DR. JOHN & LYN McKEE

You could say that Dr. John and Lyn McKee go at philanthropy “whole hog.” The Down Syndrome Coalition for El Paso fundraiser they started in 2016 is called, in fact, The Whole Hog. But the idea of giving back goes back to their childhoods. John Stuart McKee, Jr., D.V.M., is the grandson of Robert E. and Evelyn McKee, whose foundation provided seed money for the establishment of the El Paso Community Foundation in 1977. The former Lyn Horwitz’s parents also believed strongly in philanthropy.

The couple met at a high school Halloween carnival. Lyn was a student at the Radford School for Girls (now Radford School), whose motto “Disco ut servem” is Latin for “I learn to serve.” John attended Austin High School. “He flirted with me,” Lyn remembers with a smile. They eventually married and moved to Fort Collins, Colorado, where John studied veterinary medicine at Colorado State University before serving a three-year internship and residency at the University of California, Davis.

John specialized in equine surgery when he established the Southwest Animal Care Complex in Santa Teresa, New Mexico, in 1975, the year the couple moved back to El Paso. Lyn gave birth to daughter Kerry Lyn and sons John Stuart III and Robert Evan before going to work at SWACC, doing everything from overseeing the books to administering anesthesia.

John’s late sister Charlotte Cohen was on the Community Foundation’s first board of directors. John is now serving his second term on what he calls “the big board.” He also served on various committees, and is involved in the Foundation’s effort to build a children’s museum in El Paso. Lyn served as treasurer of the Junior League of El Paso, was treasurer of its hugely popular A Christmas Fair, and served on numerous committees.

Philanthropy became more personal when daughter Kerry and her husband Steve “Tiger” Banta’s daughter, Eloise Lyn Banta, was born with Down syndrome. The McKees, who have three other grandchildren, helped found the Down Syndrome Coalition for El Paso, a supporting organization of the El Paso Community Foundation. One goal was to create El Paso’s first preschool for children with Down syndrome and other developmental needs. The school, Every Little Blessing, opened in 2017 in west El Paso. Kerry, who has a Ph.D. in education, is the founding director.

“It’s my personal dream to turn it into a facility that houses schools for children with various special needs,” John says. He came up with the idea of The Whole Hog as a casual fundraiser that “everyone else isn’t doing.” The Down Syndrome Coalition has been successful with fundraising, including a major commitment from Albertsons. “That’s his persistence. He’s a visionary,” Lyn says proudly. “They do all the work,” John adds “I am just a dreamer.”

Dr. John and Lyn McKee’s Great Gift to El Paso is their lifelong commitment to the community where they grew up, the El Paso Community Foundation, and most recently their efforts on behalf of children with Down syndrome and other developmental needs. Talk about going “whole hog.”