Jenkins’ family’s relationship to children’s hospital comes full circle
by Allyson Crowell

SHAWN JENKINS CARRIES EIGHT PAGES OF PAPER WITH HIM WHEREVER HE GOES. FROM FAMILY VACATIONS TO INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS TRIPS TO THE DAY HIS COMPANY WENT PUBLIC ON WALL STREET, HE MAKES SURE THAT THOSE EIGHT PAGES – NOW YELLOWED WITH TWO DECADES OF TIME AND TRAVEL – REMAIN CLOSE AT HAND. THEY ARE, AFTER ALL, WHERE THIS CHAPTER OF HIS LIFE BEGAN.

Jenkins’ daughter, Olivia, was born in 1995 with torticollis, a fairly common but alarming condition that caused her head and neck to tilt to one side. At the time, Jenkins pulled in about $18,000 a year, selling cars and copiers and working nights and weekends managing databases. “The bills were coming in, and I was a young guy overwhelmed with the pressure,” Jenkins said. “That experience was the birth of Benefisfocus. I wrote down on those eight pages how we could simplify the process, how we could use the internet to manage health care in one place.”

From those pages leapt a vision that would eventually grow into one of the nation’s leading providers of software solutions for businesses working to manage their employees’ insurance benefits.

Jenkins shared his story during a recent interview at Benefisfocus’ corporate headquarters on Daniel Island. Beside him sat Olivia, now a healthy 20-year-old woman preparing to pursue a nursing degree.

“Benefisfocus was created out of interaction with the MUSC Children’s Hospital. It was the key spark,” Jenkins said. “Being able to do this is kind of like coming full circle for us.”

By this, he means his family’s $25 million pledge to help build a new children’s hospital at MUSC. When it opens in 2019, the MUSC Shawn Jenkins Children’s Hospital will be the most advanced pediatric health-care center in the Southeast, with the space needed to accommodate more beds, new technologies and services, plus a strong emphasis on comfort, compassion and family-centered care.

Though his family’s decision stems from Olivia’s experience at the hospital, Jenkins said it also was rooted in insights he gained during childhood. “I was raised by a single mother, and while I was fortunate to be healthy, we did fret about money. I had to make them work a little bit to think about the future,” Jenkins said. “And so was the spark for a new company.”

Jenkins visited the hospital, talked with doctors and nurses there and heard about the challenges they faced in the cramped facility. When he learned that the university was planning to build a new hospital, he knew he wanted to help. But it was not a decision he was willing to make on his own.

A month before announcing the gift to MUSC, the Jenkins family gathered around the dinner table. Shawn presented the opportunity and various options and then asked for feedback from his wife, Jocelyn; 22-year-old son, Alex; Olivia; and 3-year-old daughter, Ryleigh. “I had to make them work a little bit to think about the downsides,” he said. “I reminded them of the increased publicity and the fact that, for the children, this decision put their inheritance on the line. He and Jocelyn also were expecting twins at the time, a boy and a girl who were born in September.

Ryleigh remained quiet for more than an hour, as the family weighed the decision. “She understood that something big was going on,” Jenkins said. Finally, he turned the decision over to his family, a moment Olivia said she will never forget. “He went around the table and asked, ‘Why shouldn’t we do this?’” she said. “And it was silent.”

intention of becoming a commercial pilot and flight instructor. Shortly after graduation from flight school he met a man who ran a Summer-ville-based nonprofit that sent construction teams to developing countries. He decided to take a detour and accept a job with the mission, making $10,000 a year.

By the time the mission relocated five years later, Jenkins had started a family. He chose to stay in Charleston and began pursuing his master’s in business administration.

He picked up part-time work with Mason Holland, founder of the Mount Pleasant investment firm American Pensions, while he completed his degree. Jenkins later became a full-time employee and eventual part owner of American Pensions. In the meantime, Olivia was born – and so was the spark for a new company.

Jenkins and Holland founded Benefisfocus in June of 2000, three months after the NASDAQ crashed and the dot-com bubble burst. “It was really a contrarian time to start a tech company,” Jenkins said. “I’ve gotten every objection in the book, including, ‘I don’t have the internet.’”

But with every contemporary who questioned his decision, Jenkins just pushed harder. As the company grew, Benefisfocus relocated from its original home in a Mount Pleasant strip mall to its current 40-acre headquarters on Daniel Island, with additional operations in Greenville, San Francisco and Tulsa, Oklahoma.

As he grew Benefisfocus, Jenkins sought counsel on charitable giving from businesswoman and philanthropist Anita Zucker, who chaired the MUSC Foundation at the time. He eventually volunteered to serve on the foundation board. While learning about the university’s colleges, research programs and centers, he felt something pulling him back to the place where he had taken Olivia so many years earlier: the children’s hospital.

