

# GROWTH

GROWING RELATIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL WEALTH IN WEST TENNESSEE HOUSEHOLDS



## Grant Year 1

NOVEMBER 1, 2022 – OCTOBER 31, 2023

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## GROWWTH Staff



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**Bishop Wilson**  
*Care Coordinator*

## Jamie Pearson

Jamie Pearson's unique experience not only as a GROWWTH Participant, but also as one of GROWWTH's Care Coordinators, has allowed her to be able to connect with other participants in an engaging way.

Jamie was raised in a military family, traveling the world and experiencing other cultures. Her family also instilled traditional family dynamics such as children were to be seen and not heard. That perspective limited Jamie's curiosity in asking her family about life skills such as financial planning, buying a house or how the loan process works.

As an adult, Jamie makes it a point to teach her own children basic financial practices like writing a check, opening a bank account or withdrawing cash from an ATM. Now she's helping others learn the value of those practices.

"I've always worked in the social service field since coming out of high school," Jamie said, "That's where my heart and passion are. I truly love this program. They're not just handing out dollars or having people not understand finances. They're giving people the skillsets, connecting them with organizations like Greater Memphis Financial Empowerment Center, to get them financial savvy."

At 41-years-old, Jamie also learned new ways to apply for jobs beyond the days of typewriters.

"When I was writing resumes and cover letters about 20 years ago, they were nothing like today," Jamie said. "We didn't have Microsoft Word. We had typewriters in school. Now I can sympathize more with our participants."

Jamie is one of GROWWTH's biggest cheerleaders for our participants if ever they want to give up, give in and call it quits.

"With GROWWTH's participants, I'm not sending them through a program or asking them to do something I haven't already done," Jamie added. "I am one of very few Care Coordinators in this program or across Memphis that can say, 'Hey, I've already done this.'"



## Bishope Wilson

Bishope Wilson is one of GROWWTH's Care Coordinators. His life experience uniquely allows him to adapt his work style when it comes to engaging with participants, as he has overcome his own barriers.

Raised by a single mom who put her children's education before her own, Bishope earned his bachelor's degree this past year. He is now sharing with GROWWTH's participants how achievable it is for a high-quality career path.

"The way my mom raised me, she made the importance of college and a good work ethic very clear to me," Bishope said. "I know she's pretty proud. She cried a lot at my graduation."

As a first-generation college student, Bishope previously worked on the University of Memphis' campus as a peer mentor to other first-generation students. After graduation, he sought to continue in similar work helping other low-income families reach stable employment through GROWWTH. Whether it was job training, credential training or microbusiness development, Bishope wants to be a coach for others to succeed.

"I feel like people helped me growing up to get to where I am now," Bishope said. "I want to assist people as well. I want to be the person who helped me when I was younger."



# About GROWWTH

**GROWWTH:** Growing Relational and Occupational Wealth in West Tennessee Households

GROWWTH is a part of a study funded by the Tennessee Department of Human Services which is being conducted to determine how these pilot programs help people improve their economic well-being. During the study, all new eligible applicants will be randomly selected into one of two groups that receive a different mix of program services.

## Our Mission Statement

Elevating West Tennessee families into self-sufficiency and economic mobility by respecting their voice and choice.

## Vision Statement

GROWWTH will leverage our collective assets and knowledge to move West Tennessee's most vulnerable households to a life of thriving.

## Our Value Proposition

- Holistic ecosystem comprised of innovative education and training, workforce development expertise and community support networks
- Leveraged partner resources to alleviate barriers enabling families to achieve economic sustainability

The GROWWTH team works with each Participant to determine a pathway forward for success. Everyone's idea of progress is unique to their experiences and goals. GROWWTH provides milestone payments, wrap around services, case management, and support to help close the gaps that create barriers to self-sufficiency. During the randomization period, Group A Participants are eligible for all GROWWTH services. Group B Participants are waitlisted with access to limited services for a period of one year.



## GROWWTH Academy

Group A Participants enroll in GROWWTH Readiness Academy asynchronous online, in person or via a virtual classroom with a GROWWTH Training Specialist. These classes are designed to equip individuals with the skills necessary to succeed in the next phase of their journey, whether it be seeking a high-quality job, starting a credential training program and/or Microbusiness Bootcamp.



The 11 modules that make up GROWWTH Academy cover topics such as adapting to change, effective communication, financial management, resume building, accountability, trauma informed behavior, job search, interview skills, and more. There were 44 GROWWTH Academy graduates in grant Year 1.



## GROWWTH Approved Training Providers

Group A Participants who have graduated from GROWWTH Academy can enroll in credential training programs. GROWWTH not only pays for the tuition of the approved programs of 12 months or less in length, but also provides milestone payments to the Participants for completion of the courses and obtaining their certification. Many GROWWTH Participants are single parents who have limited resources and inability to afford training without this assistance.

