It has been said that virtually every major charitable project in the city of Middletown has a Cohen family connection. Patriarch Wilbur Cohen, now 92, has served as president of the Middletown Area Chamber of Commerce and Middletown Industrial Council. He was campaign chairman of the board of trustees of the Middletown Area United Way and a member of the committee to establish the Middletown campus of Miami University. He remains an active supporter of the Jewish Federation and Middletown’s Temple Beth Sholom. His wife Mary Jean, who passed away in 2008 at age 83, served on the boards of Bull’s Run Arboretum, Hospice of Middletown and the Ladies Auxiliary of Temple Beth Sholom. She was also an active supporter of Abilities First.

In August 2014, the West Chester-Liberty Chamber Alliance honored Wilbur with its prestigious Everest Award for his significant positive impact on commerce in the Interstate 75 growth corridor between Cincinnati and Dayton. Earlier this year, the Chamber of Commerce serving Middletown, Monroe and Trenton honored Wilbur with the Richard W. Slagle Chamber of Commerce Lifetime Achievement Award for his family’s significant contributions to quality of life in the community.
The ‘Cohen Connection’

Perhaps nowhere is the Cohen connection stronger than at Atrium Medical Center and Atrium Medical Center Foundation. As a member of Atrium Auxiliary Middletown, Mary Jean logged a record-setting 3,600+ hours over 36 years of service. As a hospital board member, Wilbur worked with five hospital presidents. He provided visionary leadership for 42 years, beginning in 1965 when he joined the Middletown Hospital board of directors. As president of the hospital board from 1972 to 1980 and United Care Corporation (the hospital’s parent company) board from 1982 to 1990, he guided the hospital through two periods of significant growth.

More than 30 years ago, Wilbur helped to establish what has become Atrium Medical Center Foundation. He was one of the Foundation’s first three trustees and served on its board for several terms. Today, Wilbur works closely with the Foundation’s Heritage Society, those who have included the Foundation in their will or estate plans.
The Cohens were instrumental in founding the hospital’s Wilbur & Mary Jean Cohen Women’s Center, as well as the Linda Cohen Abrams Health and Risk Assessment Center, named in honor of their daughter Linda who passed away at age 47 from heart disease. Wilbur also established the Mary Jean Cohen Cancer Care and Clinical Research Endowment and is currently helping to support acquisition of a mobile mammography unit as part of the Foundation’s *Every Woman, Everywhere* campaign. In addition, the Cohens were major supporters of Atrium’s Heart Center. The Foundation’s first-ever gala celebration in 2007 benefited the Heart Center and honored Wilbur and Mary Jean as community heroes for their lifetime commitment to the hospital.

**Building a Future**

Mose Cohen, Wilbur’s father, immigrated to the United States from Lavov, Crimea, in 1904. He worked for the railroad and married Wilbur’s mother, Mollie, who was born in Kentucky. Later Mose worked in the scrap metal business but left to open a women’s clothing store in Hamilton. In 1924, he returned to scrap metal, launching the Cohen Brothers company with his brother, Phil, and setting the course his family would follow for generations to come.
Headquartered on 50 acres on Woodlawn Avenue in Middletown, the company is now one of the largest metal recyclers in North America, processing more than 1.25 million tons annually at 20 locations in Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio and Tennessee.

Wilbur was born in Middletown and attended public primary schools. In junior high school, he contracted rheumatic fever and was homeschooled for a year. The illness left him with a heart murmur that kept him out of the military. In 1941, Wilbur graduated from Hughes High School in Cincinnati, where the family had moved to care for Wilbur’s grandmother after the 1937 flood. When a widowed aunt assumed the caretaking duties, Wilbur’s family moved back to Middletown. In 1942, he enrolled in the University of Cincinnati College of Business’s co-op program – seven weeks of school alternating with seven weeks of work.

Wilbur worked in the family business first, then transferred his co-op program to Clopay, a building products company doing mostly military jobs at the time. In addition to putting in his co-op time, Wilbur had a paying job at Clopay, too.

Upon graduating in 1947 with a bachelor’s degree in business administration, Wilbur had his choice of jobs. His father and uncle, however, were anxious for him to join the family enterprise. The company was growing and in need of administrative expertise. As Wilbur’s son Ken explains, “Dad made the business a real business.”
Wilbur met Mary Jean Klein during his sophomore year at Hughes High School. After graduation, she enrolled in the cadet program at the Jewish Hospital School of Nursing. Upon graduation in 1946, Mary Jean, age 20, and Wilbur, age 22, married. Their union would be blessed with four children – Ken, Kathy, Neil and Linda – and last 62 years until Mary Jean’s death in 2008. In 2010, Wilbur married Miriam Warshauer, a widow and retired psychotherapist originally from Winston-Salem, North Carolina, by way of New Orleans. Wilbur and Miriam met while serving together on the Cedar Village (Mason, Ohio, retirement community) board of directors. After a board meeting, Wilbur asked Miriam, “May I walk you to your car?” and the rest is history. The couple now resides in Blue Ash.

With Wilbur at the helm; son Ken as president and son Neil as treasurer; Andy Cohen, Jill Cohen and Adam Dumes – all fourth-generation Cohens – on board; and, at last count, 13 fifth-generation Cohens waiting in the wings, the family business is marching into the future. In 2011, Cohen Brothers launched a rebranding campaign under the moniker Cohen. Company leaders believe this title more accurately reflects the true nature of the
company and its current impact as a fully integrated recycler of electronics, auto parts and certain grades of paper and plastic, as well as non-ferrous metals (copper, brass, aluminum and steel) that can be used by steel mills and foundries in the production of new metals.

Lessons of History

Wilbur’s parents, Mose and Mollie, were not people of means; nevertheless, they were committed to helping the less fortunate. They never regarded giving as a sacrifice, but rather as a thread tightly woven into the fiber of their lives. Wilbur adopted his parents’ point of view early in life. In turn, he and Mary Jean taught their children by example the value of giving back in the communities where they live and work. Today, Ken, Neil and Kathy are humanitarians and trailblazers in their own right. Wilbur, his wife Miriam and their extended family personify more than a century of philanthropy and leadership – a history likely to be repeated by generations to come.
This article is the eighth 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.

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