A Legacy of LEARNING

By Ann Miller Baker

Dr. Leven “Chuck” Wilson
Advocate

Photography: Ray Reyes
In later years, he learned firsthand about cancer while battling multiple myeloma at Moffitt Cancer Center. He became a staunch Moffitt ally, serving on its Advisory Board even through treatment with son-in-law and caregiver Dr. Leven “Chuck” Wilson usually at his side.

“We went through a lot while he was sick simply because of the things we didn’t know,” said Wilson, a social worker with training in gerontology. “We were fortunate enough to have the resources to take care of him. But every day, whether we were at Moffitt or at his dialysis clinic, we were constantly seeing people who needed help. And as a social worker, my vow and my code of ethics is: if you see something, don’t just say something. Do something.”

Late last year, Wilson, his wife Shonda Jones Wilson, her mother Doris Jones and the entire Jones family did something extraordinary in memory of the Rev. Jones. They presented the Moffitt Foundation with a $100,000 gift, the first installment of a five-year, $500,000 pledge. The funds will support the overall efforts of Moffitt Diversity, including the George Edgecomb Society, as well as K-12 health care and research career development programs focused on minorities.

This extraordinary gift would not have been possible without the strength and support of the Reverend’s widow, Doris Jones. “I often heard my late husband say that we should work to make a global impact with a local imprint,” she said. “That is what this donation is all about.”

The four-hour service that day was as much a musical celebration as a “going home” gathering – and rightly so. Jones co-founded the famed 200-member Florida Mass Choir, writing songs that topped the gospel charts and recording 14 albums of inspirational music, including a solo CD that featured his signature raspy tenor voice raised in praise.

Though faith guided his life, there was another side to Jones. He was brought up by his grandmother to be a serious student. Classes in physics at St. Petersburg Junior College led him to an apprenticeship with IBM, which was looking to diversify its workforce at the Kennedy Space Center in Titusville. Though Jones lacked the finances to complete his college degree, IBM hired him straight out of the apprenticeship. His IBM career spanned more than two decades.

AFTER THE REV. ARTHUR T. JONES SR. TRANSITIONED FROM THIS EARTHLY LIFE IN 2013, thousands packed the Tampa church he founded to celebrate his impact. The Bible-Based Fellowship Church on Ehrlich Road with its roots in the Joneses’ home Bible study gatherings had flourished under his leadership, growing to 5,000 worshippers, five local congregations and two schools in Africa.

The Rev. Arthur T. Jones Sr.

Arthur T. “Tim” Jones II (L) and Wilson share a few moments inside Bible-Based Fellowship Church of Tampa near the seat honoring the Rev. Jones.

Photography: Ray Reyes
THE WILSON-JONES FAMILY GIFT HAS MULTIPLE COMPONENTS, BASED IN JONES’ REVERENCE FOR EDUCATION AND AIMED AT IMPACTING CANCER HEALTH DISPARITIES AFFECTING THE BLACK/AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY.

Its design evolved in the five years since Jones’ passing, through conversations between Wilson and B. Lee Green, PhD, vice president of Moffitt Diversity, Public Relations and Strategic Communications. As a researcher, Green’s career has been focused on studying health disparities in general and cancer disparities specifically. Green has a long history of research in this area.

“During all of my time focusing on health disparities, I have not seen a single family make this level of commitment financially to help address this pressing health issue,” said Green. “It is rewarding to see such a personal commitment from one family. I think it will take this type of commitment from the community for us to eventually see a reduction or elimination of health disparities. The Jones family has certainly set a standard for others in the community.”

The gift will support the overall Moffitt diversity efforts focused on cancer disparities that include health education and training for the community, student training/career development, patient care support and research.

One example is a new partnership based at a Citrus Park resource center owned by Wilson’s businesses, the non-profit Renew Group and his CPAG, Inc. health care company. Moffitt’s M-POWER (Moffitt Program for Outreach Wellness Education & Resources) works with the community to develop and improve methods to reduce cancer disparities. In this partnership, M-POWER staff visit the resource center two days each month to present workshops on healthy lifestyles, nutrition and awareness of programs addressing various types of cancers – including screening voucher offers through Moffitt. M-POWER staff are also available for one-on-one meetings with community members to answer their cancer questions and help them navigate access to and care at Moffitt.

“At the end of the day,” noted Wilson, “it’s how do we eradicate cancer? How do we deal with health disparities? How do we actually create information and resources for all of those who are impacted by it? And, importantly, how do we encourage our young people and even our older people to go in health care professions? Regardless of one’s resources, if you don’t have the capacity to deliver care, then we’re still in a difficult situation. Not having the capacity can still create the disparities in health care.”

Most importantly, Wilson says, the family hopes this gift will set an example for more to follow.

“We hope this gift will encourage others to give and have a voice,” said Wilson. “When others give, it makes the voice bigger. It makes the mission bigger.”

And to that, you can almost imagine the Rev. Jones’ raspy voice adding, “Amen.”