On April 6, about 330 of us took a step back in time to “An Evening at The Warwick Club.” We were greeted at the red-carpeted entrance to the hotel by old-guard doorman Leroy Woods and then lifted to the 12th floor on the Warwick’s outside, glass-enclosed elevator. Mingling with the crowd during the evening was The Warwick Club’s former manager, Roland Montemayor, who evoked broad smiles of recognition and warm memories from many of our guests. With Jerry Atwood softly stroking the ivories on the piano, we strolled around the “Club,” enjoying the sunset view of the Mecom Fountain, Hermann Park, and downtown Houston. In an adjacent room, memorabilia from the original club was on display, and tribute was given to a very special lady, Maxine Messinger, who died recently.  

After an hour of cocktails and hors d’oeuvres, we went downstairs to the Grand Ballroom, where the magical evening continued with a supper club atmosphere of dinner and dancing to the tunes of Sharon Montgomery. The superb food and wine selections were again reminiscent of days of yore.  

(continued on page 2)
This year’s fundraising project was selected at the Annual Meeting of The Partnership in May. Islet cell transplantation research was recommended as the 2001-2002 project by the Fundraising Committee, and the choice has been ratified by the Executive Committee and our membership. Throughout the next year, we will be working to raise money for this exciting new diabetes research program in the Michael E. DeBakey Department of Surgery.

Department of Surgery Chairman Dr. F. Charles Brunicardi will be conducting clinical trials of islet cell transplantation, a promising diabetes treatment. The study will cost $1.8 million, or approximately $150,000 each for 12 patients who have Type I diabetes mellitus, a devastating autoimmune disorder that affects more than 10 million Americans. The disease causes an individual’s immune system to attack the pancreatic islet cells that produce insulin, the hormone crucial to converting sugar into energy for the body. Type I diabetics must take synthetic insulin in order to regulate their blood sugar. Even with this treatment, many diabetics eventually develop severe complications.

In islet cell transplantation, hundreds of thousands of islet cells are isolated from a donor pancreas and then transplanted into a patient, usually through an abdominal catheter that infuses the insulin-producing cells into the patient’s liver. Islet cell transplants carry relatively few risks or complications, but until recently, fewer than 10 percent of all islet transplant patients have produced enough of their own insulin to stop insulin injections permanently. Years of research have revealed that this failure is partially due to the steroid immunosuppressive drugs given to transplant patients. These drugs prevent patients’ bodies from rejecting the transplanted islets, but they can also be toxic to the same islet cells they are designed to save.

In June 2000, a Canadian surgeon and transplantation team announced that they had achieved eight successful islet cell transplantations by using a new combination of genetically engineered anti-rejection drugs, which contain no steroids. Baylor recently received approval from the Food and Drug Administration to be among the first U.S. institutions to verify this promising research.

“The results of these trials will help us determine if islet cell transplantation will be a successful therapy for patients with Type I diabetes,” said Dr. Brunicardi.
Baylor College of Medicine hosted a Community Leader’s Luncheon on May 9, featuring a presentation by Mary K. Estes, Ph.D. on her research team’s findings in the field of new vaccines for gastrointestinal viruses. Dr. Estes has pioneered research in the role of viruses as they cause disease. Her findings have incredible implications in the public health arena.

Dr. Estes pointed out the need for vaccines to help prevent the spread of infectious diseases. Vaccines have effectively eradicated such diseases as smallpox, polio, diphtheria, and rubella from the United States. The opportunity to develop vaccines for gastrointestinal viruses—especially the rotaviruses and Norwalk virus—is tremendous. Rotavirus alone causes more than one million deaths annually—mainly among children in developing nations. In the United States, one in 50 children under the age of two is hospitalized each year with rotavirus disease. Norwalk virus is a main cause of non-bacterial foodborne disease and is increasingly being recognized as a cause of disease and death in the elderly, especially in individuals in nursing homes.

