

# A Legacy of Hope

Unlike many philanthropists who often hunger for publicity, Eugenia "Gene" Dodson, a quiet and unassuming woman, shunned the public spotlight. So when she died last December and the announcement came that she had donated \$35.6 million to local diabetes and cancer research efforts, the community was astonished.

**T**his came right out of the blue to us, and the story behind this gift is truly inspiring," said W. Jarrad Goodwin, M.D., F.A.C.S., director of the University of Miami Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, one of the recipients of the gift. Two-thirds of the multi-million dollar gift will go to the Diabetes Research Foundation, which supports the Diabetes Research Institute at the University of Miami Leonard M. Miller School of Medicine (DRI), while one-third will go to UM/Sylvester.

"She did not want any publicity about this whatsoever," said Donald E. Kubit of Fowler White Burnett P.A., Mrs. Dodson's attorney and author and co-trustee of her revocable trust. "Eugenia Dodson's final estate plan was consistent with her profound desire to fund research to find cures for diabetes and cancer."

Mrs. Dodson, who died just 24 days shy of her 101<sup>st</sup> birthday, designated the gift to be used for cure-focused research in the two diseases that dramatically impacted her family—diabetes and cancer. Her two brothers eventually died from complications of diabetes, and she herself was a lung cancer survivor, battling the disease during the 1970s. The personal and family afflictions of these illnesses fueled her passion to give back.

"Her two brothers suffered from juvenile diabetes and succumbed after much suffering from the disease—and she really took their suffering to heart," said Kubit, who recently joined UM/Sylvester's Board of Governors. "She really wanted to use her fortune to put an end to cancer and to diabetes, which she called 'this most pernicious disease.'"

The enormity of her gift provides both the DRI and UM/Sylvester with unprecedented opportunities to expand current research activities, explore promising scientific areas, develop new treatments, and greatly accelerate progress toward a cure for two of the most prevalent and devastating diseases in this country. More than 21 million Americans suffer from diabetes, and half of all men and one in three women will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetimes.

"I really feel blessed by Mrs. Dodson's generosity," adds Goodwin. "The opportunities for scientific discovery have never been greater and this kind of support is just so important to us. We are going to invest it well and fulfill all of Mrs. Dodson's hopes."



The gift will allow UM/Sylvester to make a quantum leap forward in various areas of research. The money has enabled the creation of two endowed chairs, the Dodson Chairs in Cancer Research, awarded to Glen N. Barber, Ph.D., associate director of basic science, and co-leader of the Viral Oncology Program at UM/Sylvester, and Eli Gilboa, Ph.D., a national leader in translating promising immune therapies from the laboratory into patient care. (Gilboa has dual appointments in the Division of Hematology-Oncology and the Department of Microbiology and Immunology at the Miller School of Medicine.) Gilboa will lead the Dodson Interdisciplinary Immunotherapy Institute, which will allow UM/Sylvester to greatly enhance its multidisciplinary Tumor Immunology and Immunotherapy Program, aimed at preventing and curing different types of cancers. Immunological intervention is showing new promise as a treatment approach that uses the body's own immune system to fight back against the deadly disease.

Born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on December 26, 1904, and raised in a frugal Swedish household, Mrs.

*"We are building a world-class cancer center at UM/Sylvester and this kind of resource is just so important to us. We are going to invest it well and fulfill all of Mrs. Dodson's hopes."*

—UM/Sylvester Director W. Jarrod Goodwin, M.D., FA.C.S.

Dodson moved to rural Silver Creek, Minnesota when she was a young child. "Her younger brother was very sickly and her family was told that it was best if they moved to the country where they could be close to a source of fresh milk for him," explained Kubit.

After graduating from high school, she took a course in cosmetology and in 1923 at the age of 19, moved to Florida at the urging of a high-school friend—first to Tampa and then eventually Miami. She landed her first job working at the downtown Burdines as a beautician. An intelligent woman with an independent streak, she opened her own beauty shop in the 1920s in a downtown arcade and survived the Great Depression by supporting herself and living a simple life. She later was married and divorced but continued to live very modestly. The Depression had made a lasting impression on her.

Then in 1941, she met Joseph Enloe Dodson, a hand-

some civil engineer, on a train enroute to Washington, D.C. He was the love of Gene's life, and they married in 1943. Mr. Dodson owned a substantial minority interest in Oolite Rock Company, which owned and mined limestone quarries throughout Miami-Dade County. Eventually, the quarries were depleted of their oolite rock but the company wisely retained its sizeable land holdings. As Miami grew, these holdings became very valuable.

When Mr. Dodson died in 1949, he left Mrs. Dodson with a significant inheritance including his interest in the Oolite Rock Company partnership. Eventually, the company's land was sold for a substantial profit to residential real estate developers. "The proceeds from the land sales, together with the sums she inherited from Enloe and the funds she had acquired throughout her career, formed the basis of what came to be her fortune," explained Kubit.

Wisely, she went on to nurture and grow her estate over more than a half-century by making sound investments



in blue chip stocks. She lived a truly selfless life so she could fulfill her philanthropic goals and eventually grew her fortune to more than \$36 million. Despite her affluence, Mrs. Dodson lived a modest lifestyle without any trappings of wealth because she had a much higher purpose for her money.

"She was extremely kind, had a good sense of humor, and an abiding religious faith. She believed in doing good and helping others," said Kubit. "She was a charming and astute lady. I have the greatest admiration for her and for the philanthropic and charitable ideals to which she aspired."

Indeed, Mrs. Dodson's generosity will touch many lives for generations to come—a lasting legacy only a dedicated woman with a true vision and huge heart could have left behind.

Left: Eugene Dodson

This page: Joseph Enloe Dodson with Eugene