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“The children who come here are at the most vulnerable point in their lives in terms of health and finances. They need someone to stand in the gap with them. My family is fortunate to be able to do that.”

 Shawn Jenkins with daughter, Olivia.
MUSC ENDS FISCAL YEAR WITH $73.1 MILLION IN DONATIONS

Total giving jumps 66%, Foundation assets surpass half-billion mark for first time

Philanthropic support of the Medical University of South Carolina jumped 66 percent during fiscal 2015, to $73.1 million in gifts and pledges.

The largest share of the year’s total ($48.3 million) came from individuals, followed by foundations, ($9.6 million), nonprofit organizations ($7.8 million) and corporations ($7.5 million).

On a year-to-year basis, the university saw sharp increases in giving by foundations (47%), corporations (59%), churches and religious organizations (160%), non-alumni individuals (264%), residents (862%) and its own staff (1,217%).

Meanwhile, the MUSC Foundation’s investment portfolio achieved a 3 percent return during fiscal 2015, bringing the foundation’s total assets to more than $541 million and its total endowment to $322.6 million. These philanthropically provided funds are used to pay for scholarships, endowed chairs, new buildings and facility enhancements and a broad range of research, academic and patient-care programs.

The Carlisles established a fund to pay for expenses to send MUSC dental students to the Greenville Free Medical Clinic Dental program, a ministry of Bon Secours St. Francis Health System, treating patients who have no other access to dental care, some of whom haven’t seen a dentist in years – if ever.

Patients get free treatment, and students get experience working in an underserved community. The challenge is that the money needed for travel and lodging draws about $25,000 each year out of the dean’s budget at the James B. Edwards College of Dental Medicine, straining an already limited resource.

That’s where Rick and Kay Carlisle come in. The Rock Hill residents, who live part-time in McClellanville, found a perfect match between their son’s alma mater and their personal ideals.

“We’ve always tried to tell our sons that they have a responsibility to their community,” Rick Carlisle said. “It’s great when they go to an institution like MUSC, and they learn the same thing. Our goal is to help MUSC teach students and to further that work.”

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-Rick Carlisle

Jim Fisher, the university’s vice president for development and alumni affairs, said the year’s growth in fundraising was driven in part by strong public confidence in leadership of Dr. David J. Cole, who became the university’s seventh president in July 2014.

“Dr. Cole’s presidency has been marked by a laser-like focus on the care of our patients,” Fisher said. “Since day one, he has charged the entire MUSC family with putting patients at the center of everything we do, whether we’re involved in clinical care, education, research or the general day-to-day workings of the university. That message has resonated very strongly with the community, and I believe that’s reflected in this growing philanthropic support.”

Fisher said giving also was driven by the public launch of a high-profile campaign to raise money for a new children’s hospital. Of the $73.1 million in gifts and pledges reported last year, 45 percent ($32.9 million) was designated to fund the hospital construction project.

Of special note was a contribution from Benefitfocus co-founder and CEO Shawn Jenkins, whose family in May made a $25 million gift to help build the new hospital. The MUSC Board of Trustees subsequently voted to name the facility, which is projected to open in 2019, the MUSC Shawn Jenkins Children’s Hospital.

Couple funds dental students working in free clinic

by Allyson Crowell

Every MUSC dental student spends two weeks at the Greenville Free Medical Clinic dental program, a ministry of Bon Secours St. Francis Health System, treating patients who have no other access to dental care, some of whom haven’t seen a dentist in years – if ever.

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Class uses reading marathon to raise money for MUSC Shawn Jenkins Children’s Hospital
by Allyson Crowell

They showed up at school early that morning, toting sleeping bags, pillows, snacks – and books, of course. Lynn Newman’s class of 32 students at Charles Towne Montessori came ready to read as much as possible, knowing that each precious page consumed during their annual Read-A-Thon would translate to more dollars for the new MUSC Shawn Jenkins Children’s Hospital. They take it very, very seriously,” Newman said. “God forbid you interrupt them.”

"I thought it would be easier to give to something close and not have to send money somewhere else," Helena said. "My mom talks about it all the time."

The vote came down to the children’s hospital and Pet Helpers. The class previously supported Water Missions International, the World Wildlife Federation and the sea turtle hospital at the South Carolina Aquarium. Margeaux Burkhardt, a fourth-grader, said she and her classmates wanted to get back to helping people this year.

"We decided to do this, because we’ve been doing animals the past few years," Margeaux said. "We decided we should do human beings this year. We chose MUSC, because a lot of people know about it, and we know it benefits humans."

On March 12, the students – who range in age from first grade through sixth grade -- sat down to read for the children’s hospital. They broke only for lunch and recess.