Although most vaccines are administered orally or with an injection, Dr. Estes’ team is researching other approaches such as edible vaccines, which can be grown in such foods as potatoes, tomatoes, and bananas. Edible vaccines have a number of potential advantages, including low production costs and the ability to deliver multiple vaccines through one food source. They also offer an effective method for global distribution.

Dr. Estes closed her presentation by announcing the opening of the new Texas Gulf Coast Digestive Diseases Center, which was established with a $4.5 million grant from the National Institutes of Health to Baylor College of Medicine, The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, and The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston. This center will act as a resource for research services and expertise and a catalyst for collaboration among basic and clinical researchers at these three institutions.♥
Luncheon Lecture Updates

March

Members of The Partnership enjoyed lunch at the Doctors’ Club on March 20, followed by a tour of the Huffington Center on Aging. Dr. Robert Luchi, founding Director of the Center, and Roy G. Smith, Ph.D., current Director, each spoke about current research on treatments for age-related diseases. Mr. Roy Huffington, Chairman of the Huffington Center’s Development Committee, was also present and spoke to the group about his continuing role there.

A big thank-you to the Development Office staff for coordinating transportation for the group from the Doctors’ Club to the Huffington Center.

Members visited the research lab where Hui Zheng, Ph.D., Assistant Professor in the Department of Molecular and Human Genetics, made a slide presentation and spoke about Alzheimer’s disease, the most common cause of dementia in the elderly.

“The hallmark of the disease,” explained Dr. Zheng, “is the deposition of β-amyloid plaques in the brain. The past 10 years have been the most exciting in Alzheimer’s disease research. We now know the process through which the β-amyloid plaques are produced and are working to develop inhibitors to block this process. However, there are still many unanswered questions, and addressing these is the major objective of my research.”

Proceeds from The Partnership’s “Evening at The Warwick Club” will be used to support Dr. Zheng’s work in this area.

Members were also treated to a video by Dr. Robert E. Roush, Associate Professor in the Department of Medicine, Geriatrics. The video focused on physical and mental exercise as the key to a healthy lifestyle and highlighted how several Houstonians, including Drs. Michael DeBakey, Ralph Feigin and Robert Luchi, former President George Bush, Roy Huffington, and Clara Whitmore, enjoy optimum health.

The tour reinforced members’ enthusiasm about the accomplishments of the Huffington Center and its outstanding research and education projects—and about the prospects of living a longer and healthier life!

April

More than 125 members and guests attended the April 17 luncheon. Prior to the educational presentation, Mary Lee Merrett introduced the 2001-2002 Baylor Ten Scholar, Allison Fallender, a first-year student in the Graduate School for Biomedical Sciences. Allison, who is the fifth scholar funded by the Baylor Ten endowment, has a fellowship in the Department of Molecular and Cellular Biology. She is working in the laboratory of Dr. Joanne Richards, who is researching ovulation.

Corbin Robertson served as the luncheon’s guest trustee and introduced Dr. Huda Zoghbi, an established leader in neurogenetics research and Professor in the Departments of Pediatrics, Neurology, and Molecular and Human Genetics at Baylor. This is Dr. Zoghbi’s second time as a Partnership speaker, and she also served as the College’s commencement speaker this year. After lunch, she gave an update about her groundbreaking research into Rett syndrome, the most common form of mental retardation in females. The symptoms of Rett syndrome usually appear between six and 18 months of age and include decreased head growth, loss of hand use, and loss of communication skills.

Beginning in 1985, Dr. Zoghbi led a research team in Baylor’s Howard Hughes Medical Institute that studied four families affected by the disease to find the genetic cause. In 1999, Dr. Zoghbi and her colleagues discovered that a mutation of the MECP2 gene on the x-chromosome causes Rett Syndrome. One of the functions that the mutation of MECP2 can interfere with is the methylation of DNA. Dr. Zoghbi has shown that giving folic acid supplements to mice can help to increase methylation, which can help reverse neural problems associated with the mutation of MECP2. This is truly exciting news in the search for a treatment for girls affected by Rett Syndrome and other conditions, including autism, which are influenced by MECP2 mutation. Dr. Zoghbi’s talk stirred much interest among the luncheon attendees, who asked many questions after the presentation.
Salute to Partnership Donor: Mrs. Clara Whitmore

One of the greatest successes of The Partnership’s first year has been the many people we have introduced to Baylor College of Medicine. But in our quest to expand membership and community support, we never lose sight of the importance of our longtime volunteers. These are the civic leaders who have helped shape and sustain the College and its mission of biomedical excellence.

