from the President



One of the Texas Medical Center's premier institutions is getting a new name, and I couldn't be more pleased. To honor one of Houston's most outstanding physicians, scientists, scholars, and philanthropists, the Museum of Health & Medical Science is being renamed the "John P. McGovern Museum of Health & Medical Science."

It's almost impossible to drive through the streets of the Texas Medical Center and surrounding areas without seeing the name John P. McGovern. His many contributions have made life better for countless numbers of people, although many may not realize the extent of his generosity. That's because "Jack" McGovern cares about people, not about recognition for his good deeds.

As a young boy growing up in Washington, D.C., John McGovern accompanied his father, a surgeon, on Sunday morning hospital rounds. A nurse would routinely take the youngster to see babies in the newborn nursery. Perhaps this is where his love of children first began, leading to a future career in pediatrics.

John McGovern attended Duke University Medical School, where he earned an M.D. degree in 1945. While in school, he cultivated an interest in medical research that continues today. He served in the Army medical corps and in 1951 began teaching, first at George Washington University Medical School in Washington, D.C., then at Tulane Medical School in New Orleans. In 1956, he moved to Houston to join the Baylor College of Medicine faculty.

By this time, he had developed an interest in treating allergies, and opened the now-famous McGovern Allergy Clinic. His practice became very successful, along with his business investments.

It is at this crossroads that some choose to live what Dr. McGovern calls a "Caesarian" lifestyle – centered around money, property, and prestige. But not Jack McGovern. He instead chose to start a foundation benefiting others and fulfilling his need to give, noting that material possessions are temporary, but human kindness lasts forever.

Dr. McGovern definitely practices what he preaches. His foundation, the John P. McGovern Charitable Foundation, valued at more than $200 million, has given abundantly to numerous organizations in Houston and throughout North America. Locally, the foundation is the largest individual donor to both the Museum of Health and Medical Science and the Houston Children's Zoo, which bear his name. Hermann Park, another beneficiary, has named its newly enlarged and refurbished McGovern Lake in his honor as well.

The foundation has also given money to many institutions in the Texas Medical Center and gives funds primarily in Harris County for education, health promotion and disease prevention with special emphasis on children and families. More than 50 substance abuse treatment and prevention programs have benefited from his support, and in 1989, he was awarded the Surgeon General's Medal, particularly for his work combating drunken driving.

A tireless advocate of patient-centered practice, Dr. McGovern founded the American Osler Society in 1969, which is dedicated to furthering the Oslerian values of medical excellence, humane and ethical care, commitment to medical humanities and writing, research, and harmony between the academician and medical practitioner. Dr. Osler was recognized for his influence in the training of medical students at the bedside and authored the leading medical text of his time.

Dr. John McGovern is a humble man with a giant heart. Despite his prominent stature and prosperity, he remains grounded, focusing on the needs of others and targeting his giving programs to meet the needs of a broad spectrum of society.

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