

*Catalyst Profile*  
**Pete Newsome**

The fame of Pete Newsome, the WCU alumnus of 1983, can be accredited to kale, broccoli, and collard greens. Back in 2008, his team at PharmAgra, a contract research and development lab stationed out of Brevard, North Carolina, stabilized sulforaphane, a bioactive compound commonly found in leafy greens. Now, with the chemical patented, it is currently being clinically tested for its therapeutic effects on cancer patients.

Since 1999, the scientist has put his heart and soul into this—the catalyzation of pharmaceutical and biomedical progress.

“Nothing could be more exciting than the possibility that an invention conceived in our own labs could someday be used to help fight cancer and potentially other debilitating or deadly conditions,” said Newsome.

As co-founder and co-president of PharmAgra, this former Catamount has synthesized organic compounds for anti-inflammatory, cardiovascular and oncological drugs. For a short stint, he even assisted in the development of Alzheimer’s medications.

Though he found his vocation only after graduating from the University of Utah with a doctorate in organic chemistry, Newsome’s “solid foundation” in the sciences was established in Cullowhee.

As a chemistry major in the early 1980s, this Winston-Salem native filled his semesters with co-ops, his most notable being an internship with the Burroughs Wellcome Company, a predecessor to today’s GlaxoSmithKline located in the Research Triangle Park. As Newsome puts it, science puns included, the experience “really crystallized” that he was headed down the right path.

Back in the mountains, Royce Woosley shared the “story” of organic chemistry, Gene Morris explained the fundamental mechanics of reactions and Gary Poole pushed for the scientific method.

“When professors are ‘all in’ on your success that gives you a lot of momentum,” said Newsome.

Though four years as an undergrad was a great “jumping off point,” Newsome understood that it was his responsibility to refine and apply these skills. Thus, after graduating Summa Cum Laude, he took to Utah, eventually falling into a position at Rhone-Poulenc, a French agrochemical and pharmaceutical company.

Now a vanguard in his field, the cancer-fighting researcher with international acclaim suggests that other aspiring scientists prepare themselves for the road ahead.

“If you stay in STEM as a career, get ready for a lifetime of learning,” said Newsome.  
“WCU will give you a solid foundation, but it will be up to you to determine out how best to chart your path.”