



Palmer Horton
Cystic Fibrosis patient

JOHNNY'S LEGACY OF LOVE

A LITTLE GIRL.
A "HUGE GUY WITH A HUGE HEART."
A TRANSFORMATIONAL IMPACT.

When Palmer Horton took her first breath and wrapped her tiny fingers around her mom and dad's, the first-time parents fell in love. They wanted to protect their child, who was born with cystic fibrosis (CF). They quickly learned that the team at Levine Children's had the same goal. "They embraced our entire family with their continuous care, love and support – and guided us through such a tough time," said Doughton Horton.

It was during these challenging times that Doughton's childhood friend, John Justice IV, and his family rallied to support the Hortons. John and Doughton, who lived together while attending UNC-Chapel Hill, established Friends Fighting CF (FFCF) in 2016. They collaborated with their fraternity to create an annual fundraiser that supported their CF initiatives. They also presented their ideas to John's dad, Johnny, whose initial response was: "What do you need? How can I help? What a wonderful idea!" Johnny became their biggest supporter and fan.

Over the next several years, the charity surpassed John's wildest dreams. (To date, FFCF has raised \$480,000 for research and scholarship support for children with CF). John, Doughton, and his wife Mallery had just begun discussions on how to best move forward with their philanthropy when they lost their main cheerleader. Johnny Justice – the momentum behind their charity – passed away on October 4, 2019.

"Dad was a huge guy with a huge heart," said John. At 6' 8" – John William Justice III (Johnny) – stood out wherever he went. He had a large presence, exuded warmth, and loved helping others. The man with the golden hair lived by the Golden Rule. He was known for treating everyone equally and saying, "You need anything, you call me." The native of Cheraw, SC, an avid golfer who grew up surfing and spending time on Pawley's Island, impacted people from all walks of life during his 62 years.

"If people had the gumption to ask, he always said, 'Yes,' and didn't ask anything in return," said his wife of 40 years, Donna. She recalled the time one of Johnny's employees at Justice Products decided to part ways. When Johnny asked about the man's career ambitions, he said he wished to start a trucking company. So, Johnny got him a truck and a route. Today the man still works closely with the company. There are many more similar stories – Donna learned during Johnny's memorial – of how her husband had mentored others. One man was so grateful for his support, he named his child after Johnny.

And Johnny loved children. "Our Suburban was always loaded with kids," said Donna. Johnny instilled in his sons, John IV and Samford, and their friends, the simple mantra: "Just do what you can to help. If you can help, why wouldn't you?" He led by example. When his best friend Jimmy Hodges was killed in a plane crash at age 35, Johnny stepped in to help raise his children.

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According to Donna, the only time Johnny felt helpless was when his children were sick. Both John and Samford were diagnosed with severe asthma as young boys. It struck a chord when, years later, Johnny learned of Palmer's illness and the challenges the Horton family would face. Naturally, he wanted to help.



In 2020, when the Justice family decided to honor the man they loved and who loved to help others, they realized they had the unique opportunity to help Palmer, her family, and other CF patients. The Hortons told John about a doctor at Levine Children's who they believed in – Dr. Ashley Chadha, director of pulmonary medicine. "So, I said, 'Great. Then I believe in him too,'" John recalled. "Let's get together and let's go."

The Justice's strong belief in Dr. Chadha and his care team, coupled with their desire to pay tribute to the man who loved unconditionally, led them to commit \$1.1 million to create a fund in Johnny's honor and to name the John and Donna Justice Pulmonary Diagnostic Center at Levine Children's. Under the direction of Dr. Chadha, the fund will provide support for research, personnel, equipment and capital needs to advance pulmonary research and patient care at Levine Children's.

"This inspirational gift from the Justice family launches us into a new world of opportunity for our patients, and it will truly help transform our pulmonary center," said Dr. Chadha. "The foundation of our care at Levine Children's is the relationships we form with the community and our families," he added. "I built a relationship with the Justice family through a common patient and friend; so, I do feel like we are a team, and I appreciate that more than you know."

John finds it fitting to name the Pulmonary Diagnostic Center for his parents, who he says were the ultimate team, lovingly referred to as "JohnandDonna." Now, thanks to their teamwork, countless other CF patients like Palmer will have a better experience with their healthcare journeys. "Dad would be a huge fan of that," said John. "He would also be proud that we are supporting something locally and giving Mallery and Doughton some agency over their daughter's care. My wife Barbara and I are fortunate to have two healthy children. Having seen how brave this little girl has been in the first six years of her life has changed our lives."



Now, the Justice family is helping to change others' lives. "We feel the best tribute to Johnny is to help others as much as he did," said Donna. "The Pulmonary Center embodies what made Johnny so special. He was larger than life, in body and spirit."



Rendering of the future John and Donna Justice Pulmonary Diagnostic Center at Levine Children's.