

A NATURAL SPIRIT OF GIVING



DR. JULIUS & ALICE COMBS

Philanthropists

By Damon Autry

There is a quiet nobility to Dr. Julius and Alice Combs. Their words are measured and thoughtful, and they exhibit a conscientious spirit when it comes to philanthropy. Their understated and genteel qualities are complemented by a kindheartedness that didn't have to be pounded into their psyche by their parents. Rather, their thoughtfulness is simply a manifestation of who they are.

Julius practiced medicine as an Ob/Gyn physician for more than 30 years before retiring in 1998 and Alice retired from the Detroit Public School System as the head of the Physically or Otherwise Impaired Health Department. The couple has always believed in philanthropy and of being a blessing to those less fortunate. Part of that shone through when in 1992 Julius co-founded the United American Healthcare Corporation, a full-service management company that provided healthcare to underserved individuals in the community.

In 2006 however, the couple donated an unprecedented \$1.5 million to the Wayne State University Medical School, the same institution from which Julius received his education. When asked why they chose to share such a large sum of their resources, Alice said simply "We wanted to be sure that we contributed to something that contributed so much to our lives. I wanted our gift to make a significant impact because (my husband) had gone there, and I believe that it has." Julius took it a step further. "Educational institutions are struggling in terms of the support they receive," he says. "There's a great need for others to pitch in when they can. I think the future of this country to some extent has to depend

upon philanthropy and that dependence is increasing every day." But Julius unfortunately sees a change in how some may view the need for assisting others. "Helping those who are in need has become passé in this country, especially to a large group of controlling people. But that's the way I was brought up."

Julius recalls as a young child his first taste of a philanthropic moment. "I remember being given a small number of coins at church to put in the collection plate for the missionary offering," he says. "I had no idea what a missionary offering was, but it goes back to the notion that we are obligated to help others if it was at all possible."

Something deeper than conventional philanthropy is at work with Julius and Alice, something so honest and noteworthy that it's difficult to articulate. The couple, by all appearances, project a keen sense of awareness relative to the needs of the community and a true consciousness of the limitless benefits their generosity can trigger. While there is an inherent flood of attention that comes after presenting a public institution with a seven figure gift, the couple is indifferent to the notoriety. Their kindness isn't for the pats on the back or the congratulatory handshakes or the articles espousing the virtues of their thoughtfulness. Rather, it's for the humility and the sheer gratitude of knowing they are doing what's right. "My Christian teachings strongly support giving back to others," Julius says. "That's a principally rejected notion these days, but (my Christian teachings) support that notion."

And Detroit is a better place because of it.