

A Legacy of Giving

Lambda Legal honors Drs. Waverly Cole and John Cook

In June 1960, Drs. Waverly Manson Cole and John Cook moved from Southside Virginia to Richmond and established a home, becoming the first to live as an openly gay couple in the city. Together for over 50 years until Waverly's passing in 2009, their relationship spanned such milestones as Stonewall, the AIDS epidemic, *Lawrence v. Texas* and the marriage-equality movement.

If Cook and Cole's commitment to one another is a testament to their loyalty, so too is their support for Lambda Legal. The couple made their first gift to Lambda Legal in the early 1980s and continued as major supporters through the years. In August 2009, Lambda Legal mourned the passing of its longtime supporter and friend Dr. Waverly Cole.

PRIOR TO MEETING, both had served in the U.S. Army in World War II. Cole had been named Outstanding Captain in Germany. Cook, who landed on the beaches of Normandy, had been awarded the Cross of War by the French government.

Young, handsome, well-educated and charming Virginia gentlemen, the medical doctor and teacher/counselor were quickly accepted by Richmond society. Cole touched thousands of lives throughout his 40 years in medicine, helping to heal the ill as an anesthesiologist. He headed the Department of Anesthesiology at St. Mary's Hospital and was named Outstanding Anesthesiologist in



Cole at Longwood University, which he and Cook endowed with a gift of \$5 million.

“Be happy, contribute, and be generous,” urges Dr. Waverly Cole’s partner, Dr. John Cook. “When you give, as we both did, the happiness just comes naturally.”

Virginia. John Cook headed Guidance Services at the Virginia Department of Education, was named Outstanding Counselor in Richmond, in Virginia and in the U.S. and co-authored the first elementary guidance legislation ever introduced in Congress.

Over their 50 years as a couple, they befriended prominent doctors, educators, lawyers and judges and came to meet or dine with some of the world's leading luminaries. These

included, to name just a few, Queen Elizabeth II, Margaret Thatcher, Henry Kissinger, Winston Churchill, Mikhail Gorbachev, General George Patton, Eleanor Roosevelt, Ginger Rogers, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and every Virginia governor since 1960.

In addition to carrying on busy professional lives, Cole and Cook invested in real estate throughout Virginia and amassed a considerable fortune. Rather than



Cole, left, and Cook with their dog April at home in Richmond, Virginia, in 2007

leading a lavish lifestyle, they generously shared their wealth, talents and leadership with worthwhile causes at the local, state and national levels.

COLE AND COOK HAVE GIVEN, and given generously, to the movement for LGBT rights and for the rights of people living with HIV. They became charter members of Equality Virginia, Lambda Legal, Human Rights Campaign, Servicemembers Legal Defense Network and GLSEN, all of whom have honored them for years of support. In 1985, they established the first AIDS fund to care for young Virginians living with HIV. As Lambda Legal Executive Director Kevin Cathcart recalls, “When I came to Lambda Legal in 1992, we were facing a serious budget gap. I will always remember how quickly

Waverly and John stepped up to help with a very generous gift that made an enormous difference. They have always been there for Lambda Legal and for me personally ever since, and I will always miss Waverly.”

Cole and Cook also both endowed a total of 30 scholarships at the Medical College of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University, the College of William & Mary and Longwood University. Following a \$5 million gift in 2006, Longwood University renamed the College of Arts & Sciences Cook-Cole College—the first and only college in the U.S. to be named for two gay men. Over the years, they have also funded churches, museums, animal shelters, hospitals, reading centers, historical foundations and homeless shelters.

“Very early on in our relationship, Waverly sat me down,” Cook remembers, “and he said,

‘Here’s how we’re going to live our life: We are going to be outstanding. We are going to accomplish. We are going to achieve. And we are going to help *a lot* of people.’”

Lambda Legal salutes Drs. Cole and Cook for their exceptional accomplishments, generosity, love and inspiration. They have touched the lives of thousands, and with their example teach the true meanings of love, giving, and working to make our world a better place. As men of deep faith, their lives have been their message.

When asked for their secret to a beautiful relationship and a rewarding life, Cook says, “Be happy, contribute, and be generous. I’m so pleased that we were able to help Lambda Legal. When you give, as we both did,” he adds, “the happiness just comes naturally.” **L**