

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Phil Jenkins' 'sweeping' philanthropy focuses on results

Photo: Gregory Fox



Phil Jenkins

“All I am is a sweeper manufacturer from Dexter, Michigan,” says Phil Jenkins.

Well, not quite.

Jenkins was a young engineer working for Caterpillar Tractor in 1949 when he got a call summoning him home to Dexter to take over the family farm equipment business. Once back in Michigan, a call from an old classmate — an automobile dealer — changed everything. Jenkins recalls, “He mentioned that if he just had a sweeper on the front of his Jeep, he could sell a hundred of them.”

Jenkins and his shop manager, Jim Klaperich, spent a weekend fashioning such a vehicle, and Sweepster was born. A half-century later, Sweepster, Inc., manufactures attachment, walk-behind, self-propelled and airport runway sweepers for all types of equipment used in airports, municipalities, agriculture and construction around the globe. Annual sales total about \$50 million, with aviation products generating about 25 percent of the gross revenue. And if that's not enough, Jenkins has channeled his success into a selfless and inspiring philanthropy.

He funded the creation of the Generations Together center in Dexter where preschool children and senior citizens enrich each other's lives. He supported the expansion of the Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum to encourage more children

to go into engineering-related fields instead of overcrowded fields like law. But it's his commitment to health care that has proven truly extraordinary.

In 1999, Jenkins learned of the work of Mark Moyad, a young Michigan researcher, and his holistic approach to prostate cancer research and treatment. Impressed and eager to help, he gave \$1.5 million to establish the Phil F. Jenkins Complementary and Alternative Medicine Endowment Fund at the University of Michigan. "I did it for

"I can't think of one person who has had more of an impact on my medical career and the lives of my patients," says Mark Moyad.

Mark Moyad," says Jenkins. "He's a brilliant guy doing a great job for breast and prostate cancer around the country and around the world. I'm just amazed at the guy. What I want is results. I want to see the U-M get more researchers like Mark Moyad and keep them here."

"I can't think of one person who has had more of an impact on my medical career and the lives of my patients," says Moyad. "Phil Jenkins has set up a situation I call 'old fashioned medicine in a modern time.' Because of his support of my time, I can spend as much time with a patient as necessary. I can see a retired couple who aren't wealthy but need a

consultation, and I can take the time with them they need. I can go to a patient's house, or talk on the phone with them. People are now using this as a model of what can be accomplished when a patient and a health professional get together and share a vision of making health care better. Phil is a person who invests in people, not in concepts or things that, maybe 100 years from now, *might* do something."

Jenkins didn't stop there. Last year, he gave \$2 million to the U-M Medical

School to help build the new U-M Depression Center.

"This is a thrilling and gratifying development," says John Greden, M.D., the Rachel Upjohn Professor of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience in the medical school, chair of the Department of Psychiatry and senior research scientist at the U-M Mental Health Research Institute. "The Depression Center at Michigan is dedicated to being a leader in the study and treatment of depressive illnesses and to forging a new public policy toward this disorder. That people like Phil Jenkins are coming on board in support of this endeavor truly demonstrates

that the tide has turned, and that depression is now being addressed as a chronic disease like diabetes. This extraordinary support brings us closer to effective treatments for this devastating disease."

Jenkins, whose wife, Lyn, lived with depression before her death in 1999, is all too familiar with the toll the disease takes on people. "I see depression everywhere," he says. "It's an insidious thing we really don't recognize. One problem is that we don't admit that we have it — it carries a stigma, and we have to get over that.

"I believe in John Greden. He's an honest and straightforward guy, probably the most common-sense psychiatrist I've ever met."

Jenkins' gift will be used to help build the U-M Depression Center facility — a place where research, clinical care and education will intersect in an environment of hope.

Once constructed, the University of Michigan Depression Center will be the first comprehensive research and treatment facility in the United States devoted to depressive illnesses. Says Greden, "One of our goals for the center is to diminish the stigma of depression. Other disorders, like cancer, were stigmatized in the past. Now we have a national network of 21 cancer centers. Ten years from now, I hope we will have a national network of depression centers; it is our goal to catalyze this trend with our initiative at Michigan."

—WH