

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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WHITAKER GIFT TO SUPPORT RESEARCH ON MOLECULAR AGING

DALLAS — November 29, 1994 — A \$100,000 gift to The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas from lawyer and oilman Fred Whitaker is helping researchers learn more about how cells age, which in turn will produce a clearer understanding of how cancer develops.

Whitaker's gift will support the work of Drs. Jerry Shay and Woodring Wright, professors of cell biology and neuroscience at UT Southwestern.

"We're beginning to understand how cells work," Shay said. Cells have a natural life span. When cells escape the normal aging process, they can produce serious health problems.

"Support like that we received from Mr. Whitaker will help us understand how alterations in normal cellular-aging processes can lead to indefinite cell proliferation and eventually lead to cancer," Shay added.

Shay and Wright already have shown the role immortal cells play in the development of some forms of breast cancer. Shay and Wright believe the process that produces immortal cells will be found in other forms of cancer. They also believe it is likely that the aging of our cells contributes to the degenerative diseases of aging. Understanding cellular aging may lead to new therapeutic approaches for treating these diseases.

A native of the East Texas town of Carthage, Whitaker began his professional career as an attorney before becoming an independent oil and gas producer. He moved to Dallas a number of years ago and recently published his

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autobiography, *Country Lawyer*.

Having had a longtime interest in health-care issues, Whitaker said: "I've been very impressed with the work being done at UT Southwestern. I wanted to do something to help the school and its hospitals grow."

Dr. Kern Wildenthal, president of UT Southwestern, said the medical center is grateful to Mr. Whitaker for his generous gift. "His donation of \$100,000 is of critical importance in its own right and also helped us qualify for \$50,000 in matching funds from the National Cancer Institute. This will advance the important work of Drs. Shay and Wright in a significant way," he added.

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