



Atrium
Medical Center

FOUNDATION

LEGENDS

FROM THE HILL TO THE ATRIUM

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

ISSUE 11

The Sawyer Family

When John Sawyer stops by Java Johnny's for a cuppa joe, it takes him a while to progress from the door to the counter. That's because John Sawyer knows virtually everyone in Middletown, and everyone in Middletown knows him.

A third-generation realtor, John retired in 2011 after 41 years in the family business. The firm, founded in 1938 by his grandfather, B.F., and father, J.D., as B.F. Sawyer & Son, dealt mostly in farm sales, industrial and residential real estate, and development. Groomed from an early age for the real estate business, John acquired the firm in 1976 and renamed it Sawyer Realtors.

In the 1950s, '60s and '70s, Middletown, then home to the headquarters of several paper mill companies and Armco/AK Steel, thrived – and so did the Sawyer real estate and development business. B.F. Sawyer & Son became influential around the country. In 1973, J.D. served as president of the National Association of Realtors.

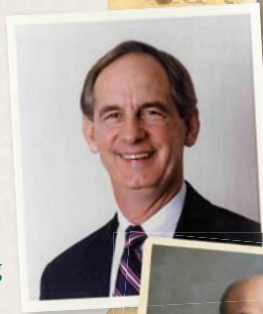


Eventually, B.F. and J.D. owned land from Marshall Road to Dixie Highway and began development of the Manchester Manor and Manchester Meadows neighborhoods. John fondly remembers Sunday dinners at his grandparents' Manchester Road farm, enjoying fried chicken, fresh from the farm yard, and roughhousing with his cousins, with whom he is still close today.

For the past 30 years, John and his wife, Teresa, have lived in a house only four blocks from his grandparents' Manchester Road farm. It's where they raised their son, John, and daughter, Kristin, both Middletown High School graduates.

Sawyer Family Service

Over the years, John has sat on a number of civic and cultural boards and garnered several awards for his service to the city. He worked with Middletown Moving Forward, a community improvement corporation formed in 2005 to advance, promote and encourage industrial and commercial economic development activities. It comes as no surprise, then, that John and his family – including his father and uncles Drs. Ben, John and James Sawyer – have been staunch supporters of Atrium Medical Center.



J.D. was on the hospital board when Walter Mischley was hired as the hospital's administrator in 1957. John was on the board when Jim Flynn assumed the job in the early 1980s and worked closely with him to lay the ground work for the hospital's regional expansion.



More recently, John chaired the Foundation's 2005 *Advancing Care for a Healthier Community* capital

campaign, which raised more than \$5.1 million for a heart center and other enhancements for the new Atrium Medical Center. John remarked at the time, "This is an opportunity for us to help raise the level of local health care even higher for our families, friends and neighbors."



The Doctors Sawyer

John's grandparents, B.F. and Louise, met in Cincinnati and moved to a farm in Georgetown, Ohio. In the late 1920s, B.F. went to work in real estate sales for Kitchen & Sheets in Middletown before establishing B.F. Sawyer & Son Realty with son J.D. in 1938.

The elder Sawyers had five children: Ben (b. 1912), John (b. 1921) and James (b. 1925) – all of whom became physicians practicing in

Middletown; J.D. (b. 1917), John's father; and Louise (b. 1914), who soon after college became a high school English teacher in Santa Monica, California.



Dr. Ben Sawyer graduated from University of Cincinnati College of Medicine in the 1940s and began a general practice in Darke County, Ohio. He came to Middletown in the late 1940s, where he practiced in a simple office on Central Avenue for more than 30 years as a general practitioner and the city's school doctor. Ben spent a portion of his career as Middletown Hospital's chief of staff. Although he was known to be outspoken at times, Ben also was an incredibly respected physician.

Despite his sometimes blunt manner, Ben was an excellent diagnostician. He retired as a colonel from the Ohio Air National Guard, where he served as a flight surgeon at the Wilmington, Ohio, reserve center. Also an excellent sailboat racer, Ben started the Cowan Lake Yacht Club in Wilmington.

Ben retired in the late 1970s, built a 40-foot catamaran from scratch, sailed it down the Mississippi River to Florida, and then sold it to an Outward Bound school. He spent his final years in Savannah, Georgia, where he died in his 80s.

John's other uncles, John and James (Jim) Sawyer, only four years apart in age, were a decade younger than their brother Ben. The brothers were close friends. Both served in World War II and graduated from the



University of Cincinnati College of Medicine. John, an ear, nose and throat specialist, completed his residency at Harper Hospital in Detroit and opened a practice in Middletown in 1956. John, his wife and their four children lived

on a farm between Middletown and Franklin, where John raised and showed his beloved Tennessee walking horses. John retired in 1980 and moved to Florida, where he died in 1999.

After completing his residency at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit in 1960, Jim, a world-class general surgeon, also opened a practice in Middletown. Highly respected by his colleagues, Jim served for a time as the hospital's chief of staff. He was an avid golfer and often sailed with brother Ben. In the early 1980s, at the young age of 57, Jim died from cancer, leaving a wife and three children.

By 1960, all three Sawyer doctors were practicing medicine in Middletown. Their realtor brother, J.D., offered to build them an office of their own to share; the brothers, however, preferred to remain close as brothers but independent as physicians.

The Apple and the Tree

John's realtor father, J.D., handled Armco relocations for 30 years, during the height of the steel giant's impact in the 1960s and '70s when the company had mills and ancillary businesses around the country.

J.D. Sawyer excelled in business as well as politics. When former Ohio attorney general William Saxbe, a family friend, ran for the U.S. Senate in 1968, J.D. led his campaign to an upset victory. In 1974, during the Watergate era, William Saxbe became the U.S. attorney general and appointed J.D. as his associate. In 1974, J.D. and his wife, Mickey, retired to Naples, Florida, where he passed away in 2006.

Like his father J.D., John, a 1968 University of Cincinnati graduate in business administration and marketing, took a turn in national politics. Before joining his father and grandfather in the family realty business, John spent a couple of years in Washington, D.C. He had worked with his father on the William Saxbe campaign, and in 1971, John worked for Ralph Perk's mayoral campaign in Cleveland that upset incumbent mayor Carl Stokes. The following year, John went to work for the Republican National Committee and was assigned as an advance man to Senator Robert Dole, then chairman of the party. When Dole was nominated for vice president in 1976, John did his scheduling.

As much as he enjoyed working in Washington, after the election, John decided it was time to return home to lead the family realty business. In addition to home sales, John developed properties such as Manchester Manor and The Woods condominiums. He has also been a worthy steward of the Sawyer family legacy, a legacy defined by hometown business leadership, civic engagement and service.

Now six generations strong, the Sawyer family continues to lend their considerable expertise to build healthier communities – and a vibrant hospital – here in southwest Ohio.

This article is the 11th 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*.

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