

# High-Flying Dedication

Last August Philip Hixon and four friends chartered a plane for a trip back in American military history. Their mission: to visit all the major World War II battleground islands of the South Pacific and create a documentary for the Palm Springs Air Museum. Included in their 16-day itinerary was Guadalcanal (on the 66th anniversary of the first Marines landing there), along with Guam, Saipan, and Tinian, the departure point for the Enola Gay—the plane that dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945.

“I was too young to fight in the war,” says Hixon, a former chemical engineer in the Air Force from 1953 to 1956, “but it is such an important event in U.S. history that I wanted to see these islands.”

Philip shares his love of aviation with his wife, Lee. She has been licensed to fly helicopters since 1983, and is a member of the Whirly Girls International Women Helicopter Pilots. They also share a dedication to the work of Cedars-Sinai. Philip is a Life Trustee of the Cedars-Sinai Board of Directors, serves as vice chair of the Continuous Quality Improvement Committee, and, with Lee, has been a member of the Board of Governors since 2001.

Recently the Hixons made a major testamentary gift to the Medical Center to create the Hixon Endowed Fellowships in Investigative Medicine, which will support select physicians who are dedicated to clinical research. It follows a gift that established the Helene A. and Philip E. Hixon Endowed Chair in Investigative



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—PHILIP HIXON (RIGHT),  
SHOWN WITH HIS WIFE, LEE

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Medicine, held by Dr. Shlomo Melmed, director of the Burns and Allen Research Institute, senior vice president of Academic Affairs, and associate dean of the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA.

“Investigative medicine is the discipline that explores the mechanisms and causes of disease,” explains Dr. Melmed, “and uses modern techniques and technologies to translate laboratory discoveries into new therapies for patients. With the fellowships, we will be able to educate and train young physician-scientists to become leaders in clinical investigation within their respective specific disease areas.”

Among the areas that fellows will explore are the biochemical, physiological, and genetic basis of cancer, heart disease, and metabolic brain disorders, along with the risk factors of various medical interventions for these diseases. Their work will complement that of Cedars-Sinai physician-researchers, including Dr. Melmed.

As the holder of the Hixon Endowed Chair in Investigative Medicine, Dr. Melmed is currently researching causes of and treatments for pituitary tumors, growth and reproductive disorders, Cushing’s disease, and other conditions related to pituitary gland dysfunction. He has pioneered the discovery and application of novel treatments for endocrine tumors and is a recognized international authority on pituitary medicine.

Dr. Melmed’s laboratory has been consistently funded by the National Institutes of Health since 1980, and he has trained over 60 physicians, scientists, and graduate students who occupy leading positions in academic endocrinology worldwide. “We wanted to support fellowships because Dr. Melmed’s work as a chair holder has been extraordinary,” says Philip, a retired publisher of medical and scientific journals and manufacturer of specialized photographic equipment, who is truly energized about the scientific enterprise. “The research he has done on zebra fish is fascinating: it virtually replicates the action of pituitary glands in humans!”

The Hixons also have contributed substantially to other programs at the Medical Center, including the Board of Governors Center for Cancer Research at the Samuel Oschin Comprehensive Cancer Institute, and the Heart Families Program for support of families facing cardiac crises. They have made numerous additional donations to Cedars-Sinai in the form of charitable remainder trusts.

Explaining the couple’s ongoing support of Cedars-

Sinai, Lee, whose father was a neurologist in the Bronx, says, “The research is cutting-edge, and the quality of patient care is unparalleled. It’s a hospital where people can go when they have a medical problem no one else knows how to handle.”

Philip was first introduced to Cedars-Sinai several years ago while serving on the board of directors of the Eisenhower Medical Center in Palm Springs. Because of his publishing business, an Eisenhower doctor asked him to produce a special medical journal to inform healthcare workers about the problems of treating patients with different cultural backgrounds. Philip then successfully asked Cedars-Sinai to be the publication’s academic partner.

Tom Martin knows firsthand how Philip, his longtime friend, continues to contribute to the advancement of Cedars-Sinai. “He invited me to join the Board of Governors,” Tom says. “He’s a dedicated and excellent fund-raiser, and a multifaceted leader of other entrepreneurs on the board. He’s also a tireless worker on every project he tackles, taking it from the idea stage to completion.”

Tom and Philip are fellow members of the board of the Palm Spring Air Museum, and both have homes in nearby Rancho Mirage. There, several months ago, the Hixons invited Dr. Shlomo Melmed and his wife Ilana to take an aerial tour of the Coachella Valley in their helicopter. “That kind of flying makes me anxious, but they were very relaxed, calm, and comforting,” says Dr. Melmed, adding that the Hixons’ ease and graciousness are just part of what he appreciates about their friendship. “The Hixons are very warm, loyal, and generous people who are very concerned about the quality and human significance of whatever they do, whether it’s charity or social involvements. They are truly an inspiring couple,” he adds. “They always want to know ‘Does it make a difference in people’s lives?’”

While the Hixons are intent on living their lives with purpose and supporting science that expands the horizons of healthcare, they also welcome the perspective that flying offers.

“Flying is like someone in a book being lifted off the page and being able to look in and see your world,” says Lee, who still maintains a sense of wonder at the process despite being a veteran pilot. Like science, she adds, “It gives a whole new dimension to the way you see things.” ■