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# Geoffrey Beene's Cancer Research Project

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By LISA LOCKWOOD

The late [Geoffrey Beene](#) might conjure up multiple images: his modern, minimalist and original designs, a successful men's wear business, a fierce, stubborn independence — and a decades-long feud with this publication's late, legendary publisher [John B. Fairchild](#). But there's another, less-known side to his legacy.

Beene, who died of squamous cell carcinoma in 2004 at the age of 80, directed his estate to provide support for cancer research, and [G. Thompson Hutton](#), president and chief executive officer of Geoffrey Beene LLC, came up with an unusual plan that seems like a contradiction in terms: a corporate not-for-profit model.

In 2006, Beene's company established the Geoffrey Beene Cancer Research Center at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, donating 100 percent of net proceeds from its royalties to cancer research. In 2008, Beene's estate donated the company to MSKCC. Since 2006 and through July of this year, donations to the Geoffrey Beene Cancer Research Center will exceed \$144 million in value, said Hutton.

Keeping a low profile is not unusual for the Beene franchise. And Beene's feuds were many in his career. The rift with WWD took on the air of fashion-industry myth, its actual cause blurred by the years. Several scenarios have been described: One involved Beene's refusal to share a sketch of a wedding dress he made for the daughter of President Lyndon Johnson. Another scenario involved Beene's reportedly curt dismissal of a young WWD writer who had been assigned to interview him. Whether single cause or multiple, WWD was not welcome at Beene's shows and he was virtually ignored by the paper for most of his career. But the designer and WWD eventually tried to bury the hatchet, and the paper's fashion editors attended a few of Beene's shows toward the end of his life.

Beene's women's ready-to-wear collection was shuttered a year-and-a-half after his death, but his name lives on in men's wear, where the business has 30 licensees with companies such as PVH Corp., Oxford Industries, Global Brands Group and Randa Accessories. Beene's products generate retail volume between \$300 million and \$400 million.

Hutton, who was formerly Beene's attorney, became a director of his business in 1978 before assuming the CEO and president's role shortly after the Surrogate Court appointed him executor of Beene's estate in late 2004. Describing how this relationship with MSKCC developed, Hutton recalled a conversation he had with Beene prior to his death, where Hutton told the designer, "I want to do something that will make your name as strong in the scientific community as it is in the fashion community."

When Beene received his cancer diagnosis in 2000, he showed up unannounced at Hutton's office, saying he needed to get his affairs in order. "The doctor said he had six months to live. I got him a new doctor," said



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*Sasha Maslov*

Hutton. Beene lived four-and-a-half more years. "He was able to continue to design and travel and do things. He knew cancer was going to get him."

Following the designer's death, Hutton had to decide what to do with the company, which was owned by Beene's estate. After taking care of Beene's family and employees, Hutton approached Harold Varmus, then-ceo of Memorial Sloan-Kettering, in 2005 about forming a joint venture to fund new cancer research. In 2006, they established the Geoffrey Beene Cancer Research Center at MSKCC.

In 2008, Hutton worried about what would happen to the company if something happened to him. He spoke to Varmus at MSK and said: "How would you like to own Geoffrey Beene?" Varmus happily agreed. Hutton donated 80 percent of Beene's company to MSK; the Geoffrey Beene Foundation owns the remaining 20 percent.

The Geoffrey Beene Cancer Research Center is now 100 percent funded by the company and the Geoffrey Beene Foundation. And royalties from the company's licensees fund the Geoffrey Beene Cancer Center.

Each licensee contributes funds to the advertising campaign. Beene hired CoolGraySeven to develop a marketing communications plan and an advertising campaign for fall to get the word out about the philanthropic thrust. The ads feature Colin Jost, writer and performer on "Saturday Night Live," and coanchor of SNL's Weekend Update. The campaign will break in the September issues of various men's magazines, in addition to outdoor and digital media. "Mr. Beene's irreverent wit was legendary, so we thought about a new face for the brand that would feel relevant for today's consumer," said Russell Nardoza, senior vice president and chief operating officer of Beene, referring to Jost.

Beene's foundation also funds 40 to 50 charities, including research for Alzheimer's, heart disease, YMA scholarships, the CFDA Lifetime Achievement Award, programs for veterans, protection of women and children, and protection of animals. Combined funding of all the causes that Geoffrey Beene LLC and the Geoffrey Beene Foundation supports will exceed \$183 million in value by July.

Among the breakthroughs from Beene's cancer research funding are molecular diagnostics for targeted therapies; possible new treatments for pancreatic cancer, various leukemias, liver cancer and methods of combating breast cancer metastasis to the brain. Beene's funds support advanced research initiatives and labs, the establishment of senior and junior faculty chairs, graduate fellowships, the annual Geoffrey Beene Symposium and the annual Geoffrey Beene Research Retreat.

"It's absolutely been a transformative partnership for Memorial Sloan-Kettering," said Craig Thompson, the hospital's president. He noted that broad support for research has eroded in the U.S. since 2003 because of the economy and funding has been flat. "Part of science that particularly matters to cancer patients and to our understanding of cancer has been the ability to fund new ideas that might lead to more effective and safer therapies."