

Growing a Legacy at McLeod



Dr. Jay and Ellen Pearson have been active members of the Florence community since 1978. Born and raised in Columbia, the two traveled across the country for Dr. Pearson's general surgery residency, which he completed in Seattle, Washington. When Dr. Pearson was offered a position at McLeod, the two jumped at the chance to return to South Carolina.

"We saw moving to Florence as an opportunity to be closer to family in Columbia," explained Ellen. "But, Florence has become our home. We have raised our three children here, and most of our key life events have taken place in Florence."

Leading the Way in Breast Cancer Care

When Dr. Pearson began practicing medicine at McLeod in 1978, he was one of 85 doctors on the medical staff. During these last four decades, the hospital expanded from McLeod Memorial Hospital to a seven-hospital regional health system

with more than 750 physicians on the medical staff. Dr. Pearson played a key role in this growth, namely by helping McLeod make advancements in breast cancer treatment.

"When I first started in practice, breast cancer treatment was not very sophisticated, and did not vary much from patient to patient," recalled Dr. Pearson, who still cares for breast cancer patients for follow-up appointments. "With the establishment of the McLeod Breast Health Center in 2005, physicians from each discipline now work together to develop a personalized treatment plan for each patient."

The McLeod Breast Health Center became accredited by the National Accreditation Program for Breast Centers (NAPBC) in 2010 under the guidance of Dr. Pearson and others. This designation has been a major asset to women in the region. However, Dr. Pearson refuses to take all of the credit.

"We have an extremely talented group of surgeons, oncologists, radiation oncologists and radiologists," Dr. Pearson explained, "who depend on the important work of a great pathology department."

Personal Experiences Lead to Volunteering

As Dr. Pearson worked to improve breast cancer treatment, Ellen was contributing to healthcare in her own way.

"In 1990, I had Guillain-Barre syndrome, and spent a month at McLeod relearning to walk and take care of myself," reflected Ellen. "The care I received will always hold a special place in my heart."

This experience motivated Ellen to help others who turn to McLeod for their care. Sharing time with a close friend who passed away from cancer led Ellen to give back through McLeod Hospice.

A volunteer at McLeod Hospice for several years, Ellen often went above and beyond her normal duties of visiting patients. She recalls driving patient families from out of town to visit their loved ones, and even taking patients' grandchildren trick-or-treating.

The Pearsons have given generously to support programs funded by the McLeod Foundation since early in Dr. Pearson's career. In 2012, Ellen's passion for hospice care led her and Dr. Pearson to generously support the Foundation's efforts to expand the McLeod Hospice House from 12 beds to 24 beds.

"The Hospice House is a wonderful haven for patients and their families as they seek end-of-life care," said Ellen, who has seen several close friends benefit from the service.

Leaving a Legacy

For more than 40 years, the Pearsons have witnessed the growth and excellence at McLeod Health. Today, they want to ensure that their efforts continue long after they are gone and have chosen to make a legacy gift to the McLeod Foundation. "We believe in the vision of McLeod Health," explained Dr. Pearson. "We have both been patients here, and this work has been my calling."

"We want to see the excellent care we have benefited from continue on for the community we have come to love," Ellen added. "It is so important to have healthcare given by people who truly care."

The Pearsons chose to make their legacy gift via a charitable gift annuity, "a very easy process," according to Ellen.

"Setting up the annuity did not require an accountant or an attorney," Dr. Pearson explained. "The Foundation provided us with a consultant who walked us through the entire process."

The Pearsons' many years of generous support have grown into a legacy that will impact generations to come.