

Alumni couple gives \$5 million for Presidential Chair at Tulane School of Medicine

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A \$5 million gift from retired pathologists and Tulane alumni Phil and Cheryl Leone is establishing the university's ninth Presidential Chair, to be based in the School of Medicine. (Photo courtesy of Phil and Cheryl Leone)

A husband and wife team who first met as Tulane undergraduates on the way to becoming doctors is donating \$5 million to create the university's ninth Presidential Chair, which will be based at the School of Medicine.

The Drs. Philip and Cheryl Leone Presidential Chair Endowed Fund will support a medical school professor who will also hold a joint appointment in another school or unit and focus on areas such as public health, immunology, parasitology or anthropology.

Phil (A&S '64, M '68) and Cheryl (NC '66, M '69) Leone are retired pathologists and current members of the School of Medicine Board of Governors. They view their donation as an expression of gratitude to their alma mater and an important investment in medical education and innovation.

“Tulane University has played a major role in our lives and the lives of our family members,” Phil Leone said. “Our son graduated from Tulane, and Cheryl’s siblings earned undergraduate and graduate degrees from the university. Our education impacted us all personally and professionally in very positive ways, and we have always wanted to give back.”

“Endowing a Presidential Chair with an emphasis on interdisciplinary academic study allows us to contribute to the university in these challenging times,” Cheryl Leone added. “We hope our gift will strengthen the medical school and help train future physicians who can significantly advance the field of medicine.”

Tulane is now one step away from President Michael Fitts’ goal of adding 10 Presidential Chairs to its faculty endowments. Presidential Chairs are a top priority for Fitts as he seeks to attract some of the world’s most renowned faculty members in multi-disciplined areas such as biomedicine, coastal restoration, global health and more.

“The Leones are a true Tulane family, not only because they earned their degrees here, but for the many contributions they have made both in their own careers and now through this extraordinary commitment to advance interdisciplinary inquiry and instruction, which are so vital in addressing today’s multi-faceted challenges in human health, the environment and other critical areas,” Fitts said.

Over the years the Leones have given prolifically to Tulane, particularly the School of Medicine. In 2015 they set up the Drs. Philip and Cheryl Leone Scholarship Endowed Fund to benefit medical students in financial need. In 2020 they [donated \\$1 million to launch the Leone Learning Center](#), the primary teaching center for first-year medical students.

“Phil and Cheryl’s deep devotion to Tulane could not be more inspiring,” said L. Lee Hamm, MD, senior vice president and dean of the School of Medicine. “Their support — from scholarships to the state-of-the-art learning center and now to their Presidential Chair — propels the school forward in every mission and at every level. Their Tulane spirit is phenomenal.”

As undergraduates, Phil Leone majored in English while Cheryl concentrated in biology. They first met during a summer gross anatomy class in preparation for entering Tulane School of Medicine. An illness delayed her matriculation for a year, but Cheryl credits — in addition to Phil’s devotion — the excellent care and encouragement she received from Tulane medical staff for her recovery. Phil graduated from the school in 1968 and Cheryl in 1969.

Residents of Naples, Fla., the Leones have worked in both academic and private practice. In addition to their Board of Governors service, they also belong to Tulane’s National Campaign Council for South Florida. The NCC supports *Only the Audacious, The campaign for an ever bolder Tulane*, the most ambitious and comprehensive fundraising effort in the university’s history.

Both are members of the Paul Tulane Society, which honors individuals and organizations that have donated \$1 million or more to the university.

The Leones have two children, including Seth, who earned a bachelor’s degree in Latin American Studies from Tulane’s College of Arts and Sciences in 1995. Cheryl Leone’s late sister, Bonny Gale Levine, earned a bachelor’s degree in anthropology from Newcomb College in 1968 and a master’s in education from the Graduate School in 1969, later attaining a doctorate in early childhood education at Temple. Her brother, Peter M. Levine, graduated from Tulane in 1969 with a bachelor’s degree in history and in 1973 as a doctor of medicine.