

**“Celebrating the Robins Legacy,” University of Richmond alumni magazine, Winter 2010:**

Center court of the Robins Center was transformed into an intimate, late-summer tent party for more than 200 guests, who gathered to honor Richmond’s biggest supporters—the family of E. Claiborne Robins Sr., R’31 and H’60—on the 40th anniversary of the family’s \$50 million gift to the University in 1969.

Mr. Robins, who died in 1995, was in many ways present. He appeared in several framed photographs. He was heard in a film about the family’s legacy (below), and was remembered fondly by many in the room who had enjoyed the opportunity to know and work with him.

Current and former Richmond presidents and trustees, alumni leaders, and star students, among others, toasted the University’s greatest benefactors, recognizing with warmth and enthusiasm Mr. Robins’ wife, Lora Robins, H’73, and their children, E. Claiborne Robins Jr., B’68 and H’86; Betty Robins Porter, H’78; and Ann Carol Robins Marchant, W’67. They also saw evidence that the family’s leadership at the University remains vibrant.

“I have an announcement to make,” said Claiborne Jr., on behalf of his family. He highlighted the family’s long interest in Spider athletics and a 38-year quest to have home football games played on campus. Then he broke the news: “Your new football stadium will be named after my dad. The Robins Center now has a big brother right next door, the E. Claiborne Robins Stadium that you’ll call Robins Stadium.” The facility will house the football program that won the 2008 NCAA Division I FCS national championship as well as soccer, lacrosse, and track and field teams. It is scheduled to open in September 2010.

The audience responded with the third standing ovation of the evening.

## THE GIFT

The naming of the stadium recognizes the family’s extraordinary, sustained generosity to the University, which exceeds \$200 million.

But the reason for this particular celebration was the 40th anniversary of “The Gift”—the family’s largely unrestricted donation of \$40 million along with a \$10 million challenge grant in 1969. No other living benefactor at the time had

made as large a contribution to an American university. Adjusting for inflation, the \$50 million gift would be worth \$293 million in today's dollars.

Claiborne Robins Sr. joined Richmond's Board of Trustees in 1951, and in the 1960s, he saw the University struggling to pay its bills and maintain its facilities. He wanted to help, and hoped to do more than alleviate the immediate crisis. He wanted to give the University the resources to become the best small, private university of its kind.

"I have always believed that education is the greatest investment that an individual or corporation or foundation could possibly make," Robins said in old interview footage presented in a new film, *A Vision, a Gift, a Promise*. "It is something that has an impact, not only on the present generation, but on many, many generations to come. I can't think of any other type of giving with so significant an impact."

Because Robins made his magnificent gift when he was only 60 years old, he was able to witness the transformation it helped bring about during the next quarter century. "I know that it's better to give in your will than not to give at all," he says in the film, but "you'll get 100 times the satisfaction of doing it while you're alive."

## THE IMPACT

After the 40th anniversary celebration, President Edward Ayers reflected on the enduring importance of "The Gift."

"Mr. Robins had served on the board for a long time and understood how the University worked," Ayers said. "He gave not only extraordinary resources, but also the flexibility to use the endowment for different purposes over the years as Richmond's needs changed. He demonstrated remarkable foresight that has indeed been crucial to achieving the aspiration we all share: for Richmond to become one of the finest small universities."

"It was a transformational gift," said Bobby Ukrop, B'69, who was present when the gift was announced at his commencement ceremony. "The gift wasn't about just paying bills. It changed the trajectory to make the University a more relevant place going forward, a place where things were happening, which

attracted more good people. The more people worked together, the more good they could do. It was not just about facilities and programs, it was about making people more engaged.”

The Robins family’s contributions in 1969—particularly the \$10 million challenge grant—encouraged other alumni to make donations and fulfill their own visions, said Ukrop, an emeritus trustee and 40-year volunteer with the University. His family founded Ukrop’s Super Markets and First Market Bank, and he generously agreed to the renaming of the stadium, which had previously carried the First Market name.

After the Robins gift, alumni and other supporters met the challenge grant and kept going. By 1980, they had matched the entire \$50 million. More campaigns followed—often with Robins family members leading the way—and the University’s endowment grew to \$1.57 billion as of Sept. 30, 2009. Endowment income provides about 30 percent of the University’s annual operating budget, the equivalent of \$17,900 per full-time student each year.

The family’s generosity has touched every student at Richmond for the past 40 years through scholarships, professorships, and the University’s thriving academic programs—not to mention the buildings that carry the Robins name.

“Mr. Robins and his family are the reason why presidents have been successful here,” concluded Dr. E. Bruce Heilman, who became president in 1971 and currently serves as a chancellor. “The Robins gift wasn’t just money once, but follow-through, and they continued to give and continue today. His leadership was compelling.”

## THE LEGACY

Most of Richmond’s current first-year students were 4 years old when Claiborne Robins Sr. died, but Ayers likes to remind them that Robins once was a 19-year-old UR student, studying and working hard to find his place in the world with no idea where life would take him.

“These things don’t just happen,” Ayers says. “People make them happen. Students today should not imagine their life as scripted.”

In the film, *A Vision, a Gift, a Promise*, Ayers puts it this way: “I want our students today, not only to be grateful to Mr. Robins and his family, but to emulate Mr. Robins. . . . This is someone who, within living memory—not just back in the distant past—had a vision for an entire institution and has helped make that come to pass in a relatively short period of time. We’re at the beginning of the story, not at the end.”

And word is getting out.

At the celebration, Claiborne Robins Jr. said he dined out recently and the waiter mentioned that his nephew, Tyler, had just enrolled in UR. A little bit later, the waiter brought Tyler and the student’s stepfather over to the table and introduced them to Robins.

“Have you ever heard of Claiborne Robins?” the stepfather asked.

“Have I heard of him?” Tyler replied. “He’s everywhere!”

“He was my father,” Robins acknowledged, “but thank God he was everywhere.”