

# Native Son WATCHES CENTER GROW

## *Moffitt Plays Vital Role In Metro Tampa's Development*

*By Michelle Bearden*

**From his Holland & Knight office on the 39th floor of the Regions Bank building in downtown Tampa, former Florida Gov. Bob Martinez can look out the window and take in the milestones of his life.**

There's the house he grew up in on Ivy Street in West Tampa near Raymond James Stadium. There's the University of Tampa campus, where he got his undergraduate degree and where the athletics center bears his name. His south Tampa home where he lives with his wife of 61 years is in a not-too-far distance as well.

And right below him is the city of his youth and adulthood, where he served as mayor from 1979 to 1986, undergoing an urban renaissance.

New housing developments and business structures. The long-awaited Riverwalk. And the beginnings of a street system that will ease traffic and encourage more walking.

"It's really pretty cool, isn't it?" says a relaxed Martinez, now 81 and a senior policy advisor for Holland & Knight. "I feel really privileged to still be a part of Tampa. Its history is my history."

The same could be said for Martinez's role with Moffitt Cancer Center.

He joined the center's Board of Advisors in 2006 just three years after it was formed at the invitation of former Moffitt Board Chairman Sen. Connie Mack. That makes him one of the longest-serving members of a board that plays a critical role in growing Moffitt's reputation and presence on a state and national level, and acts as a sounding board to Moffitt's senior management.

"They're our ambassadors," says Mary Coffeen, chief of staff to the CEO at Moffitt. "They are all busy, very talented people who take the time to spread the word about our mission here. They have a real commitment to helping us beat cancer, and that translates to helping us reach new audiences with our message. Sometimes that means patients, and other times it might be donors or lawmakers.

"Without a question, they play a vital role in our long-term growth."



Gov. BOB MARTINEZ

Martinez is in good company on the Board of Advisors, whose members are appointed and have no specific term limits. Some of his fellow members include: former ABC news commentator Sam Donaldson and his broadcast colleague, political commentator Cokie Roberts, National Football League former coach Don Shula, physician and author Robin Cook, NFL Hall of Famer Bob Griese (who chairs the group), National Hockey League commissioner Gary Bettman, former University of South Florida president Francis Borkowski, singer-actress Olivia Newton-John and retired U.S. Ambassador Mel Sembler.

What Martinez brings to the table is his history with the community and his expertise in government relations, Coffeen says.

“When we need advice or feedback on certain issues, he is quick to provide an answer or help set up a meeting,” she says.

Martinez has connections in Tallahassee, where he lived when he served as Florida’s first (and only so far) Hispanic governor from 1987 to 1991, and in Washington, D.C., where he served three years under President George H. W. Bush as the “Drug Czar” of the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

And there’s another asset that this Tampa native son provides in his longtime role as a Moffitt cheerleader.

“This is my home. This is where I grew up,” he says. “And you can say the same for Lee Moffitt. No matter how far our journeys have taken us, this is where our roots are planted.”

#### **HIS GRANDPARENTS WERE SPANISH IMMIGRANTS WHO CAME HERE IN 1908 LURED BY THE PROMISE OF WORK IN THE CIGAR FACTORIES. THOUGH THEY ENDED UP IN DIFFERENT PROFESSIONS, THEY FOUND A VITAL COMMUNITY OF FELLOW TRANSPLANTS.**

Born on Christmas in 1934, he recalls an idyllic and safe childhood. And to make his storybook beginnings even sweeter, he met the love of his life in his homeroom at Thomas Jefferson High. He was just 19 when he married Mary Jane Marino.

Indeed, it’s been a bountiful life. Besides all his years of public service, Martinez also has been an educator, a restaurant owner a business labor consultant. While he was mayor of Tampa, the city built one of the country’s first waste-to-energy plants, annexed thousands of unincorporated acres of land that would become New Tampa, opened the convention center and the performing arts center and revitalized Lowry Park Zoo.

He made a successful bid as governor after his two mayoral terms. In that capacity, he is most proud of the impact he made on the environment, including Preservation 2000, America’s largest environmental land acquisition program, and proposing the Surface Water Improvement Management Act that protects Florida’s surface waters. He also helped get Florida’s first solid-waste management law passed, advocated laws that protected manatees and dolphins, and implemented Florida’s Growth Management Act.

He doesn’t hesitate in picking the accomplishment that means the most to him.

“My marriage to Mary Jane,” he says. “That’s easily at the top of the list.” The six-decade union produced a son and daughter, and now five grandchildren. All of the youngsters are on Florida’s pre-paid college plan, another initiative championed by Martinez and launched when he was governor.

“My twin granddaughters were Contract One and Contract Two,” he says. “To be part of a program from the very beginning and to see so many families benefit from it is just so satisfying.”

#### **THAT ALSO SUMS UP HOW MARTINEZ FEELS ABOUT MOFFITT CANCER CENTER.**

What began as a dream of his colleague H. Lee Moffitt has blossomed into a major asset for the Tampa Bay area and Florida.

“Lee was a visionary. He was courageous,” he says. “He used his credibility and pull as Speaker of the House to fight for something that had not been done here before.”

Moffitt didn’t want just a hospital. He also wanted a research center that would seek cures and offer experimental treatments to patients whose options had run out. Martinez says finding the funding and the support were challenges that might have deterred others. But not Moffitt.

“It could have all gone south, but he was not about to let that happen,” Martinez recalls. “He put together a good group of people, stayed on course with the mission he envisioned and wouldn’t take no for an answer. Lee is a great example of how one person can make a difference.”

Having a nationally recognized cancer institute in an area is “every bit as vital” as a strong university and hospital system, major-league sports teams, a thriving corporate base, a diverse cultural and entertainment center and an international airport. It plays a role in attracting new residents and new businesses – all important components in growing a metropolitan area.

It also is a great equalizer in giving patients who otherwise could not afford to seek treatment in far-off places such as MD Anderson in Houston or Cleveland Clinic in Ohio, Martinez notes.

Martinez doesn’t have a personal cancer story to share. An avid walker and tennis player, he’s keenly aware that he’s been blessed with good health. But he knows the stories of so many patients who turn to Moffitt for a fighting chance to beat cancer. Those are the people who inspire him and give him the impetus to continue in his long-standing role as a Moffitt ambassador.

“We’ve come a long, long way in 30 years. Now we have a reputation and we have a brand,” Martinez says. “You can credit that to a history of performance, from quality care to medical breakthroughs. But there’s no letting up. Until we find a cure, we keep moving forward.”