

Wilfred Konneker

When Wilfred Konneker's mother died of tuberculosis in 1926, he was only four years old and his sister Winona was seven. The children were sent to a sanitarium for a year to prevent them from coming down with the same disease.

When they were released, their father, Roy Konneker, being a single father, sent them off to Greenfield to live with his sister and mother. Roy did not abandon them, visiting them regularly and even taking them to the 1933 Chicago World's Fair.

Young Wilfred entered first grade when he moved to Greenfield and because of his late start, his teacher wanted to hold him back but, through his father's intervention, Wilfred read books over the summer and was promoted.

Living in Greenfield was an adventure for Young Wilfred. He and a friend won a pony in a grocery store contest by enlisting all their friends and neighbors to give them credit for their purchases. He took on morning and afternoon paper routes when his grandfather gave him a bicycle. He studied the Boy Scout handbook before so that when he came of age he could pass the Tenderfoot requirements quickly. He went on to become an Eagle Scout and earned the Bronze Palm for earning extra merit badges.

Upon graduation from McClain High School, he and a friend hitchhiked to San Francisco and back so they could attend the World's Fair being held there. This drive and determination continued on into college and adulthood. He attended Ohio University and received his B.S. in chemistry and math in 1943. During World War II he worked on the Manhattan Project (atomic bomb). In 1947 he received his M.S. from Ohio University in physics and later his Doctorate in physics from Washington University in Saint Louis.

He was a pioneer in the nuclear medicine field, using radioisotopes for diagnosis and therapy. He founded and co-founded many companies. He and his wife, Ann Lee, are major philanthropists, endowing the Konneker scholarship each year to a McClain High School grad, many programs at OU, St. Louis, and even the historical society's Stone Schoolhouse (Konneker Education Museum).