



Elsie Hillman, 1925–2015

## CONFLUENCE BUILDER

*Everything needs a real doer . . . somebody who is willing to do anything for the thing that they are passionate about. —Elsie Hillman*

Elsie Hillman was generous with her voice and her resources and her energy. She seemed to have a knack for bringing people together, for bridging divides.

For instance, Hillman, a strong Republican Party advocate, defended a woman's right to reproductive freedom.

As press reports noted after her August 4 death, Hillman was as comfortable rubbing elbows with parking attendants as she was with U.S. presidents. She regarded them equally for the human behind the job. (And was likely to call them all "Dearie.")

The wife of a billionaire, Henry Hillman, she could have kept to cloistered circles. Instead she brought dinner to people with AIDS in the '80s when few offered compassion to that population.

She wore costume jewelry rather than the real thing because, as she once told a friend, "I have more important things to do with my money." We noticed.

She and her husband gave a second chance to some of the region's sickest children through the Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC's Hillman Center for Pediatric Transplantation.

And they lent their family name to two endowed professorships at Pitt: One supports the understudied field of women's health. (It's held by Yoel Sadovsky, scientific director of the Magee-Womens Research Institute.) The other is in oncology. (That one is held by Nancy Davidson, director of the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute and UPMC CancerCenter.)

Elsie and Henry Hillman brought a spirit of connection to the construction of the Hillman Cancer Center, which opened in 2002; by design, it links scientific and clinical efforts. They gave millions to fund innovative studies of nearly 100 Pitt faculty members there. Perhaps not so surprising was another priority for Elsie Hillman: She was devoted to making patients as comfortable as possible during their treatments.

—Kristin Bundy and Erica Lloyd