

Couple Creates Dual Legacies With Gift



Boone and Robin Aiken are lifelong Florence natives. Both were born in the McLeod Infirmary, and both have dedicated large portions of their lives to making their city and its hospital better places. Now, they are leaving a legacy that will impact the lives of McLeod patients for years to come.

Boone's legacy began with his grandfather, Jefferson Boone Aiken. Named a Board Trustee when McLeod was first chartered as a nonprofit corporation in 1930, he played a key role guiding the hospital through its early days. He served until his passing in 1978.

Boone's father, J. Boone Aiken, Jr., was also a Trustee, serving during the transformative period of 1979 to 1986

when McLeod moved to its current location and grew into a thriving regional medical center.

"I remember my dad bringing home tall stacks of work," recalled Boone of his father's time on the Board. "McLeod Trustees certainly do their homework."

Carving his own path in serving McLeod since 2003, Boone has served as general counsel to the McLeod Health Board of Trustees.

"McLeod is such a great institution, run by incredible leaders," said Boone. "It is an honor and a privilege to have a relationship with this hospital."

The story of Robin's legacy begins with her sister, Wana Kaye Hutchinson Rhodes. As Wana Kaye, a resident of Pinehurst, received cancer treatment at Duke University Hospital, Robin was moved by the patient services program that ensured all the needs of oncology patients were met, beyond simply their direct medical needs. After her sister passed away, Robin resolved to bring a similar program to McLeod.

"My family remained involved with Duke's program for years after Wana Kaye's passing," recalled Robin. "I thought that it would be great to have something like it here at McLeod."

In 2014, her dream was realized with the establishment of the HOPE (Helping Oncology Patients Everyday) Fund. Over its three years of existence, the HOPE Fund has assisted patients with transportation to treatments, medication for pain and nausea, educational materials, wigs and head coverings, and other immediate needs specific to each individual patient.

One story that struck Robin the most involved a patient who was grinding rice to put into his feeding tube because he could not afford the necessary nutritional supplements. The HOPE Fund stepped in to provide nutrition for him.

While the Fund is "fulfilling all expectations," according to Robin, the HOPE Advisory Committee is "still learning and fine-tuning" the program.

For example, the HOPE Fund made a large step forward this year by hiring its first paid employee, the HOPE Coordinator. The coordinator's role is to go to the patients, initiating conversations and determining their particular needs.

"We are already identifying and meeting new needs thanks to our coordinator," explained Robin.

Robin also learns the needs of oncology patients firsthand. In addition to her work as the HOPE Advisory Committee Chair and McLeod Foundation Board Trustee, Robin serves as a volunteer at the Cancer Center, where she operates the HOPE Cart (a cart with snacks, drinks, headphones, and magazines to help make long chemotherapy sessions more tolerable for patients).

"It is a blessing to push that cart around and see the smiles it brings," said Robin. "It also gives me better perspective and allows me to see the good the HOPE Fund is doing and the other needs it could be addressing."

Robin's immense efforts to honor her sister's memory have not gone unnoticed by her husband.

"I am so proud of Robin for how dedicated she is to this cause and am very pleased that her dream is coming to reality," said Boone.

Given the couple's longtime commitment to McLeod, it is no surprise that they chose to make a legacy gift to ensure that their contributions last long after they are gone.

"We were both born and raised here in Florence, and Boone's family history is so closely tied to McLeod," Robin explained, speaking about the couple's decision to make a bequest to the HOPE Fund in their will. "We wanted our legacy gift to be a lasting stamp of our appreciation for McLeod Health."