

Robert T. Cooney, MD Scholarship



Robert T. Cooney, MD

Doctor Robert T. Cooney devoted 45 years of his life to serving patients in a rural setting.

He began his life and education in the eastern United States. He was born on December 21, 1923 in Pittsfield, Massachusetts and completed his medical education at Boston University Medical School.

It was through his internship at St. Mary's Hospital in Madison that Dr. Cooney began to put down roots in the Midwest. He soon opened a practice in DeForest with Dr. John Grinde.

It was also through St. Mary's that Dr. Cooney met Judith Amundson after one of her old boyfriends called to say that two young doctors had just "blown in" from Boston, noting, "They're rich, they're good looking and they've got a car!" When Dr. Cooney arrived to pick up Judith for their first date, her mother and sister hung over the banister and gave Dr. Cooney four thumbs up. As Judith remembers, Dr. Cooney was not rich, but he was good looking, funny, nice and had a car. They married in 1950.

In 1955 he joined the Portage Clinic. As a physician in Portage, Dr. Cooney made house calls and delivered generations of babies. "Phones were ringing at all hours of the day and night, everything from myocardial infarctions to ear aches, surgery and delivering babies. It was an invaluable experience," remembered his daughter-in-law, Janice Cooney, who developed her own appreciation for the role of a family physician in a small town when she did a clinical rotation with Dr. Cooney while pursuing her Physician Assistant degree.



During retirement, Dr. Cooney could be found on the Portage Country Club golf course pursuing a passion that began even before his passion for patient care. He started golf in high school and continued until the week before his death, when he played 18 holes.

Dr. Cooney served his country, his community and his profession. As a member of the “greatest generation,” he served his country in World War II and held the rank of Captain as a physician and surgeon in the US Army Medical Corps in Korea during the Korean War.

Later, among many other activities, he served on the Board of Directors of Portage’s Zona Gale Center for the Arts and the Portage Library, most notably as President during construction of the new library. He was a member of the Knights of Columbus, the Elks Club, and a volunteer at Planned Parenthood. He was an active member of the Wisconsin Medical Society and served as President of the Wisconsin Medical Society Foundation Board of Directors (formerly the Charitable, Educational and Scientific Foundation). He especially enjoyed the opportunity to present scholarships to medical students.

Following his death in 2004, his patients sent numerous cards to his family noting the impact his care had on their lives. In response, his family shared how his patients gave meaning to his life.

It is with great respect for Dr. Cooney’s legacy as a rural physician that Judith Cooney has contributed funds to the Wisconsin Medical Society Foundation to provide a significant scholarship to a medical student who shows strong interest in practicing in a rural community.