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- Margeaux Burkhardt, 4th grader, Charles Towne Montessori

At final tally, they raised $5,060.05 that day.
Amanda Mahaffey, special events coordinator with the children’s hospital, recently visited the class and brought them a framed drawing from a former patient to hang in their classroom. The students shared their spoils of victory:

I read 11 books!
I read 13 books!
I read 614 pages!

But Mahaffey had another question for them.
"How many of you have been to the MUSC Children’s Hospital as patients?" she asked. Nearly every hand went up.

Charles Towne Montessori students raised more than $5,000 for the MUSC Shawn Jenkins Children’s Hospital during their annual Read-A-Thon.
COUPLE PROVIDES FULL SCHOLARSHIPS THROUGH ESTATE PLANNING

by Allyson Crowell

When Delaine Robbins thinks about college debt, the Rock Hill resident remembers that old Ford Model A that he and his twin brother shared when they were students at Wingate University.

They drove the car to a barber shop and a college canteen, where they mopped floors. But their income wasn’t enough to cover tuition, and they had to pay up before they could sit for exams. So the brothers sold their old Ford to the barber in order to graduate.

For Mr. Robbins, his and his wife’s recent commitment to provide full scholarships at the MUSC College of Medicine is a nod to that old Model A.

But for Julia, his wife and the former math coordinator for Rock Hill School District, it all comes down to a simple equation: “Think about all the people that doctors help every day. They might see about 30 people per day and work about 20 days per month, so that’s at least 600 people that they will help every month. It gets to be exponential.”

The couple recently made a planned gift that establishes the Delaine and Julia Robbins Endowed Scholarship Fund from their estate after their deaths. They have no previous ties to the Medical University but wanted their gift to benefit students who hope to become physicians and who otherwise might have to choose another career because of the high cost of medical school tuition.

“We wanted to do something that makes a difference,” Julia said. “A key to anyone’s happiness is health. And the key to health is doctors. We need more physicians.”

Associate Dean for Development Terry Stanley said the legacy of the couple’s gift “literally will never end.”

“The foresight and generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Robbins will be life-changing for many – for the worthy students who will someday receive the scholarship that bears their name, and for the patients that those future doctors will someday comfort and heal,” Stanley said.

The couple met when Delaine was 15 and Julia was 13, and Delaine’s family business performed extermination work on Julia’s home in Rock Hill. Julia and her mother went into town to pay bills, and she met both Delaine and his brother, Eugene, at Modern Exterminating Company.

That night, she wrote in her diary: “Today I met two cute twins and boy, do they have the best manners! One’s name is Eugene, and I forget the other’s name…”

When her neighbors called Modern Exterminating for some termite work the following week, Julia put on her favorite red-and-white shirt and white short-shorts and spent the day in the yard while the boys worked. Delaine remembers staring out at her from the house.

He asked her to go on a double date to the movies with Eugene and his date. When Delaine had met girls at school and church, they always had to ask their mothers’ permission before agreeing to a date.

“Julia just said, ‘Yeah, I’ll go – without asking her mama!’ Delaine remembered. ‘I thought, this is a girl of the world.’ They dated for seven years before marrying, and only after a decade of marriage did Julia tell him that their date to the movies was her first date ever.

Delaine and his brother, now 72, still run the family exterminating business, which serves fourth-generation customers. Julia, 70, retired from the school district nearly 10 years ago so that she and her husband could travel together beyond the constraints of summer and winter breaks from class.

Julia called MUSC this past December to inquire about scholarship donations. College of Medicine Interim Dean Dr. Deborah Deas said that their gift comes at a critical time, as the College of Medicine continues its unprecedented Opening Doors campaign for medical scholarship funding.

“A willingness to work hard, combined with determination and compassion, are ideals upon which Mr. and Mrs. Robbins have built their lives. This makes their choice to endow a medical scholarship a fitting one. Diligence and compassion are among the foundational virtues that all medical students must possess and continue to cultivate.”

-Dr. Deborah Deas, College of Medicine interim dean

To learn more about the Opening Doors Medical Scholarship Campaign, call Candace Gillespie at 843.792.4253.
Dr. Earle, a cardiothoracic surgeon in private practice in Lexington, Ky., first came to Charleston for his general surgery residency in 1974, after finishing medical school at the University of Kentucky. “When I interviewed for my internship, the surgical residents and the surgical staff were very friendly, and the city of Charleston seemed like a perfect fit for me to feel at home during my surgical training years,” Dr. Earle said.

Dr. Earle completed his general surgery residency in 1979 and his cardiothoracic surgery training two years later. Dr. Fred Crawford became chief of the Division of Cardiac Surgery in 1979 and served as a mentor to Dr. Earle during his cardiothoracic surgery training.

