

'Great Floridian' Charlotte Maguire dies at 96

Doug Blackburn, Tallahassee Democrat 11:02 a.m. EST December 7, 2014



(Photo: COLIN HACKLEY/FSU)

Charlotte Edwards Maguire, a pioneer as a physician and a philanthropist who was an invaluable advocate for Florida State University's new medical school, died Saturday at her home in Westminster Oaks. She was 96 and had been receiving hospice care.

Gov. Rick Scott named Maguire a "Great Floridian" last year and recognized her during a ceremony in the atrium of the FSU College of Medicine.

Maguire's ongoing gifts to FSU enabled the university to expand the precursor to its medical school, and her continued support helped make it possible for FSU to establish the country's first new public medical school in a quarter-century when it opened in 2000.

John Thrasher, now FSU's president, was speaker of the Florida House of Representatives and a fellow proponent for creating a college of medicine at FSU, his alma mater. He worked closely with Maguire to ensure that FSU would have an accredited medical school even though it wouldn't be associated with a teaching

hospital, as was the norm at most universities.

"Charlotte was one of the early supporters of the medical school. She was generous with her support and stayed involved and stayed supportive of the physicians. She will be greatly missed," Thrasher said. "She never asked for anything other than the opportunity to contribute to the medical education of the next generation of physicians."

Maguire's life story could easily be turned into a Hollywood production. She was born in 1918 and grew up in Orlando.

Maguire earned her undergraduate degree at Memphis Teachers College in 1940, where she worked as a long-distance operator for the telephone company to help pay for her education. She went to medical school at the University of Arkansas, because University of Florida did not open its medical school until 1956, when Maguire was well into her practice as a pediatrician in Orlando.

She was the only female student in her class at medical school, and she encountered faculty members who did not think a woman should be attempting to become a physician.

"They were resentful," she recalled in a 2004 interview. "They didn't want to talk about male problems and illnesses in front of a woman."

It was indeed a different era. When Maguire established her own pediatric practice in Orlando in 1946, providing free care for those in need and focusing on children with disabilities, the local newspaper ran a story with the following headline: "Orlando's first girl doctor returns."

Maguire married Raymer Francis Maguire Sr. in 1948. He was an attorney, citrus grove owner and 28 years her senior. When he died in 1960, Maguire maintained her medical practice while taking over the family business, driving an hour to Lakeland to take classes in citrus grove management and earning a real estate license.

Her distinguished career included time as assistant secretary of health and scientific affairs for the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. She was also involved in establishing the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services.

Maguire will certainly be remembered for her generosity and her active support for training students to be physicians. Her contributions enabled FSU to strengthen its Program in Medical Sciences, or PIMS, which was a joint effort with University of Florida to create a pipeline from FSU to UF's medical school. Her unwavering support also helped launch FSU's College of Medicine, where the school's library is named for her.

"She was loved, admired and respected by all who were lucky enough to know her. Her early and vocal support of the College of Medicine helped make this experiment in medical education happen," John Fogarty, dean of the medical school, said in a release. "She faithfully attended most of our graduation and White Coat ceremonies when her health allowed, and it was wonderful to see our students interact with her."

Maguire's professional focus shifted from pediatrics to geriatrics late in her career. Ken Brummel-Smith holds the Charlotte Edwards Maguire, M.D., Chair in Geriatrics at FSU.

"Dr. Maguire was the quintessential physician," he said. "She would often express alarm that physicians today 'don't examine people!' She would always want assurance that we are teaching our students to sit down and listen to the patients' stories, and put their stethoscopes to the patients' chests."

Maguire moved to Westminster Oaks, a multi-level assisted living facility, in 1991. She had an impact there, as well. Her donations allowed Westminster to create the Maguire Learning Center, which now serves the entire Tallahassee community as a premier educational venue.

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