

Michels Family Foundation: Donates \$15 million for rare cancers research

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Milwaukee, March 28, 2022 – Just 11 when she was first diagnosed with a rare pediatric brain cancer, Sophie Michels is now a junior in college and a long-term cancer survivor. In her honor, Tim and Barbara Michels, Sophie’s parents, and the Michels Family Foundation at Michels Corporation are donating \$15 million to establish the Michels Rare Cancers Research Laboratories at the [Medical College of Wisconsin Cancer Center](#) to accelerate research and advance innovative treatments for everyone facing a cancer diagnosis.

The gift was announced by Tim Michels and his family along with leaders from the Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW), Children’s Wisconsin and Froedtert Health during a special event at the [Froedtert & Medical College of Wisconsin Clinical Cancer Center](#) on Friday, March 25.

“Like so many other families facing a cancer diagnosis, we were fearful and seeking answers,” said Tim Michels, co-owner of Michels Corp., an international energy and infrastructure construction company headquartered in Brownsville, Wis., with offices in the Milwaukee area. “Our daughter was blessed to receive life-saving treatment. Our contribution is aimed at making sure more Wisconsin families have access to the life-saving treatments they need by funding cutting-edge research so desperately needed for the study of rare cancers.”

The contribution is the largest donation ever made to the MCW Cancer Center and fuels an intense effort to discover treatments into rare cancers that affect fewer than 15 out of 100,000 people each year according to the National Cancer Institute. Rare cancers do not attract the same level of government and private funding

directed at more common cancers.

“We classify these cancers as rare, but the reality is that, when taken as a whole, rare cancers account for about 25 percent of all cancers,” said Dr. Gustavo Leone, the Dr. Glenn R. and Nancy A. Linnerson Endowed Chair in Cancer Research and director of the MCW Cancer Center.

“Diagnosing these cancers is more difficult, which can lead to delayed treatments and poorer outcomes for patients,” Dr. Leone said. “This generous gift elevates the MCW Cancer Center as a hub for major cancer discoveries and a source of innovative therapies for patients in Wisconsin and beyond.”

“Hearing that diagnosis was devastating,” said Michels. “But we have always been determined to help Sophie fight this battle, and we continue to do so every day.”

The gift supports the study of choroid plexus carcinoma and other rare cancers. The choroid plexus is a structure in the brain where malignant tumors can occur in children and adults but are more likely in the first year of life.

“We are not scientists, but the family started calling me ‘Dr. Dad’ as we tried to learn as much as we could about Sophie’s condition and treatments,” said Michels. “The more we learned, the more we realized the connection between support for research and new cancer treatments and cures.”

Dr. John Raymond, the president and CEO of MCW, agrees.

“Academic health systems that practice evidence-based care are a vital source of medical discovery. The importance and significance of the Michels family choosing to invest in Milwaukee – their community – leads to southeastern Wisconsin being an even more meaningful hub of impactful cancer research,” said Raymond. “Our philanthropic partnerships advance this critical work. Cancer is one of our biggest challenges, and we are truly grateful to the Michels family for their support.”

“The generous donation today aligns with our continued investment and commitment to provide access to academic medicine to the diverse communities we serve,” said Cathy Jacobson, president and CEO of Froedtert Health. “This investment in new research into rare cancers will accelerate treatments and will assist us in continuing to deliver the right care in the right place at the right time.”

Tim Michels stresses his desire to give back and make a difference for all families affected by cancer. And he is grateful for the research and clinical care conducted at Froedtert Hospital, MCW and Children’s Wisconsin, where Sophie received initial treatment.

We’re proud to live in Wisconsin, home to some of the best researchers and physicians in the country,” he says. “We want to find treatments for choroid plexus carcinoma, but any cancer research has the potential to uncover new ways of treating all kinds of cancers.”

“We know from our experience with Sophie that the battle against cancer never ends,” he adds. “And we want to do our part to help other families too.”