“Dr. Crawford was very demanding,” Dr. Earle said. “We had to go to his office at 6:30 a.m. and report on the status of his patients in the ICU. We were, of course, very apprehensive at the time. But if you needed a pat on the back, he was there to give it to you.”

After completing the program, Dr. Earle accepted a position as assistant professor on the faculty of cardiothoracic surgery at MUSC. Dr. Crawford helped him find a faculty position at the University of Kentucky Medical Center in Lexington a year later. Dr. Earle stayed at the medical center for six years before joining a private practice group in Lexington.

“You owe a debt of gratitude to your residency program. MUSC was very educational and rewarding for me, and I am pleased to be able to give back to MUSC with a monetary gift to the institution that helped pave the way to my professional success.”

-Dr. Gary Fisher Earle

Dr. Earle’s gift will support an endowed chair named in honor of Dr. Fred Crawford, who served as Dr. Earle’s mentor during his training in cardiothoracic surgery at MUSC.

“You owe a debt of gratitude to your residency program. MUSC was very educational and rewarding for me, and I am pleased to be able to give back to MUSC with a monetary gift to the institution that helped pave the way to my professional success.”

-Dr. Gary Fisher Earle

Dr. Earle and Dr. Crawford have a special connection. While chief resident, Dr. Earle helped perform successful open heart surgery on Dr. Crawford’s father. Dr. Crawford, who held the department of surgery’s first endowed chair, said the fund that should enable the department to recruit world-class cardiothoracic surgeons.

“What’s interesting to me is that someone who gave this amount of money wouldn’t want this to be the Gary Earle Chair,” Dr. Crawford said. “Honestly, I don’t think that ever crossed his mind.”

Residency training ran a little differently when Dr. Gary Fisher Earle completed his general and cardiothoracic surgery residencies at MUSC in the 1970s and early 1980s. Today, residents are restricted to 80 work hours per week, but then a surgical resident would routinely spend as many as 120 hours per week in the hospital.

Residents often stayed overnight in a rocking chair in the cardiothoracic intensive care unit, Dr. Earle remembered. There they babysat both pediatric and adult post-op cardiac patients, while trying to catch a few minutes of sleep at the patients’ bedsides.

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Dr. Earle has pledged $600,000 to the Fred Crawford Endowed Chair in Cardiotoracic Surgery. He challenges fellow alumni to contribute to the fund, which will become endowed at $2 million. One of Dr. Crawford’s first chief residents at MUSC, Dr. Marshall Marchbanks, began fund-raising for a chair in Dr. Crawford’s honor in 2008. Dr. Marchbanks died in 2010 before the fund reached its goal, and Dr. Earle has since then embraced the cause to help realize Dr. Marchbanks’ initial endeavor.

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Scholarship honors son, helps 25 years of dental students

by Allyson Crowell

John Meador Sneed loved surfing and baseball and, even as a teenager, he exhibited the compassionate spirit of a much older soul. His parents, Dr. Dan and Cherrie Sneed, remembered one trip to visit Cherrie’s parents, when 15-year-old John Meador wanted to stay home and go to a surfing competition instead. “We brought along his little cousin and, even though he didn’t want to go, John Meador spent the whole trip taking care of his cousin,” said Dan Sneed, a retired instructor with the James B. Edwards College of Dental Medicine.

John Meador also had a knack for design. He built a skateboard ramp in his parents’ backyard. His parents suspect that their handsome boy bathed with wavy brown hair would have grown into a tall, dashing man. They never had the chance to find out.

On April 28, 1990 John Meador hopped into a friend’s pickup truck. They left the Sneeds’ home in Meggett to meet more friends and drive down to Edisto Beach. His parents headed in the other direction to a banquet for the MUSC dental students. When Dan and Cherrie Sneed arrived home that night, they found dozens of cars in their yard. They knew immediately that something had happened to John Meador or to their older son, 19-year-old Will.

As they stepped into the crowd, their minister told them, “There was a fire.” A drunken driver had collided with John Meador and his friends, igniting a tremendous tragedy. “The Sneeds kept going, even with this tremendous tragedy,” Dr. Javed said. “They had to care about people and be capable people. That’s what John Meador was.”

The Sneeds established the John Meador Sneed Memorial Scholarship Fund and have provided scholarships to 25 dental students since their son’s death. The scholarship isn’t based solely on academics; the criteria instead demand “genuine love and concern for others and talent for practical accomplishment.”

Every one of them was a down-to-earth, ethical, capable student,” Dan Sneed said. “They had to care about people and be capable people. That’s what John Meador was.”

Dr. Tariq Javed, associate dean for academic and student affairs in the College of Dental Medicine, leads the committee that selects the scholarship recipient each year. A longtime colleague of Dan Sneed, Dr. Javed also knew John Meador.

