Dee Keeton, RN, was 24 years old when she saw her house go up in flames on a local TV newscast and discovered that she’d lost everything. “I thought it was the worst day of my life, but as it turned out, I realized that good things can come out of something truly awful,” the former DeKalb Medical intensive care unit (ICU) nurse recalls. When she returned to work, DeKalb Medical employees and physicians lined up outside the ICU to give her clothes, kitchen utensils, money, hugs and hope. It’s a gesture the 5-foot-1-inch dynamo, who eventually rose to become interim chief executive officer of Decatur Hospital and director of patient relations, and her husband, Bill Keeton, M.D., have never forgotten.

“It opened my heart to continue helping others,” she says, and she has set the tone for the many contributions the career nurse and her husband have made to their community. Not surprisingly, the acclaimed anesthesiologist and best-selling author met Dee while the two were volunteering their medical services in DeKalb County, and they were married in 1993. Together, the couple has contributed more than 75 years of hands-on patient care and advocacy to alleviate human suffering and enhance the quality of care at DeKalb Medical and across Georgia.

With their “Don’t talk about it, just do it,” attitude, Dee and Bill have been moving mountains and raising millions to modernize care at DeKalb Medical as they motivate others to model their pattern of giving. The Keetons’ recent generous donation to the DeKalb Medical Foundation’s Advancing Hope and Healing capital campaign contributed to a record fundraising year for the Foundation, which reached its goal ahead of schedule. “We want to give back to a place that has given so much to us,” say the Keetons about DeKalb Medical and the Foundation, which feels like family to them. “However much we give, we feel we get so much more back because it just multiplies.”

Recognized for their profound ability to understand and empathize with other people’s pain, the Keetons have worked hard to make DeKalb Medical a hospital their community is proud to claim. “When you help people in pain, you change their lives,” shares Dr. Keeton, who has dedicated much of his life to keeping DeKalb Medical at the forefront of science and medicine. Dr. Keeton founded one of Atlanta’s first pain centers, where he helped revolutionize the treatment of chronic pain. Today, DeKalb Medical continues to provide the latest treatment advances and it benefits from Dr. Keeton’s leadership while he serves as chief of anesthesia.

The fruits of the Keetons’ labor and their boundless enthusiasm, innovation and optimism for the future of medicine will likely be felt for many generations to come. Every year, Dee helps administer the Dr. W. Mark Coppage Scholarship Fund, which promotes nursing excellence and care advancement in the industry. Her impact on the profession was further expanded when she was appointed by Governor Sonny Perdue to serve on the Georgia Board of Nursing in 2004.

“Don’t ever dare tell Dee she can’t do something, because she will prove you wrong,” shares Dr. Keeton of his wife of over 20 years, who spearheaded the formation of the Charles B. Eberhart Memorial Golf Classic in 1995 while serving on the Foundation’s board of trustees. The tournament has now raised well over a million dollars in charitable donations to improve the standard of healthcare in DeKalb County.

The depth of the Keetons’ humanity makes them heroes to all who know them. In May, the Keetons were recognized for their volunteerism and visionary leadership at a special ceremony. The auditorium at DeKalb Medical’s North Decatur campus is named for them, in honor of their generosity.

Whether ministering to patients or serving on local professional boards, the Keetons’ life and legacy will forever inspire others to fearlessly give more of themselves and never doubt the difference one individual can make.
We want to give back to the place that has given so much to us. However much we give, we feel we get so much more back because it multiplies."
—Dee and Bill Keeton, M.D.