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Office of University Communications

December 11, 2018



Dr. H. Gene Washburn '52 Remembered for Contributions to University and Community

 An image of Dr. Gene Washburn, left, and his wife, Billie. A portrait of their children hangs on the wall behind them.

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—A physician known as a quiet, humble servant in the Boiling Springs and Gardner-Webb community passed away Dec. 9, 2018. Dr. H. Gene Washburn, a 1952 GWU alumnus and former Board of Trustee chair, is remembered for his devotion to his family and faith, his dedication as a family practice physician, and his support for his alma mater.

His family connection to Gardner-Webb dated back to the very birth of the institution. His grandfather, W.W. Washburn, was the first person to sign the Boiling Springs High School (predecessor of Gardner-Webb) certificate of incorporation, and served on the Board of Trustees from 1904-1933. He also had other family members serve the University as faculty, staff, board members, volunteers and students.


After earning his associate's degree from Gardner-Webb, Washburn obtained his bachelor's from Wake Forest, and his Doctor of Medicine from Wake's Bowman Gray School of Medicine. He then proudly served as a captain and medical doctor in the United States Army, where he was stationed mostly in Germany.

In 1962, Washburn came back home to join the medical practice of his older brother, Dr. W. Wyan Washburn. "I was grateful," Washburn said in a story published in 2012. "In fact, that's why I'm called 'Dr. Gene,' because Wyan was always 'Dr. Washburn.' I certainly enjoyed working with him. He taught me a lot, not just about medicine but about people."

Not only did Dr. Gene work as a family physician for nearly 40 years, he also volunteered to serve as team doctor for GWU athletic teams, was a consulting physician for Cleveland County high schools and went on medical mission trips to Honduras and Zambia, Africa. Two of his four children are also serving in the medical profession. His son, Dr. Rusty Washburn, followed in his footsteps as a family physician in Rutherford County. His daughter Sherry also works in the medical profession, serving as a nurse.

Dr. Gene served multiple terms on the GWU Board of Trustees, and was elected chair several times. During his leadership, which spanned over two decades, the University experienced significant growth. In 1996, N.C.

Gov. Jim Hunt attended a ceremony to name Washburn Hall in honor of Dr. Gene and his wife, Billie, and their significant contributions to Gardner-Webb. Before being donated to Gardner-Webb, the building was for many years the site of Dr. Gene's medical practice.

 An image from the GWU photo archives of Dr. Gene Washburn in academic regalia speaking at a ceremony at Gardner-Webb.

His commitment to the University was honored in several other ways. He was named Bulldog Club Member of the Year in 1974 and received the Alumni Association Award for Service to College in 1981. He was honored as the GWU Alumnus of the Year in 1983 and was

inducted into the Gardner-Webb Athletic Hall of Fame in 1999. In 2002, Dr. Gene received Gardner-Webb's highest recognition of merit, the Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree.

Dr. Gene was a member of Boiling Springs Baptist Church, where he had served as a deacon, church moderator and leader of several church committees. In the community, he received awards for his dedication to youth sports and service to athletics. He contributed land to the Broad River Greenway and served on the boards of the Cleveland County Economic Development Commission and the Foundation of the Carolinas.

Located in the North Carolina foothills, Gardner-Webb University is a place where Christian compassion meets critical thinking. A private, Christian, liberal arts university, Gardner-Webb emphasizes a strong student-centered experience and rigorous academics to prepare students to become effective servant-leaders within the global community. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.