

# SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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## **UT Southwestern establishes professorship in stem-cell research in honor of Texas icon Willie Nelson and his wife**

DALLAS – June 17, 2005 – Willie Nelson, who decided to leave college in favor of a music career, is now being honored at the most elite level of academia for his support.

UT Southwestern Medical Center officials have established a professorship honoring Texas' legendary country musician and his wife, Annie, who approached the medical center to offer their help in raising much-needed funds for stem-cell research earlier this year. The eight-time Grammy Award winner organized and donated his services for a benefit concert on March 4, 2005.

Dr. Eric Olson, chairman of molecular biology at UT Southwestern, will hold the Annie and Willie Nelson Professorship in Stem Cell Research.

The benefit appearance featured Mr. Nelson and the Grammy-winning group Los Lonely Boys. The event at the Nokia Center sold more than 5,300 tickets, including several hundred at premium prices, and earned over \$250,000 for research at the medical center. The chart-topping Los Lonely Boys also donated their time and talent at no charge, and UT Southwestern also plans to dedicate a new research laboratory in their honor.

“With the strong encouragement and support of Annie Nelson, Willie generously contributed his time, energy and enormous talent at no cost because they believe our doctors and scientists can make important breakthroughs in medical research that will lead to cures for diseases of all kinds,” said Dr. Kern Wildenthal, president of UT Southwestern. “The concert was an enormous pleasure for those of us fortunate enough to attend, and we are extremely grateful for such a fantastic experience. Beyond that, the research these funds will foster will be of tremendous importance for mankind, and we are particularly grateful to Willie and Annie for that. This professorship will be a perpetual reminder to the world of their commitment to helping others.”

Mr. Nelson, 71, gained national prominence in the mid-1970s with his so-called “outlaw” approach to music by crafting an iconoclastic progressive-country identity that flourished nationally in 1975 with his first No. 1 hit, “Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain.” By the end of the 1980s, he had collected 19 more No. 1’s.

The former Fort Worth disc jockey from the little farming community of Abbott (about an hour south of Dallas) began singing in his church at age 4 and wrote his first song at 7. He briefly attended Baylor University in 1953.

“There was a while when I thought maybe I might want to get a law degree or something, so I went to Baylor in Waco,” he told an interviewer for the PBS series “American Roots Music” in 2001. “I decided pretty quickly that I'd rather stay in music.”

Mr. Nelson’s music is not easily categorized, as one may detect the influence of western swing, pop, jazz, gospel and even polka. When Mr. Nelson moved to Nashville in the 1960s, he quickly became noted as a composer. His “Hello, Walls” made No. 1 for Faron Young, and “Crazy” became a classic for Patsy Cline.

“We are honored to support what we so greatly believe in,” said Annie Nelson. “We’re proud to have this professorship in our names and look forward to following the work of Dr. Olson and others at UT Southwestern dedicated to the advancement of stem-cell research.”

Dr. Olson, director of the Nancy B. and Jake L. Hamon Center for Basic Research in Cancer, has dedicated his career to unraveling the mechanisms that control muscle gene regulation during development and disease. He also holds the Robert A. Welch Distinguished Chair in Science.

Dr. Olson has received numerous honors including the Distinguished Scientist Award and the Basic Research Prize from the American Heart Association, and the Pasarow Award in Cardiovascular Medicine. He is a member of the National Academy of Sciences, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the Institute of Medicine. He also is the editor-in-chief of *Developmental Biology* and a member of numerous editorial boards and the Scientific Review Board of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. He has documented his research in more than 350 publications.

“I am incredibly thrilled and honored to be the recipient of this wonderful professorship,” Dr. Olson said. “The Nelsons’ generosity and vision will provide an important boost to our new program in stem-cell research. And, as an amateur guitar player and a longtime admirer of Willie Nelson, I am particularly excited to be linked to him in this way.”

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