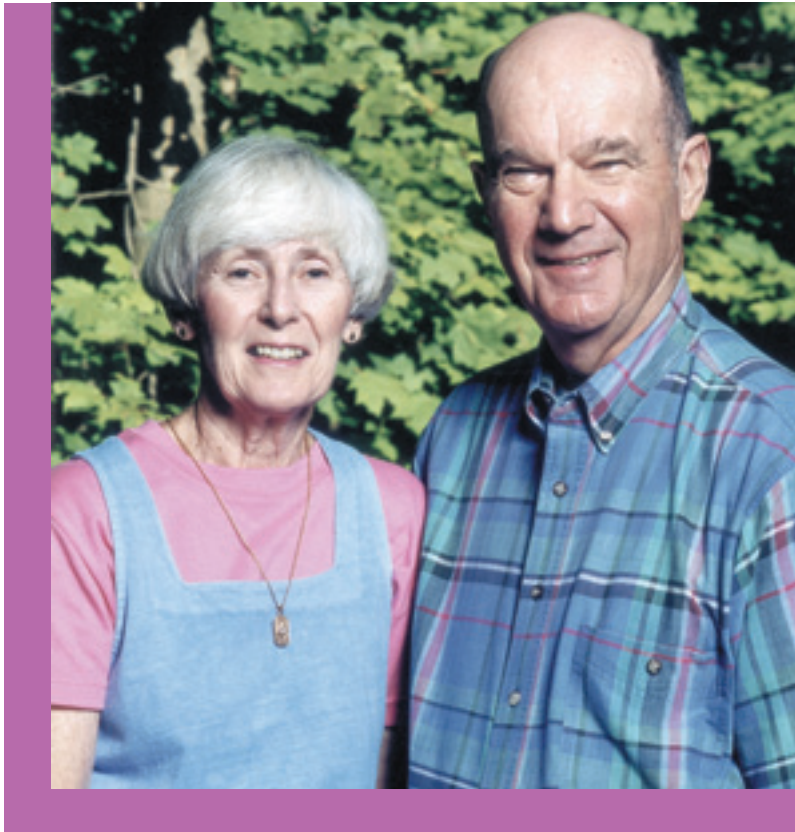


BETTING ON THE RIGHT PEOPLE

For Bob and Ellen Thompson, it's a way of life...and they're betting all they've got



“It’s the same thing with the University of Michigan. You’ve got a friend you’ll bet on because you feel that they’re going to do the right things.”

It was on a farm in the small, southern Michigan town of Jonesville that Bob Thompson was raised during the Great Depression. His family’s life was one of self-described modesty and simplicity, with no electricity or running water. But despite limited amenities, his parents set an example of benevolence and generosity.

“My parents were caring people. They cared about their neighbors, their friends, and their family. And they did things. They sacrificed what they had, which wasn’t much, to help others.”

In 1999, Bob Thompson and his wife, Ellen, an early elementary school teacher who also comes from a modest background, sold their asphalt business, Thompson-McCully Company, which they started in 1959 with just \$3,500. With a selling price of \$400 million, helping others as Bob’s parents had done a generation before became their highest priority.

Although their profits could have afforded them a luxurious lifestyle, they remained in their hometown of Plymouth in the same unassuming home they bought in 1962 and immediately began giving away their money. They divided \$128 million among 550 Thompson-McCully employees, former employees, and their families. With \$100 million, they established the Thompson Foundation, with a mission to benefit education in Detroit, Highland Park and Hamtramck — three southeastern Michigan communities with limited educational resources — and they made gifts to their alma mater, Bowling Green State University, and to

Michigan Technological University. And it didn't stop there. Each year the Thompsons give to other causes, with a focus on education.

"Education is the answer," Thompson says. "Education broadens you. It makes you hopefully open up to accepting other ideas and issues. It lets you go on to do something."

Situated in his unembellished office and dressed in casual clothing, he candidly states, "What you see is what we are. This is it." The extravagance that money can buy simply does not appeal to Bob

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and Ellen Thompson. "We don't need the money we have." And it is for that reason he and Ellen have a lifetime goal of giving away all of their assets.

In August 2001, the University of Michigan Cardiovascular Center and its electrophysiology program benefited from a \$1.16 million gift from the Thompsons.

A few years prior, Bob had been experiencing heart problems. After consulting with several physicians in the area, he referred himself to Fred Morady, M.D., at the U-M, who diagnosed Bob with atrial fibrillation and treated him with a pacemaker. The procedure improved Bob's quality of life tremendously, and, soon after, he wrote to Morady expressing his desire to make a contribution towards cardiovascular research.

Says Bob, "Dr. Morady is a dedicated guy. He's really trying to solve some problems. He will develop things that will change the way medicine is delivered to his and other patients. It's impor-

tant in his life. He's just simply driven to solve problems, so if you can give him some financial help, then you know you're on the right team."

Currently, the Thompson's gift is being used by Morady and his team for research projects that will advance the understanding of atrial fibrillation and improve treatments. In January 2002, the Thompsons presented two more gifts to the University of Michigan Health System.

In recognition of the dedication and expertise in complementary and alterna-

tive medicine of the Department of Urology's Mark Moyad, senior research associate, the Thompsons contributed \$500,000. In a health care world where time is often limited, Moyad's patience and extraordinary patient care left a lasting impression on Bob and Ellen Thompson.


"Mark Moyad is a person who has endeared himself to us by personally counseling us on our health issues. He takes time, he does a lot of research, and he has an understanding [of quality patient care]." The gift is being used to support prevention, therapies, education and counseling for patients, medical students, and other health professionals regarding complementary and alternative medicine therapies.

The third gift went to the Kellogg Eye Center — \$1 million to support the planned facility expansion where research into macular degeneration, a condition from which Bob suffers, will be conducted. When asked why he was

motivated to give to Kellogg, and to the Department of Urology and the Division of Cardiology, Thompson refers to a small anecdote about putting faith in people.

"In life, at least I always say, you bet on people. If you get the right person, if you get the right feeling, and the chemistry is right, you know you can move forward with these people. We ran a fair-sized construction company, and it was always based on relationships with our people. If we had the right people in the right spot, we would just stay out of their way and know that they would do okay. And I think it's the same thing with the University of Michigan. You've got a friend you'll bet on because you feel that they're going to do the right things.

"And besides," he says, "I have fun doing this. I'm 70 years old and I get to talk to all kinds of people about all kinds of things. I've got an opportunity to go on in life and still be involved and active and viable. I'm very thankful for that."

Bob and Ellen Thompson hope that in the end they will have changed people's lives for the better. Just as their parents did, the Thompsons care about others. And they do things. For that, the University of Michigan Medical School is endlessly grateful. 

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