Gift of a lifetime

Jack Moermond '56 wanted to make a difference.

He has.

Dr. Moermond, who died on Thursday, Oct. 17, after a battle with cancer, was retired from a full career as a patent attorney with Dow Corning in Midland, Mich. He was equally highly regarded, however, for his expertise in waterfowl and taxidermy.

Diagnosed in February, he had spent the past months considering carefully how best to bequeath the museum-quality collection that he had created. The answer: Hope College.

He donated 110 ducks and geese to the college, representing every species of waterfowl in North America. The collection is an important addition to the new science center, part of the Legacies: A Vision of Hope campaign, one that will significantly enhance the college’s biology program.

“It’s one of the top collections, certainly, in North America,” said Dr. James Gentile, who is dean for the natural sciences and the Kenneth G. Herrick Professor of Biology at Hope. “This will really be a centerpiece for the building.”

Every gift has a story. Behind each is an experience, or a connection, or a memory, or a combination of the three.

Dr. Moermond had spent more than three decades perfecting his craft and developing the collection from which his gift to Hope is drawn. He had work displayed at the Smithsonian and at other museums, and had worked with the state’s Department of Natural Resources to help train agents involved in poaching enforcement.

He had traveled throughout the continent—Alaska, Canada, Maine, Mexico, Texas, as well as Michigan and points between—to acquire not only elusive species, but examples within species by season.

He reflected on the experience just a month before his death, during a September visit to the department of biology during Linda’s freshman year.

“And he saw some of what they had, for study skins and such, and what specimens they had in the case, and he said, ‘I’ve got something that look better than that,’” she recalled. “We started looking around, and Eldon [Grej, of the biology faculty] was there, and he started talking with him and said, ‘How would you like some more?’ And he said, ‘I’ll take what you can give me.’

“The new collection will play a central role in the college’s biology program, according to Dr. Kathy Winnett-Murray, professor of biology.

“For students of zoology, Dr. Winnett-Murray noted, there is no substitute for having actual examples for study and comparison.

“We use them a lot in the zoology courses to show examples of the different species, and also the plumage differences that can exist,” Dr. Winnett-Murray said. “We also use them in outreach programs tremendously.”

The outreach reflects the central, historic identity of the college as not only a place of learning for its students, but a resource for the community. Last year, more than 1,800 area school children toured the science museum in the PeaLe Science Center.

“They don’t have resources like that at all

Legacies: A Vision of Hope

Legacies: A Vision of Hope is a $105 million fund-raising effort that has four primary components: renovating and expanding the science center, constructing the DeVos Fieldhouse, increasing endowed endowment, and addressing short-term and long-term facility and space needs.

For more information about the campaign, please visit the college on-line at www.hope.edu or call (616) 395-7939.

Diagnosed with cancer in February, Dr. Jack Moermond ’56 sought to make a difference through the donation of the museum-quality collection of ducks and geese that he spent more than three decades developing. The 110 birds he has given to Hope will be a centerpiece in the new science center, an important resource for Hope students as well as young visitors to the college’s science museum. Dr. Moermond is pictured during a visit to campus just a month before his death on Thursday, Oct. 17.

in two massive, glass-sided cases on the third-floor landing in the building’s main atrium, with the geese and other large birds visible from both the landing and the main floor below.

To help visitors understand what they are seeing, an interactive CD-ROM will run on a computer being integrated into the display area. “So while you’re standing in front of the collection, you’ll actually be able to pull up information about the birds—natural history, range...,” Dr. Gentile said.

Editor for the CD-ROM project is Dr. Eldon Grej, founder of Birder’s World magazine, who is now retired from the Hope biology faculty. Details are still being worked out, but Dr. Gentile hopes to make copies of the CD-ROM available to the public in some way.

Every gift has a story. When he learned that the collection was going to Hope College, Dr. Moermond’s young grandson became worried. Thinking of the happy times he had spent with his grandfather in the bird room in Midland, he wondered: could he visit them at the college?

The answer? Definitely. That’s why they’ll be there. For everyone.