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Eastern N.C.'s first female physician dies

By Kathryn Kennedy
The Daily Reflector

Thursday, October 09, 2008

A legacy of caring and social justice remains after the death of a local retired pediatrician.

Dr. Malene Grant Irons, known simply as "Dr. Malene" to patients and friends, passed away Wednesday at her home in the Cypress Glen Retirement Community. She was 93.

A funeral service will be held at 2 p.m. today at Jarvis Memorial United Methodist Church.

"Above all is the legacy of a servant," said her son, Dr. Tom Irons, associate vice chancellor for regional health services at East Carolina University. "She practiced from a position of service...the physician should be on his or her knees before the patient. I've been powerfully touched by that."

Dr. Malene earned a certificate in nursing from the East Carolina Teachers' College before enrolling in pre-medical courses at Duke University. She and her identical twin, Isa Costen Grant, then applied to Duke's medical school but were turned away.

"They were rejected on the grounds of their frailty," Tom Irons said with a laugh.

"Duke hadn't taken women at that point," he said. "They stayed up all night applying to colleges they knew would take women and got in to all of them. They were tough women."

They selected the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond to complete their degrees. In 1945, Dr. Malene and her husband, the late Dr. Cary Frederick Irons Jr., opened practices in Greenville. She was the first pediatrician and female physician in eastern North Carolina.

Local lore includes a story about Dr. Malene working in the neonatal ward when the hospital was still segregated, according to ECU spokesman John Durham. Durham recounted a tale he heard about an African-American baby not receiving the care it needed, so she brought it up to the white ward without hesitation — a solitary event launching her involvement in the hospital’s integration.

Dr. Malene was honored throughout her career for both medical and civic service. She was appointed the first director of the Developmental Evaluation Clinic in 1965, and in 1974 they named the building after her. The Kiwanis Club of Greenville once observed a "Dr. Malene Irons Night" in recognition of her work among underprivileged children. To this day, the city of Greenville presents the Best-Irons Humanitarian Award annually, in honor of Dr. Malene and the late Dr. Andrew Best.

"She was a truly tolerant person who believed in charity in the biblical sense, looking towards everyone with love and respect," Tom Irons said. "She was also an extraordinary thinker. Took nothing at face value...always questioning."

She is survived by three sons and their families. Tom Irons said they were all privileged to know and be raised by Dr. Malene.

"In her last several years, she grew more compromised in her thinking, but her kindness remained," Tom Irons concluded. "It was difficult to care for her, because she had many needs, but [Cypress Glen staff] all loved her."

Memorials can be made to the Malene G. Irons Scholarship, ECU Medical Foundation, 525 Moye Blvd., Greenville, N.C. 27834; or the Cypress Glen Benevolent Fund, 600 Hickory St., Greenville, N.C. 27834; or to Jarvis Memorial United Methodist Church, 510 S. Washington St., Greenville, N.C. 27834.
Stadium plans move forward

By Josh Humphries
The Daily Reflector

Thursday, October 09, 2008

The East Carolina University football team will have a much larger house in a few years.

Athletics officials continue to plan for an expansion of Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium that will close in the scoreboard-end of the field to give the stadium a horseshoe shape.

Officials say plans for the $24 million expansion are still in the early stages, and they hope to get started with construction after the 2009 football season. Work should be finished by the 2011 season.

"The only thing for sure is we are going to put as many seats as possible into the east end zone," wrote Terry Holland, director of athletics at ECU, in an e-mail last week. "This should enhance our game day atmosphere in several ways."

The projections are for between 7,500-9,000 new seats, depending on sight lines and other factors, Holland wrote. That will bring the total capacity of the stadium to around 50,000, allowing officials to move seats allocated to students to the lower level of the stadium, closer to the field.

"Closing in the end zone will hold the noise in and direct it to the field," Holland wrote.

It also will open new opportunities for revenue, freeing about 3,000 seats for sales to season-ticket holders, and raising money from the lease of planned luxury suites — though they are also still in the planning phase, as is a new press box.

Jimmy Bass, senior associate director of athletics for external operations, said the project will be funded with self-liquidating bonds approved by ECU Board of Trustees and UNC system Board of Governors.

The added revenue-boosting opportunities could be targeted toward paying for those bonds.

Most importantly, to many Pirate fans, is the boost it'll give on game day, making the stadium more difficult place for visiting teams to play.

"It will create more of a home-field advantage," he said. "We are trying to create a fan-friendly college football facility that helps us create a home field advantage for the Pirates."

Bass said there is no way to know how the expansion may affect ticket prices, but officials believe there will be enough continued demand for ECU games to warrant the construction.

Officials have been quick to say that none of the funding will come from student fees.

"We think there will be a continued demand for tickets for Pirate football in the future," Bass said. "We are focused on improving the game day for all of our fans, students, Pirate club members, faculty and staff. More seats will yield more potential for season-ticket revenue and also new Pirate Club members to contribute to the athletic scholarship fund."

The new section will have upgraded concessions, rest rooms and other amenities.

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A boy, a preacher and a severe case of hydrophobia

The Diviners takes center stage in Ayden

By Lauren Harrell
The Daily Reflector

Friday, October 10, 2008

The Ayden Community Theatre will present "The Diviners," an award-winning, two-act play by Jim Leonard Jr., at the Doug Mitchell Auditorium in Ayden this weekend.

"The Diviners," set in the rural town of Zion, Ind., in the 1930s, is an inspiring tale about Buddy Layman, an impaired 14-year-old boy with a fear of water, and his companionship with C.C. Showers, a disillusioned preacher.

A traumatic accident took the life of Buddy's mother and left him with severe hydrophobia — the fear of water. But it also left the boy with the ability to predict weather and find underground water.

When C.C. Showers comes into town looking for work, Buddy befriends the pastor. The two outcasts find a common bond.

Former Kentucky pastor C.C. helps Buddy overcome his fear of water and Buddy's simple questions about angels and heaven help provide C.C. — and the Depression-ridden town — with hope and something to believe in.

The original staging of "The Diviners" was produced at Hanover College in Indiana, where it won the National American College Theatre Festival Playwriting Award in 1980.

It also played Off-Broadway at the Circle Repertory Theatre in New York in 1980 and 1981.

Other plays by Leonard include "Crow and Weasel," "V&V," and "And They Dance Real Slow in Jackson."

Ann Creech, ACT president and stage manager for "The Diviners," said the play was chosen because it is so "different" and "has such a great story."

Since there are many different locations in the story, the stage is set up with several platforms to distinguish one setting from another.

"It took a lot of imagination," Creech said.

Ayden Community Theatre was founded in 1978 as Ayden Theatre Workshop under the direction of mentor and teacher Doug Mitchell. Following a hiatus, the group re-emerged through Ayden Arts and Recreation.

The Ayden theater produces at least two major productions each year, generally one in the spring and one in the fall.

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