

Alfred ‘Burr’ Wishart Jr.: Our Tribute

In the world of philanthropy, we speak often of having a transformative impact on our community, but to achieve that goal in real terms can be elusive. This was not the case for Alfred ‘Burr’ Wishart Jr., who through his leadership at The Pittsburgh Foundation and The Heinz Endowments helped to establish programs and institutions that continue to touch the lives of people in the Pittsburgh region today. With his passing on April 20 at the age of 91, Mr. Wishart leaves behind a legacy of compassion and inspiration that many recall with fondness and admiration.

A community leader and Presbyterian minister, Mr. Wishart was deeply moved by the inequities and protests in Newark, New Jersey, where he was a pastor in the 1960s. His desire to advance social change and the common good was the hallmark of his work after he became executive director of the Howard Heinz Endowment and The Pittsburgh Foundation in 1970. At that time, the Howard Heinz Endowment, together later with the Vira I. Heinz Endowment, served as the umbrella organization that included The Pittsburgh Foundation. As part of a restructuring in 1993, the two Heinz philanthropies began operating as The Heinz Endowments and The Pittsburgh Foundation became an independent community foundation, which Mr. Wishart continued to head until his retirement in 2001.

During his 31-year tenure as one of Pittsburgh’s foundation leaders, Mr. Wishart’s accomplishments included working with the Heinz family and patriarch Jack Heinz in developing the Pittsburgh Cultural District in the 1970s and 1980s. Mr. Wishart’s role included overseeing the construction of Heinz Hall and the Benedum Center and purchasing properties nearby.

Mr. Wishart helped to secure the state funding needed to ensure the ongoing operation of the Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild and Bidwell Training Center, which have enabled thousands of students to obtain the skills needed to pursue arts or trades careers. He also set standards for inclusive community philanthropy such as meeting the practical needs of low-income residents, encouraging people of varying income levels to become foundation donors and diversifying foundation staff to better reflect the community.

Mr. Wishart will be missed by all who knew him. We at The Heinz Endowments extend our condolences to his family and friends, and join others in recognizing his lasting contributions that continue to benefit the Pittsburgh community and beyond.