“He was a super guy, highly ethical – just like his mom and dad,” Dr. Javed said. Each year Dr. Javed’s committee selects a scholarship recipient who is both dedicated to dentistry and also compassionate, but Dr. Javed looks for one additional quality in honor of the Sneeds.

“This scholarship recipient is the epitome of an individual who has met tragedy with great dignity and with great understanding of why things happen and that you have to still keep going,” Dr. Javed said. “The Sneeds kept going, even with this tremendous tragedy.”

The fund is now endowed, meaning students will receive this honor in John Meador’s name every year. The Sneeds made provisions through their living trust that the scholarship will receive additional funding from their estate. Thanks to gifts from friends and family, plus smart investment and careful planning, they hope that the amount of the scholarship will increase over time.

“The Sneeds have gotten to know their scholarship recipients over the years. Until Dan’s retirement a few years ago, he taught them all. Meeting each new recipient with every passing year – now 25 and counting – reinforces that the Sneeds chose the correct way to honor John Meador. “If you want to have your faith restored in the young of America,” Dan Sneed said, “go talk to our dental students.”

HELPING PATIENTS SMILE, TODAY AND FOR

by Natalie Hahn

Bob Mason, or “Dr. Geezer” as he is known to the patients, lives by a simple, selfless mantra: “The most precious gift one person can give to another is attention.” Since 2007, Dr. Geezer has been bringing smiles to patients’ faces while volunteering at MUSC and other nearby hospitals in his clown attire. It all started when his wife, Sherrie, encouraged him to visit Mooseburger Camp, a six-day intensive clown school in Minnesota. Sherrie hoped her husband would be reminded how to laugh and enjoy life again after retirement.

After attending a training program led by Bumper “T,” a clown renowned for cheering hospitalized patients, Bob decided to pitch the idea to the Charleston area in hopes that he could jump-start a local program.

The Bumper “T” Caring Clowns’ mission is to provide therapeutic humor to patients, families and caregivers in the hospital. Bob believes in the power of endorphins to reduce pain, and he knows that humor can jumpstart that healing process. Bob chartered the South Carolina chapter of Bumper “T” Caring Clowns and said he not only enjoys helping patients, but their families as well.

Bob developed his love of community service through the South Carolina Bumper “T” Caring Clowns program, but he also wanted to make a contribution that helps future patients. Bob and Sherrie are establishing a planned gift that will benefit Hollings Cancer Center. A survivor of melanoma, Bob made MUSC the beneficiary of his retirement plan, which will fund melanoma research.

“I’ve known people who have passed away from melanoma,” he said. “My personal situation makes me want to give. This planned gift will help others with cancer later down the road. We all know someone who has been affected by cancer in some way, whether personally or watching a loved one go through the disease. My wife and I have a lot of respect for MUSC and the good work that they do.”

Bob hopes that, like his and Sherrie’s planned gift, his clown program will continue to serve generations of patients, even beyond his years as a clown. But for now, keep an eye out for Dr. Geezer strolling the halls of MUSC, looking for patients in need of a good laugh.
PAVING THE WAY FOR FUTURE LEADERS
Former MUSC Hospital CEO’s scholarship continues lifelong connection

by Allyson Crowell

Stuart, a native of Virginia, came to MUSC as its first administrative resident in 1973. He joined the staff as an assistant administrator for ambulatory care a year later, after receiving offers from both MUSC and another institution in Ohio.

“But the flowers bloomed here at Christmas,” Stuart said. “It was more than flowers that kept us here, of course, but they sure helped.”

He and Barbara would spend the next four decades connected to MUSC, where Barbara currently serves as president of the MUSC Women’s Club. The group volunteers and provides scholarships to students in the six MUSC colleges.

“The two of us decided to invest in something important to us,” Stuart said. “MUSC is our highest priority.”

The W. Stuart and Barbara Smith Endowed Scholarship Fund will provide financial assistance to an incoming residential Master in Health Administration student in the College of Health Professions. Because an endowed fund takes time to accrue interest needed to pay out the first scholarship, the Smiths provided additional funding to support the first recipient immediately.

“The W. Stuart and Barbara Smith Endowed Scholarship Fund makes it possible for the MHA Division to recruit top students to the program and help the program remain competitive,” said MHA Division Director Dr. Jami DelliFraine.

The first student to receive the award, Kirstie Hewson of Lexington, received her undergraduate degree from the University of South Carolina in experimental psychology and currently works as a school age counselor. She said the Smiths’ scholarship helped with her decision to attend MUSC.

“I am sincerely grateful to the Smiths for their generous contribution to my graduate education and to the faculty of the Department of Healthcare Leadership and Management for selecting me for this award,” Hewson said. “This scholarship solidified my decision that the Master in Health Administration program at MUSC is the ideal place for me to cultivate professional relationships and gain the necessary skills and knowledge to be successful in the field of health care administration.”