For more than 30 years, Clara Whitmore has been one of these loyal Baylor supporters. Mrs. Whitmore’s late husband, John E. Whitmore, was one of the original members of the Board of Trustees at Baylor College of Medicine, serving from 1969 until his death in 1987. Mr. Whitmore, who served as Chairman and CEO of Texas Commerce Bank, truly regarded his tenure at Baylor as a labor of love. He never once missed a Baylor Board meeting, and he was an integral member of the Board’s finance committee.

It was this dedication to serving his community that Mrs. Whitmore wanted to honor upon her husband’s death. As a result, she established the John E. Whitmore Memorial Lecture- ship, which has brought many distinguished guest lecturers to Baylor for more than a decade. Mrs. Whitmore’s personal dedication to Baylor has grown since that first gift. She was an early member of Baylor Ten and became involved with the College’s Huffington Center on Aging (HCOA). In 1993, she made a tremendous $2.4 million commitment through a charitable lead trust to establish the John E. and Clara B. Whitmore Chair for the President of Baylor College of Medicine. This unique endowment provides vital support for the President to direct to the College’s top priorities.

Today, Mrs. Whitmore remains one of Baylor’s most active volunteers. She is an endowed member of The Partnership and is a part of the HCOA Development Board and the Jaworski Society, a group that honors those who have made deferred gifts to the College. She also stays busy with travel, other volunteer activities, and her family, which include three children and four grandchildren.

Calendar of Events
(continued from page 3)

March 19, 2002
Educational Lecture & Luncheon
Islet Cell Transplantation
Dr. F. Charles Brunicardi
River Oaks Country Club

April 16, 2002
Educational Lecture & Luncheon
You Won’t Believe Your Eyes!
Dr. Dan B. Jones
River Oaks Country Club

May 2002
Annual Meeting
Date and location to be announced

June 2002
Membership Party
Date and location to be announced

Annual Meeting Report

The Partnership’s annual meeting was held on Wednesday, May 23, and was attended by 107 members, guests, and staff. Doug Freeman, an attorney and nationally renowned estate planning consultant, was the guest speaker. His presentation on “Philanthropy in America: The Importance of Volunteers” highlighted the enormous impact volunteers have on communities throughout the United States.

The Executive Committee remains the same for 2001-2002. The main order of business at the meeting was the nomination of new members to the Board of Directors. The eleven new Board members are:

William Constantine Crassas
Andy F. Delery
J.A. Elkins, Jr.
Ellie R. Francisco
Mehrnaz S. Gill
Sharon Chapman Graham
Mollie Hill
Walter Kase
Jeffrey Franklin Smith
John M. Sullivan
Nancy Wood

Many thanks to all the Partnership members who have helped to make our first year such a success!
Giving

Date __________________________
I am enclosing a gift in the amount of $ __________________________
In memory of ________________________________________________
In honor of __________________________________________________
On the occasion of ____________________________________________
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IN MEMORIAM

Bernice Kilgore Giddings

Partnership member Bernice Kilgore Giddings passed away on June 6, 2001. Mrs. Giddings’ two great passions were her family and her volunteer work. She spent more than 70 years dedicating her time, energy, and resources to the Houston community. In addition to being a longtime Baylor volunteer, she was a lifetime board member at The Methodist Hospital and had served on the Board of the San Jacinto Methodist Hospital since 1968. She also was involved with the American Lung Association and the Girl Scouts. Mrs. Giddings attended every Partnership event. She will be deeply missed by all her friends at Baylor and throughout the community. ✷