

Sylvester's 30th Naming Anniversary Celebration Honors Family's Philanthropy and Foresight

After watching his father suffer before eventually succumbing to cancer, Harcourt M. Sylvester Jr. vowed to do everything within his power to alleviate that pain for other families. With a dynamic vision and generous financial support to the University of Miami, he forever changed the face of cancer care in South Florida.



(From left) Stephen D. Nimer, M.D.; Brian Smith; Jena Smith; Laura Sylvester; W. Jarrard Goodwin; Sharon Goodwin; Andy Trunk; Chris Malfitano; Jayne Malfitano



Thirty years later, the world-renowned cancer center that bears his name – Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center – is now leading the way when it comes to cancer research, clinical care, education, and community outreach programs. It was Sylvester's philanthropy and foresight that laid the groundwork for the center to achieve its coveted National Cancer Institute designation and become the region's only nationally ranked cancer center.

In 1986, Sylvester pledged \$27.5 million from the Harcourt M. and Virginia W. Sylvester Foundation, which he and his father created. The pledge was to benefit cancer programs at the University of Miami School of Medicine and was the largest gift in University history at the time. Two years later, the foundation committed an additional \$5 million to help fund the construction of a one-of-a-kind facility designed to promote discovery and healing.

When that building officially opened in 1992, it ushered in a new era in cancer care. Sylvester was joined at the dedication ceremony by his two daughters, Jayne S. Malfitano, now president and director of the Harcourt M. and Virginia W. Sylvester Foundation and vice chair of Sylvester's Board of Overseers, and Laura Sylvester, now vice president of the foundation. Their daughters, Clare Malfitano and Jena Smith, are also members of the board.

Together, they have continued the legacy left by their late father and grandfather, using the family's foundation to continue to invest heavily in Sylvester and its physician-researchers. Their most recent gift was a \$5 million commitment to enhance Sylvester's survivorship programs.



Celebration and Gratitude

In recognition of the 30th anniversary of the naming of Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, a celebratory dinner was held at The Boca Raton to honor the University's strong partnership with the Sylvester family. In attendance were Malfitano and her husband, Chris Malfitano; Laura Sylvester and her husband Andy Trunk; and Smith and her husband, Brian.

University of Miami President Julio Frenk welcomed guests and offered his gratitude, calling the members of the Sylvester family incredible stewards of their family's legacy and an integral part of the University family.

"You are the standard bearers of your family and steadfast partners in helping us to expand our mission," said President Frenk. "We have achieved so much together."

Jarrard "Jerry" Goodwin, M.D., former director of Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center (1996-2010), reiterated that sentiment, crediting the Sylvester family for the thought and purpose behind their foundation's pledges, which shaped Sylvester into the world-renowned cancer center it is today.

"So many people came together in the formative days of Sylvester, when we wondered if we could become a great cancer center," said Dr. Goodwin. "I could not be prouder of Sylvester than I am today."

'Such an Incredible Gift'

Adam Carlin, chair of the Sylvester Board of Overseers, extended his gratitude to the Sylvester family, noting that they could have done anything they wanted with their resources, energy, and passion but chose to put it towards



building an extraordinary cancer center to serve the South Florida community.

“I want to thank the Sylvester family for such an incredible gift you’ve given us and continue to do so,” Carlin said. “You have no idea the difference you have made in so many people's lives and their families.”

As a person who has lived with breast cancer, Felicia Knaul, Ph.D., a member of the Cancer Control Program at Sylvester and director of the Institute for Advanced Study of the Americas, spoke specifically of how the Sylvester family’s most recent gift support patients and survivorship.

“I want to thank you for making it possible for all of us to be able to continue our journey and to receive care in a place that radiates compassion and caring,” she said. “This is a gift to all patients who are treated at Sylvester.”

Survivors and Volunteers

Javier Sanchez, executive director of Dolphins Challenge Cancer, also spoke about survivorship, noting how exciting it was to have more than 300 participants who were cancer survivors participate in the DCC after they received treatment at Sylvester. He then thanked the Sylvester family for their longstanding commitment to the Miami Dolphins’ signature fundraiser.

“We would not be here today – we would not have advanced as much as we have – if it were not for this partnership,” said Sanchez. “I thank you for your continued support of the cancer center and DCC.”

Susan Dinter, the chair of The Pap Corps Champions for Cancer



Research, told the Sylvester family how proud her all-volunteer organization is to be part of the Sylvester team, and their gratitude to the philanthropist who started it all.

"I thank your father for being so philanthropic and creating a cancer center in our neighborhood that all of us can be proud of," Dinter said.

Throughout the evening, University and community leaders relayed their appreciation for the ongoing support of the Sylvester family. One of the most touching tributes came from Sylvester Director Stephen D. Nimer, M.D.

"Thirty years ago, the Sylvester family set in motion an engine to drive clinical cancer care, prevention and early detection research, education, and training and advanced and complex treatments for the most difficult to treat cancers," said Dr. Nimer, who is also the Oscar de la Renta Endowed Chair in Cancer Research and executive dean of research at the Miller School.

"Jayne, Laura, Clare, and Jena, as the representatives of the Harcourt M. and Virginia W. Sylvester Foundation, you have gone above and beyond in carrying on your family's mission to change cancer care and research in South Florida. I want to thank the Sylvester Foundation and family for their continuing involvement and passionate advocacy for all we do."

Steadfast Dedication

To recognize the Sylvester family for their visionary leadership and steadfast dedication to Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, Dr. Nimer presented them with a tribute book that chronicles the Sylvester legacy in the cancer center's history and its promise for the future.



Speaking on behalf of her family, Jayne Malfitano thanked those in the audience, as well as those who were not able to attend, for joining them on this incredible journey in making Sylvester all that it is today.

She concluded her comments by calling for a toast to “honor our past, celebrate our present, and look to a very bright future.”

The evening was a touching tribute to an inspirational man and devoted philanthropist whose family is keeping his legacy alive through everlasting support for Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center and the University of Miami. To date, the Harcourt M. and Virginia W. Sylvester Foundation has committed more than \$62 million.

Content Type Article