

The University of Texas System Administration



TRUE TO THEIR TEXAS ROOTS



The Funk Family (above: Joe, Adrian and Kathleen Funk)
Joe and Kathleen Funk established the *Funk Family Foundation Chancellor's Excellence Endowment* to give back to their UT roots.

Joe and Kathleen Funk are emergency medical physicians in Atlanta, but their medical roots run Texas deep. They both received their BS in biology from UT San Antonio and MD from UTHealth's McGovern Medical School. They completed their internships in emergency medicine in the inaugural class at UTHealth in Houston before going on to finish their emergency medicine residencies. Their impressive resumes are the result of sacrifice and determination, working hard to attain their dreams through opportunities UT institutions provided.

Joe's journey began in the early days of EMS, in the infancy of emergency medicine, earning his paramedic license from UT Health San Antonio. "My father started the region's first EMS program just outside of San Antonio, which was a volunteer organization at that time and asked if I could help out." Joe chuckles, "Ironically, I said there was absolutely no way I could deal with blood, let alone take care of sick people. So he suggested I just drive for them. I took a first responder EMT course and that's where my passion started. I wanted to advance our system."

"Out of my own pocket I started taking the courses in the new paramedic program at UT Health Science Center in San Antonio." Joe recalls, "We were studying out of books that were

handwritten by the authors that even included white-out on the pages, because it was such a new field, as EMS began in 1974. Nobody really knew how or what to do in a formal manner, so UT Health Science Center in San Antonio was the first in our area that put together a well-run program for paramedics. They were one of the top paramedic programs in the state and UT did everything right, so I just continued from there."

Kathleen's plan was more line of sight. "Coming from a small Texas town, we were taught in high school as 'good little girls' that if you end up going to college, you went there to find a good man. But I knew at the beginning that I wanted to go to UT and to be a paramedic. I am the first in my family to go to college and there was no internet back then, so I didn't know what the pathway was for either one of those plans. I had absolutely no guidance — our high school college counselor did not help girls place. After graduation, I walked into the registrar's office at UT San Antonio and said 'I want to go to school,' since I did not know what that entailed. I did not know what to do to get accepted or how to fill out an application, but they were very welcoming and guided me each step of the way."

Somewhere in the mix of working three jobs to pay her way through school, Kathleen met Joe her freshmen year and they continued on their path together. He had previously left school to work as a paramedic to save money, but went back to UT San Antonio with Kathleen to finish his undergrad degree.

"After researching initiatives, seeing the UT System's vision led us to know it was the right place to put our focus."

Joe and Kathleen have attended three UT institutions and their generosity began by giving back to their alma maters. But they wanted to do more. Kathleen explained, "We had come to the point that we said, 'We can give more, where do we want to do that?' After researching initiatives, seeing the UT System's vision led us to know it was the right place to put our focus."

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After several years in the Chancellor’s Council, Joe and Kathleen established the *Funk Family Foundation Chancellor’s Excellence Endowment* at the UT System.

“You can have a lot of great work at all the campuses, and UT institutions do that very well, but you can’t guide initiatives and take things to where they need to go without great leadership. The UT System provides this support.” Kathleen continues, “We even asked ourselves when we were deciding, ‘Even though our sons might not attend UT institutions, is this still where we want our money to go? Absolutely.’”

Joe came to a realization. “We’ve been faculty at several other institutions outside of Texas and we always took it for granted that UT is always the way every place does it. The other places were great institutions with quality education, but it just was not UT style. Without a doubt, UT is the leader in education. That’s why we always kept leaning back towards UT. That’s what we knew and that’s how we thought things should be done.”

“We have attributed the leadership skills we have learned and used throughout our lifetime to UT, whether it is the ability to crack a chest, run a code, or lead a team,” Kathleen explains. “Joe is in administration now and is in line to be chief of staff this year, and every time we’ve taken a turn towards a new role, we really both look back to the pillars we were given by UT System institutions that taught us how to do that, either by teaching us directly or by seeing what it looked like. We stand on the shoulder of giants that lived, worked or taught at UT and we carry that with us every day.”

Joe jokingly adds, “We look at it as, ‘What would UT do?’”

Joe and Kathleen have taught their sons, Eric, 24, and Adrian, 20, the value of hard work and persistence. (To that end, Adrian’s persistence has paid off and he is transferring this semester to UT Austin to start his sophomore year as a Longhorn!)

Most importantly, they Funks taught their sons the importance of remaining grateful for the people who helped them and to

always pay it forward. “In medical school we had gotten to a point where we knew we weren’t going to make it through financially, so one of us would have to quit and work to support the other to keep going to school.” Joe continues, “But then my parents came through to help us. Although they didn’t have much, they didn’t want to see our dream fall because of financial strains.” The Funks feel the exact same way and established a scholarship at UT Austin’s Dell Medical School to support medical students for generations to come. They have also established a similar endowment at UTHealth’s McGovern Medical School for medical students in financial need.

“It takes a village to raise a child, but it takes donors to educate those children.” Joe adds. “Plus you can’t take it with you, so why not help make someone’s future brighter?”

“Our awareness of the good fortune we have been given has led us to teach our children to give back to the community through volunteer activities.” As Kathleen reiterates, “Everybody gives something different, whether it be time, money, experience, expertise. Everybody contributes the assets that they have.” She continues, “If you’re not helping someone you’re not doing your job.”

In addition to their generous philanthropy, the Funks have been involved in educating medical professionals to recognize and treat victims of human trafficking, as well as serving on medical rescue, disaster relief and medical training teams in Kenya and Haiti.

But how ever far they go, Texas is never far from their mind. Even with Joe becoming chief of staff next year and while lot of people their age are winding down, the Funks have entertained the idea of returning to the Lone Star State. “There are still a lot of opportunities for us to do things, and retirement is not in our vocabulary,” Kathleen emphasizes.

In gratitude to their Texan education, “We hope that we encourage those individuals who have found their community far from Texas to look back, give thanks, and give back to their UT roots.”