



Lester "Ruff" Fant, III

Lester "Ruff" Fant III has spent a lifetime quietly making big things happen. The behind-the-scenes lawyer was one of The Inn's earliest supporters and a founding board member. Known to us as "Ruff" -his Mississippi childhood nickname earned from years of being just that-he still bears a strong Southern drawl that immediately gives away his heritage.

Ruff, working as a lawyer for Cassidy & Associates in the late 1980s, met Carmala Walgren, a congressional spouse who was integral in propelling the vision of The Inn after her teenage babysitter battled cancer at the NIH. It was Ruff's job to make the project plausible. "My life's work has been listening to people say 'here's our broad goal, how do we go about doing it?'" he says.

Carmala, Debbie Dingell, and other dedicated congressional spouses teamed up with Dr. Phil Pizzo, then head of pediatrics at the National Cancer Institute, and convinced the NIH to donate two acres of land. They met Mark Raabe, general counsel of Merck & Company, a global pharmaceutical company, and successfully persuaded them to underwrite construction costs.

Ruff helped unify the group towards a common goal. "Anytime you get high-powered people in a room, there are disagreements," he says. "You had all these parts-getting the government to agree, getting the founders to agree, getting Merck to agree," he adds. "I was their pro-bono lawyer and I was very committed to what was being done."

Ruff developed the legal structure of The Inn, its board of directors and its non-profit status. He and his wife Susan live in Georgetown and have remained committed to The Inn throughout the past 20 years, faithfully and generously contributing. The Inn is grateful for the vision, drive, and support of Ruff and the other invaluable founders of this amazing "place like home." "I really think The Children's Inn is one of the most benevolent projects a group of individuals has ever done," he says.