

GROWING UP MOFFITT

The Next Generation Is Ready To Further The Mission

By Ann Miller Baker



JENNIFER MOFFITT, Ph.D.

Photography: Ray Reyes

MOFFITT
CANCER CENT

...to contribute
and cure



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It wasn't when the idea of a cancer center was first being talked about. She hadn't even been born yet.

It wasn't when she was a 7-year-old following along behind her father and grandfather at the construction site, imagining the cancer center taking shape.

It wasn't even on those occasional visits to the hospital's classroom, when she'd sit beside other preteen girls who taught her firsthand about IVs, chemo, leukemia and the sad fact that not everyone survives.

Jennifer Moffitt, daughter of the cancer center's founder and namesake, says she didn't have a true sense of her role in Moffitt's mission until she had been a patient herself.

IN 2014, SHE WAS STRUGGLING WITH WHAT WOULD EVENTUALLY BE DIAGNOSED AS PANCREATITIS. “We weren't quite sure what it was at first,” she recalls. “I was treated at the cancer center by the phenomenal gastroenterology team. It was a prolonged experience, but it allowed me to see the hospital from an entirely different perspective, as both an inpatient and outpatient.”

Though she's quick to add that her course in no way compares to the emotional and physical trauma of cancer, she says the patient experience was enlightening. “I was able to witness firsthand the incredible patience and compassion of the Moffitt team, especially the nurses and technicians who hold your hand late at night when the family has gone home and who are

there with you again first thing in the morning to check your vitals, and the doctor whose well-timed humor alleviates your fears. It was that experience that helped me feel I was ready to contribute further to the cancer center.

“I had been nervous about it. I don't have a background in legal studies, in business, in health care. My background is in literature and art. How would I be able to further the mission? It was getting the perspective of the patient and of the family that helped me realize what my role could be — an advocate for patients and their families.”

EARNING A SEAT ON THE BOARD

A visiting lecturer at Florida State University where she earned her Ph.D. in Literature, Jennifer Moffitt became a member of the Moffitt Hospital Board in 2015. It's a role her dad hastens to point out was not simply a given. “I don't think it ought to be automatic,” says H. Lee Moffitt. “She needs to demonstrate that she's got the right stuff to contribute to the future of the cancer center. I have every confidence that she will be able to do that. I'm blessed to have what I think is the most perfect daughter that was ever born. And I'm very, very proud that the Moffitt family will continue to have a role in the future growth and development of the cancer center.”

The pride is mutual. “Walking through the hospital with my father was really when I began to understand the center and its significance for the community. Seeing patients thank my

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father is emotional and humbling. I am so grateful both for the human being that he is,” she says, “and for the father that he has always been.”

Her memories include days when he’d take time from his role as lawyer and state legislator to pack her lunches or coach her softball team. Or the Sunday morning ritual of going out to breakfast with her father and grandfather, “just the three of us. And then sometimes, the three of us might come out here together during the construction process with the bulldozers and the sandspurs and buildings beginning to go up.” She recalls her dad “trying to explain to a very young me what was happening. It was exciting to see his enthusiasm and to realize that his dream was becoming a reality.

“I think most people involved in a project like this would have signed the papers and left afterwards. Not only was he hard-hatting it through the process, being far more involved than anybody probably really wanted him to be in those early stages, he’s continued that deep involvement to this day.

“There was a quote some years ago in one of the local newspapers, and they called the cancer center ‘Moffitt’s Magnificent Obsession.’ This is his passion. It’s what we talk about at home. It’s what we talk about on vacation. The cancer center, cancer treatment and the mission are always at the forefront of his mind. And he wants to do everything he can to help find the cure and to better treat those with cancer.”

MOVING MOFFITT TOWARD THE FUTURE

With its 30th anniversary this October, the cancer center is celebrating — both its past and its role in the future of cancer research and care. “Thirty years from now,” Jennifer Moffitt predicts, “I hope that Vice President Biden’s Moonshot Initiative – and our role in that mission - will have radically altered the landscape of cancer treatment and that we will be moving towards treating a chronic illness rather than a life-threatening disease.” And she sees the cancer center’s role as playing to the strengths that created such a remarkable rise through its first 30 years: “We are where we are today because of the unbounded compassion and curiosity of the Moffitt Team, their courage to experiment and try new things, and their desire to collaborate with other cancer hospitals to share research, benefit patients, and find the cure. I am honored to be joining such a remarkable group of people in this mission.”

She’s looking forward to being an active participant in the cancer center’s future, and is counting on team members, volunteers, patients and families to share their thoughts with her. “My role

will be to listen as much as possible over the next few years as I strive to learn more and more about the cancer center from a variety of perspectives. Then I can use that knowledge to advocate, to fight for the best possible care for everyone who walks through the doors.

“One of the frightening things about cancer is that no one is immune. This is why it’s so crucial for us to have a Comprehensive Cancer Center here in our community. Everyone deserves to have access to the treatment and the support system that the Moffitt team provides.

“As everyone knows, my father has argued that one person can make a difference, and he has consistently challenged me to think about the ways that I will give back in my lifetime. But he also always stressed the importance of community and collaboration. I think that the idea of one person making a difference means that one person can ignite a movement. They can inspire others to action. That’s what my dad did with the cancer center. He had this dream and the courage and scrappiness to get it going. Most importantly, he was able to inspire others to join in his mission. It was bringing together all the different people that have worked tirelessly for the cancer center over the years that have made it the world-class facility it is today.

“If I’ve learned anything so far, it’s that it doesn’t matter who you are or what your background is. If you are willing to give of yourself, you can make a difference in your community and here at Moffitt Cancer Center.”

This next generation Moffitt intends to do just that. 



Photography: Jeremy Peplow