Dr. James Zoller, chairman of MUSC’s Department of Healthcare Leadership and Management, called Stuart a role model for students. “Stuart Smith goes way back with our program,” Dr. Zoller said. “He was one of the founding advocates in the ’80s, and he has supported interns and fellows. He’s been a great friend of the MHA program over the years.”

As Stuart’s role within the university changed and expanded over the years, he chose to work with new MHA students annually. And each year, he said, the students impressed him. The Medical University Hospital Authority also has selected at least one MUSC MHA graduate as a fellow in hospital administration for the past 25 years.

The Smiths said they look forward to staying connected with the program and also getting to know more MHA students through the scholarship. “The benefit of providing a scholarship,” Stuart said, “is that it helps us recruit the best students.”

YEARS TO COME

“I’ve known people who have passed away from melanoma. My personal situation makes me want to give. This planned gift will help others with cancer later down the road.”

—Bob Mason, aka “Dr. Geezer”

Call Linda Cox at 843-792-9562 or email coxl@musc.edu to learn more about making a charitable gift to the MUSC Foundation through your retirement account.
When Domnique Newallo saw that one of the men following her to her apartment had a gun, she didn’t hand over her purse or run. Her car had broken down that morning on the way to a Spanish class that she struggled through but needed to graduate. Then, without her car, she had missed a doctor’s appointment that afternoon and couldn’t get it rescheduled for six months. And she could barely pay for her apartment, as she put herself through an undergraduate degree while raising a son with special needs.

So Domnique didn’t scream for help. She screamed at the men. And when the gunman told her that he needed the money to feed his daughter, she laid in harder. The men, so taken aback by her response, eventually fled.

Looking back on that afternoon in Atlanta, Domnique acknowledged her own recklessness. “That probably wasn’t the best way to handle the situation, but I get sick of people saying, ‘I’ve got kids or I didn’t graduate high school,’” she said recently. “I had a 10th grade education. I don’t like people making excuses.”

By age 11, Domnique had pledged her life to a gang in Detroit. She was stealing cars and breaking into houses. By 15, she was pregnant and homeless, in and out of juvenile detention centers.

“I like the saying, ‘It’s never too late to become who you’re destined to be,’” Domnique said. She is now in her third year at MUSC’s College of Medicine. She has received the College of Medicine Dean’s Scholarship for the past three years, which waives her out-of-state tuition, plus additional scholarship dollars.

“If it weren’t for donors, I wouldn’t be where I am now,” Domnique said. “We don’t get here on our own. None of us does.”

She researches under world-renowned radiologist Dr. Joe Schoepf and, within months of joining his lab, became first author on a publication about how breast calcifications can serve as an early indicator of heart disease.

“There couldn’t be any better proof of the effectiveness of the scholarship program,” Dr. Schoepf said. “We are all extremely proud of Domnique, especially knowing her background and family situation. I’m impressed at how she’s able to juggle all this successfully.”

After getting her GED as a teenager, Domnique joined the Army and became an X-ray technician. She married, had a second son and joined on with a private X-ray practice. But after seven years of working as a tech, she decided she wanted to be the doctor instead and enrolled at Spelman College in Atlanta in 2008.

When the recession hit, she lost her job, and her student loan debt surged. By then, her marriage had ended, and she was on her own again. Domnique relied on cafeteria workers who let her come early to eat meals for free and the women in the scholarship office who always managed to find a few thousand extra dollars to keep her from maxing out on her loans.

“I walked across the stage in 2013, and that was my first time ever walking across a stage,” Domnique said. “I kept telling myself, ‘Don’t cry. You want to look cute in pictures.’”

She chose MUSC for medical school for a few personal reasons. She had delivered her first son at Medical University Hospital when she was 16. She remembered walking to church from a home for pregnant girls in Charleston and how passersby stared at her swollen belly.

“I never felt that judgment at MUSC,” Domnique said. “The staff there just wanted to educate me, so that I could deliver and care for the healthiest baby.”

When it came time to apply to medical schools, Domnique contacted the diversity offices at 20 schools around the country. She only heard back from MUSC and one other school, but MUSC staff helped her with her personal statement. She received her acceptance letter on her 31st birthday.

“I never would’ve thought that the same place I gave birth to my son 17 years ago would be where I’m getting my education,” she said. “I have literally come full circle. Every day I wake up and thank people who take the time to give.”
with obstructions due to parasites. Those experiences shaped her desire to help other people throughout her career and on into "semi-retirement."

“I wanted to encourage students to continue to volunteer and also to help those going into a field that is so needed, family medicine,” Dr. Snape said.

