells and syncytia; electro-diffusion of ions in cells; diffusion of  $H^+$  ions in the mucus layer of the stomach;  $Ca^{2+}$  diffusion in heart muscle cells; and  $Ca^{2+}$  diffusion in a neuromuscular junction.

Fran was born in Chicago in 1942. Her family moved to Los Angeles in 1950. After graduating from high school in 1960, she attended the University of Southern California. She graduated in 1964 with a bachelor's degree in mathematics and went to work as a computer programmer at TRW Systems in Redondo Beach, CA, where she met Art. She was a computer programmer for approximately the next 20 years, working in a variety of companies. She and Art were married in 1969. In 1983 she went to UCLA full-time to earn an MBA. After graduation in 1985, she started a small computer company to produce educational software for children. The company produced the first desktop publishing program for children on the Apple 2 minicomputer. In 2000 she transitioned from computer software design to managing their investment portfolio.

Art and Fran got involved supporting the MIT Physics Department because Art did his dissertation in plasma physics supervised by a professor in the physics department. He believes that the breadth of his MIT education, especially the background he acquired in physics, enabled him to make the transition from aerospace applications at TRW to biophysics at UCLA. "So, after initially deciding that we wanted to support graduate students at MIT, we decided to support *physics* graduate students. This decision was reinforced by talking to various department heads, when we decided that the work being done in the physics department was so important and was already changing the world. We also liked that our support was tied each year to a specific individual student. We both went through college with various levels of scholarships and we wanted to give back by supporting these students."

Art and Fran have been great friends to the Physics Department and have supported a number of physics fellowships. When asked what they have most enjoyed about supporting these students, they say, "We enjoy meeting these incredible young students who are not only talented in the area of physics they have chosen, but are also gifted in other areas including dance, playing musical instruments and singing opera. It is somewhat humbling to see what these students have accomplished at such a young age." Art and Fran also enjoy attending the Patrons of Physics Fellows Society dinners. "After meeting these scholars, we shared their confidence. We felt a sense of pride that we were able to contribute to these young scholars' futures."

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Art and Fran have been great friends to the Department and I'm so appreciative of their continued support for Peskoff Fellowships.”

**PETER FISHER**

THOMAS A. FRANK (1977) PROFESSOR OF PHYSICS AND DEPARTMENT HEAD

Art and Fran have also supported online courses. Recently Art has taken online courses that include videos of actual MIT undergraduate classes in quantum mechanics. These reminded him of quantum mechanics courses he had taken in-person at MIT 60+ years earlier, but included results that were discovered during those 60+ years. The fact that these and other courses are available worldwide to anyone is an incredible contribution to the future of the world. It led Fran and Art to contribute support for online courses.

Art and Fran encourage others to support the Department, too. "Our original plan was to bequeath money to the Physics Department via a charitable remainder trust. We eventually decided that we would like some immediate gratification. That's why we chose to support future superstars during our lifetime. We know we made the right decision!"

In addition to their careers, they have been fixing up houses since the '70s. They moved out of an apartment and into their first house in 1971, a "fixer-upper." After remodeling it extensively, they found they enjoyed the fixing-up process. They sold that house and bought another "fixer-upper." That was the start of a succession of houses that they bought, moved into, fixed up and sold. At some point, "We decided to buy houses, not to live in, but to fix up and keep as rental houses. And the return on these investments has allowed us to support fellows in the Physics Department!"

# SUPPORT THE MIT DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICS

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Attracting the best graduate students to work with our faculty continues to be our highest priority. We have established the **Patrons of Physics Fellows Society** to recognize friends of the Department who have made it possible for us to recruit the

very best graduate students. A commitment of \$70,000 or higher will make you a member of this society. You will receive updates from the named graduate student you are supporting and be invited to the annual Patrons of Physics Fellows Society dinner.

With your help, we will continue to understand the deepest aspects of nature, perhaps even the origins of space, time and matter. To make a gift, or for more information on making a gift, please contact:

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