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Family Violence Expert to Receive UNH Alumni Association's Pettee Medal

By [Maggie Paine](#)
UNH Alumni Association

January 16, 2001

DURHAM, N.H. -- The University of New Hampshire Alumni Association will present its highest honor, the Pettee Medal, to internationally renowned sociologist Murray Straus on Feb. 9, during a program beginning at 3 p.m. in the Great Bay Room at the New England Center.

Straus is a member of the UNH faculty and co-director of its Family Research Laboratory. In announcing his selection as the 67th recipient of the Pettee Medal, Alumni Association President Karen Johnson said, "Over the past 30 years, Dr. Straus has dedicated himself to the study of family violence and its relationship to violence in the larger society, and his work has become the cornerstone for a whole new field of sociology. His research has changed the way parents, educators, social workers, police and lawmakers look at the 'ordinary' violence that takes place in our homes, schools and neighborhoods every day."

As part of the Pettee Medal ceremony, Straus will be interviewed by Ally McNair, host of the New Hampshire Public Television program NH Outlook, and Jennifer Crompton, news director at WMUR-TV in Manchester and a 1982 UNH graduate. They will discuss Straus's contributions to the study of violence in the family -- a field he virtually invented -- and the effects of family violence on individuals, families and society.

The Charles Holmes Pettee Medal was established in 1940 by the University of New Hampshire Alumni Association and the Board of Trustees. The medal is awarded annually to a resident or former resident of New Hampshire in recognition of outstanding

accomplishment or distinguished service in any form to the state, the nation or the world.

"Dr. Straus epitomizes the kind of extraordinary achievement and distinguished service represented by the late Charles H. Pettee, for whom the medal is named, and we are proud to award it to him," Johnson noted. Pettee served UNH for 62 years as professor and dean until his death in 1938.

Straus is best known for his development, with sociologist Richard Gelles, of the Conflict Tactics Scales, a method of measuring the extent of violence in the home on the basis of information gathered by asking family members how they resolve conflicts. Developed at UNH in 1971, the Conflict Tactics Scales have been modified over the years and are now used all over the world.

Straus is the author or co-author of 19 books and 212 papers. Many of his recent works explore the impact of corporal punishment on children's development and how corporal punishment influences their use of violence as adults. His research shows that children exposed to verbal abuse or physical violence such as spanking are more likely as adults to abuse alcohol and drugs, experience depression or commit suicide. He has long advocated child-rearing practices that rely on caring, support and consistency to guide behavior, rather than verbal threats or spanking.

"Beyond his research, Professor Straus has devoted considerable energy to the mentorship of a generation of graduate students who have extended his research and teaching through their work as scholars, teachers and policy makers," said Elizabeth Crepeau, a UNH professor and member of the award committee. "I feel he is especially deserving of the Pettee Medal because he has articulated the impact of family violence to the public, policy makers and scholars."

British psychologist and child advocate Penelope Leach agrees with Straus's conclusions. "His work has been crucially important to all of us around the world who work with children's rights," Leach said. "He has led people to serious research on a topic that, until 10 years ago, had been ignored. If you believe in the importance of this issue, Murray Straus is a very, very important

guy."

Previous recipients of the medal include television producer Marcia Peterson Carsey, astronaut Alan Shepard, former New Hampshire Governor John H. Sununu and former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop.

The program is open to the public. For more information, call the Alumni Association at (603) 862-2040 or e-mail: alumni@unh.edu.

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