Terrell Glenn, who graduated from the MUSC College of Medicine in May, received the Award for Volunteer Service this year, soon after finishing a rotation in Uganda. “I helped in the operating room, and I delivered a baby one day,” he said.

In addition to his time in Africa, Terrell worked at Grisia Ministries and the free MUSC Cares Clinic while finishing med school. “Service has been a great way to refocus,” he said.

He started a residency in family medicine at Texas A&M this fall.

“I liked all my rotations, but especially family medicine,” Terrell said. “A variety of cases came in, and you get the opportunity to get to know people. You get to know families over time.”

Dr. Snape, who received the South Carolina Medical Association Volunteer Physician of the Year Award in 2013, created one of her scholarships by donating from an Individual Retirement Account and private funds. She and her husband, Ed, also have donated to MUSC through a charitable gift annuity. Both scholarships are endowed, meaning students will benefit from that funding for generations to come.

“It’s a wonderful opportunity to give to charity if you don’t need it financially,” she said. “Since I don’t need it now, I would like to give it for a good cause.”

In addition to her work as medical director of the free clinic and her missions abroad, Dr. Snape serves Eucharist to shut-ins of St. James Episcopal, provides meals to homeless people and mentors women in becoming leaders. She remembers, after all, how women struggled to get to know people. “You get to know families over time.”

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“I just have a real desire to help,” Dr. Snape said, “wherever I am.”

Blatt-Ness fund supports cancer research, shows value of planned giving

by Allyson Crowell

B ut there was no mistake: the Blatt-Ness Distinguished Chair in Oncology had matured from its modest beginnings, thanks to careful planning and prudent investment. Judge Blatt remembered a reception for the fund in the early ‘90s -- and worrying that the meal cost more than the gift to MUSC at that point.

The Blatt-Ness Distinguished Chair in Oncology honors the late Speaker Solomon Blatt – South Carolina’s longest-serving state legislator and father of the 93-year-old judge – and the late Justice J. Bubba Ness, who was elected to the South Carolina Supreme Court in 1974 and served as chief justice from 1985 to 1988.

Those two men had a unique connection themselves. As Judge Blatt explained it, “Daddy loaned money to Bubba to go to college.” And just as Ness borrowed money from the senior Blatt, Ness in turn loaned the younger Blatt money when Blatt Jr. was in college. Ness wound up practicing in Bamberg, while Blatt Jr. practiced in nearby Barnwell before accepting the federal court job in Charleston, where he has served for 44 years.

Partners from the law firm of Ness, Medley, Richardson, Loadholt and Poole made gifts in 1993 that jumpstarted the Blatt-Ness fund. Terry Richardson, one of the attorneys and Ness’ son-in-law, said cancer research seemed the perfect avenue to honor the two men.

“Every family has been affected by cancer,” Richardson said. “We represented and still do represent a large number of asbestos victims who have died of cancer, mesothelioma or lung cancer. We have been intimately involved with cancer for a long time, and we’re all particularly indebted to Judge Blatt, Speaker Blatt and Justice Ness. All three gentlemen were mentors and leaders to our firm.”

An endowed fund provides an ongoing source of income and a prestigious recruitment tool. Through the Blatt-Ness chair, MUSC can hire world-class faculty members without straining an already tight budget.

MUSC’s Hollings Cancer Center recruited Dr. Anthony Alberg in 2006 as the first Blatt-Ness Distinguished Chair in Oncology. Alberg, a vocal advocate of smoke-free policies and an increased cigarette tax, currently serves as interim director of Hollings and a mentor to junior faculty. He said the endowed chair helped to provide the resources necessary to make a case for smoke-free communities across South Carolina and to engage in national efforts to increase the evidence base to drive policies.

“The most important thing, in all honesty, isn’t anything I’ve done,” Dr. Alberg said. “It’s being able to attract talented faculty in tobacco control through my leadership role in Hollings Cancer Center. Through their research and their activities locally, statewide and nationally, I think MUSC and the Hollings Cancer Center are having a huge impact. The impact of that chair starts with one person, but it really can be magnified through subsequent recruitment.”
A way from home and in aggressive treatment for brain cancer, Travis Branch had an idea. The 33-year-old father of two wanted to hold an event that would raise awareness and generate research funding for the disease that had landed him in the hospital.

When he went to California a few years later for a clinical trial that proved unsuccessful, he further defined what he wanted from that event: It should raise money specifically for promising clinical trials that could save lives like his own.

“He just didn’t have enough time left,” said his brother, Giles Branch. “He was talking about it in his final days.”

After Travis died in 2010, Giles and Carrie Branch Levesque, Travis' widow, took Travis' ideas and immediately got to work. As Carrie packed her home in Louisiana and prepared to move closer to family in Charleston, she and Giles began planning Swing For A Cure charity golf tournament.

