



Atrium
Medical Center

F O U N D A T I O N

LEGENDS

FROM THE HILL TO THE ATRIUM

*A Tribute to the Men and Women
Who Made It Happen*

ISSUE 17

Walter H. Roehll Jr., MD

In his 2013 memoir, *Stories from the Heart: Revelations from a Charismatic Cardiologist*, Dr. Walter Roehll Jr. wrote: “There was never a question of whether or not I was going to be a doctor; it was in my blood, and from as early as I can remember, I was groomed to be a physician and work with my father to heal and relieve the suffering of others.”



And that is exactly what Walter H. Roehll Jr. did. Between them, the Drs. Roehll served the people of Middletown for 89 years. Dr. Roehll Jr. joined his father’s group of board-certified internists and the Middletown Hospital staff in 1962. After the elder Roehll suffered a major stroke in 1966, Dr. Roehll Jr. continued to practice internal medicine, eventually branching out as an independent board-certified cardiologist.



As Dr. Roehll Jr. emerged as one of the region’s leading cardiologists, it is no coincidence that Middletown Hospital established one of the country’s first community hospital coronary care units and became the second hospital in the Cincinnati/Dayton area to begin a cardiac rehabilitation program.

Seeding a Legacy

Born in Middletown in 1929, Dr. Roehll Jr., along with his two sisters, grew up in the family home on Stanley Street. He attended Lincoln Elementary School, Roosevelt Junior High School and Middletown High School, where he was active in intramural sports, journalism, music and theater. His love for opera and the symphony, which was encouraged by both of his parents, remains strong today.

In the Roehll family, vision, innovation, dedication and leadership were the hallmarks of excellence in medical practice. Early on, Dr. Roehll Sr. made sure he exposed his son to the importance of medical research and quality patient care. Dr. Roehll's mother also served as his mentor, instilling within him a strong sense of family values – not to mention a love for gardening and cooking. (They made a mean chili sauce.)

In 1947, Dr. Roehll began his pre-med education at Miami University, where, in his sophomore year, he met the love of his life, homecoming queen Mary Lou Jackson, who was a year ahead of him. After her graduation, Mary Lou began teaching and married Walter after he graduated the following year. With Mary Lou as his most enthusiastic cheerleader, Dr. Roehll wasted no time enrolling in medical school at the University of Cincinnati. He went on to complete a one-year internship and two-year internal medicine residency at Cincinnati General Hospital.





Dr. Roehll's education was interrupted in 1957 when he was called to serve for two years as chief of internal medicine at Moody Air Force Base in Valdosta, Georgia – quite a feat for a

physician with only one year of residency under his belt.

By this time, the Roehlls already had two daughters. Their first son was born while they were stationed in Valdosta. After two years of service, which he had thoroughly enjoyed, Dr. Roehll was anxious to get back to Middletown to finish his education and join his father's medical practice – but not before his commanding officer threw him a curve: Would he be interested in joining an exciting new program based in Houston, Texas? The growing space program was recruiting physicians, and Dr. Roehll's interest in cardiology made him an excellent candidate.

After giving the prospect some serious thought, Dr. Roehll and Mary Lou decided against a future with NASA – too many risks, too many unknowns. The Roehlls chose instead to keep things down to earth, a decision Dr. Roehll looks back on today with some nostalgia for what might have been. As his tour of duty drew to a close, both Duke

University and the University of Michigan offered him fellowships. He chose Duke and was awarded a one-year research fellowship in the emerging specialty of cardiology. Far less was known about the workings of the heart in the early 1960s. During his time at Duke, Dr. Roehll and his cohorts published pioneering research on the basic physiology of the heart. While living in Durham, North Carolina, the Roehlls welcomed their fourth child, a son.

Coming Home

With his fellowship drawing to a close, Dr. Roehll made plans to return to his residency at Cincinnati General Hospital. He joined his father's practice in Middletown and commuted to Cincinnati for his residency. At the request of his mentor, he extended the residency for one year to serve as chief resident, which included an appointment as assistant professor of medicine. Looking back, Dr. Roehll remembers this year as a time of intense learning. Although he attempted to continue his professorship after his residency had ended, it proved to be too much for a busy physician with a young family.