“We took all the energy we had been focusing on Travis and his treatment and rolled it into the tournament,” Giles said. He and Travis had grown up working summers on local golf courses, and Travis always liked playing at Patriots Point – so that’s where they held Swing For A Cure in 2011.

Travis had died of sarcoma, a type of rare, malignant tumor that invades connective tissue. Swing For A Cure, which just celebrated its fifth year, brought in $100,000 this July for sarcoma research and clinical trials.

MUSC orthopedic oncologist Dr. Lee Leddy said the fund helped to set up a new sarcoma immunotherapy lab, where researchers will study how the body’s immune system recognizes and fights this type of cancer.

“Most doctors don’t get into sarcoma for a good reason. There aren’t a lot of good outcomes. But this event brings much-needed clinical trials and assists faculty and researchers. It has a direct impact on patient care.”

Swing For A Cure has grown gradually from Travis’ initial dream with every passing year. In 2014, newly-diagnosed osteosarcoma patient Eric Crawford and his wife, Meredith, attended the tournament dinner, after Eric had shared a testimonial for a video shown that evening.

Eric was in the midst of four rounds of chemotherapy at the time. After that, he underwent surgery and then three more rounds of chemo to fight the disease, but a lung scan revealed that treatment had failed.

“He was supposed to go to chemo the day of the scan, and it was canceled, so we had to figure out a new game plan,” Meredith said. “He said, ‘Let's go to Disney World.’”

The Crawfords took their 4-year-old daughter and 2-year-old son down to Florida for the weekend, and then the couple spent another weekend in New York visiting Eric’s old college buddies. Eric died fewer than six months after the tournament dinner.

Like Travis Branch, Eric Crawford had traveled to other states for treatment. He participated in an immunotherapy clinical trial and also enrolled in alternative treatments. One such treatment arrived on the Crawfords’ doorstep the day after Eric was admitted to the hospital – too late for him to take it.

Meredith became involved in planning Swing For A Cure just a month after Eric’s death, and the event is now called the Branch-Crawford Swing For A Cure.

When asked about the success of this year’s Swing For A Cure, Giles Branch and Carrie Branch Levesque say in unison, “Meredith.” But Meredith credits her late husband, whose outgoing personality first got them invited to the event and whose friends rallied around the tournament this year.

“Eric was definitely planning to golf in it this year,” Meredith said. “We didn’t know that we’d instead be honoring him.”

Next year’s tournament will be held July 8 & 9, 2016, at Patriots Point. Like the event’s Facebook page for updates: www.facebook.com/SwingForACure.TravisBranchMemorialGolfTournament

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-Dr. Lee Leddy
OUT & ABOUT

The MUSC College of Medicine hosted its 2015 Scholars and Benefactors Celebration Brunch on Oct. 10 at the Country Club of Charleston.

Mr. and Mrs. Ciandella with their daughter, Shelli Ciandella, recipient of the Class of 1967 Scholarship.

Dr. Robert Ball, Class of 1970 Scholarship Fund benefactor with Daniel Tagge, Class of 1970 Scholarship recipient.

Dr. Layton McCurdy, College of Medicine dean emeritus and benefactor of the Class of 1960 Scholarship and the Layton and Gwen McCurdy Endowed Scholarship.

Dr. Delores Gibbs, benefactor of the Rose Delores Gibbs, M.D. Endowed Scholarship, and Christopher Awozie, recipient of same.

Dr. Mary Baker, Class of 1978 Scholarship benefactor with Logan Roof, Class of 1978 Scholarship recipient.

Athena and Dr. Peter C. Gazes, benefactors of the Peter C. and Athena C. Gazes Endowed Scholarship, were treated to a surprise cake in honor of Dr. Gazes’ 94th birthday.

Maggie May Stephenson, granddaughter of Dr. Charles May, benefactor of the May Family Medical Heritage Scholarship, and Hampton Sasser, recipient of the May Family Medical Heritage Scholarship.
OUT AND ABOUT (cont’d.)

The College of Pharmacy hosted its annual scholarship luncheon for donors and scholarship recipients on Aug. 21, when students received 105 awards representing more than $213,000 in scholarship support. During the luncheon, Drs. Walt and Lynn Uber had the opportunity to visit with their scholarship recipient, Alyssa Rabon (center), a member of the Class of 2016.

On Sept. 2, the Charleston RiverDogs presented Storm Eye Institute with a check for $20,000 during the final home game of the season. For almost two decades, the RiverDogs have been a powerful community partner in the fight against blindness. Inspired by their daughter, Rebecca, who was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa as a child, RiverDogs owner Mike Veeck and his wife Libby have dedicated their lives to supporting vision research that will one day find the cure for blinding eye diseases.