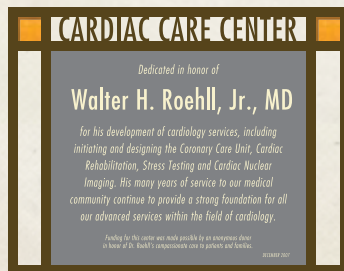


In 1986, Dr. Roehll started a solo cardiology practice. With the financial support of a grateful patient, he was instrumental in bringing stress testing, nuclear cardiology and cardiac rehabilitation services to Middletown Regional Hospital. Dr. Roehll was named medical director of cardiology at the hospital that same year. One of his first goals was to “deinstitutionalize” cardiac rehabilitation, remaking its image from that of a dismal future in a wheelchair to an active, productive lifestyle choice.

In the 1990s, with the help of volunteers from the American Red Cross, the YMCA and the American Heart Association, Dr. Roehll created the Middletown Area Survival Heartbeat (MASH) CPR training initiative. A grass roots effort, MASH trained more than 20,000 people in CPR. Following up on this success, Dr. Roehll worked with a portable defibrillator manufacturer to introduce this technology to Middletown emergency services, government buildings, hotels, restaurants, clubs, businesses, schools, churches and community centers. He acquired devices directly from the manufacturer and sold them at cost. Although he made only about 20 sales at the time (plus the one he donated to his church), he did plant the seed for what has become a device available virtually everywhere that people gather.

Living His Vision

When hospital administrators came to him with plans for a new hospital, explaining that there simply was no more room to expand cardiac diagnostic and rehabilitation services, Dr. Roehll enthusiastically joined Atrium Medical Center Foundation's executive committee for the capital campaign to create a new Heart Center, which was named in his honor. Dr. Roehll was center director until 2009, when he became medical director of cardiology emeritus at Atrium Medical Center. While in that role, he led the effort to create the Atrium Cardiology Ancillary Services Endowment to help support continuing education for cardiology technicians.



All told, Dr. Roehll served for 13 years as the hospital's medical director, 11 years on the hospital's board of directors and on the Foundation board from 2007 to 2016. He also volunteered on the boards of the Middletown Symphony Orchestra, Middletown Civic Association, American Heart Association, Middletown Rotary and Brown's Run Country Club. In 2015, at age 86, Dr. Roehll and his wife of 67 years, Mary Lou, retired to be near their daughters on Hilton Head Island.

Dr. Roehll's fellow physicians continue to admire his skill, innovation, compassion, leadership and commitment to his patients, the hospital and the community. Asked about the scope and impact of his many achievements, Dr. Roehll is quick to acknowledge the vital role Mary Lou has played: "She raised the family, totally supported my efforts, and together we made the perfect team."

This article is the 17th in a series of profiles celebrating the 2017 centennial anniversary of Atrium Medical Center (formerly Middletown Hospital and Middletown Regional Hospital). The series honors the men and women whose civic-mindedness and genuine caring for others helped Greater Middletown grow and contributed to the first-class medical center the region boasts today.

Past Legends focused on:

Paul Galeese, *Issue 1*; E.O. Bauer, MD, and John L. Bauer, MD, *Issue 2*; Educating Our Caregivers, *Issue 3*; Russell L. "Rusty" Malcolm, MD, and Albert S. Malcolm, MD, *Issue 4*; Ann and Arthur Bidwell, *Issue 5*; Atrium Auxiliary Middletown, *Issue 6*; Dr. Dick and Charlotte Nisbet, *Issue 7*; The Wilbur Cohen Family, *Issue 8*; Middletown Area Federation of Women's Clubs, *Issue 9*; Dolly Frieman Casper, *Issue 10*; The Sawyer Family, *Issue 11*; Southwest Ohio Businesses, *Issue 12*; Dr. Raymond and Jean Anne Kiefhaber, *Issue 13*; Richard "Dick" Slagle, *Issue 14*; Celebrating 100 Years, *Issue 15*; The Levey Family, *Issue 16*.

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