# Who We Serve

GROWWTH served **243 West Tennessee families** between February 1, 2023 and October 31, 2023 in 21 counties grouped into three regions:

## SOUTHWEST Tennessee

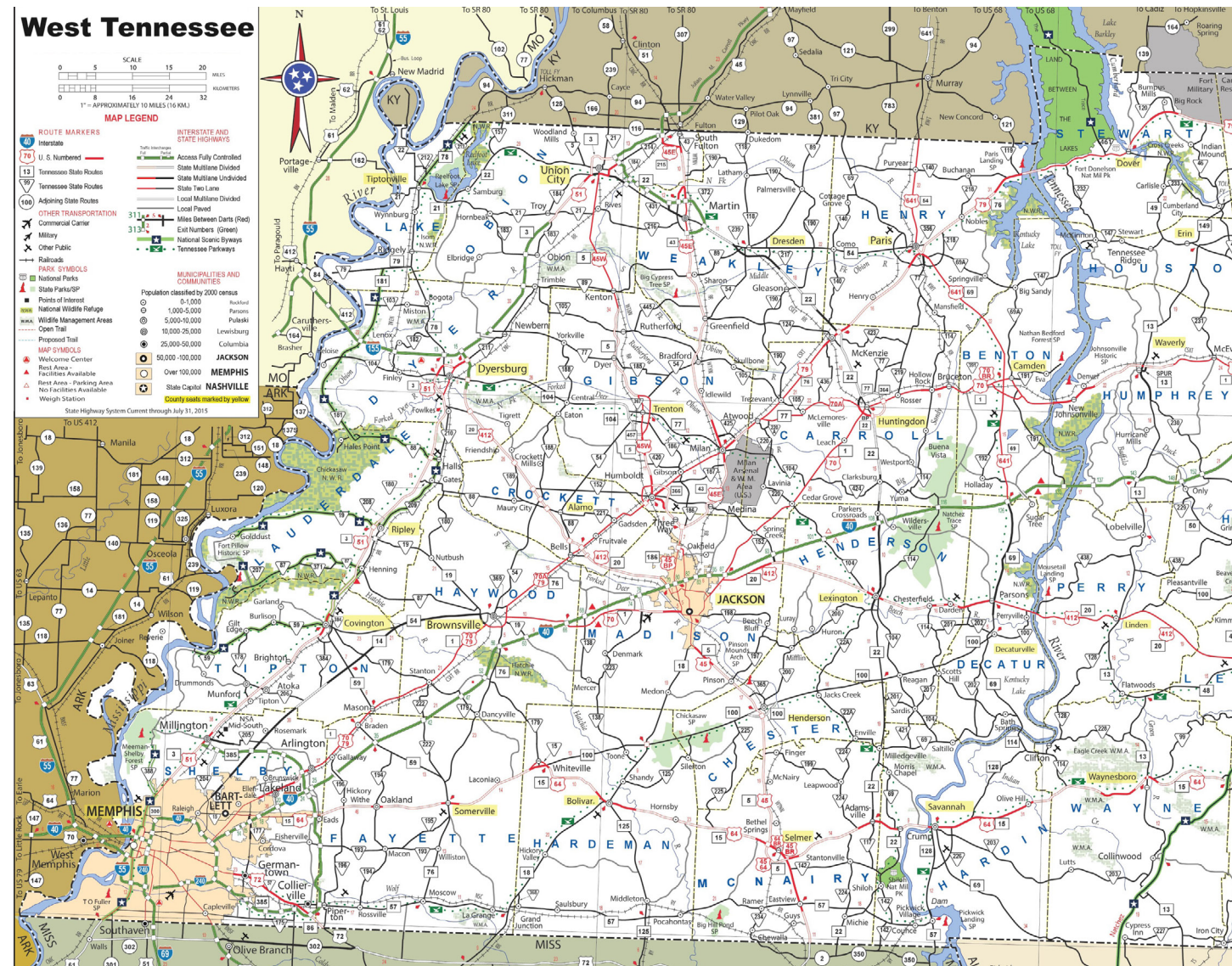
Chester, Decatur, Hardeman, Hardin, Haywood, Henderson, Madison, McNairy counties;

## NORTHWEST Tennessee

Benton, Carroll, Crockett, Dyer, Gibson, Henry, Lake, Obion, Weakley counties;

## GREATER MEMPHIS

Fayette, Lauderdale, Shelby, Tipton counties.



# Meet Romena

Romena is a mother of four who dreamed of owning her own business. She sought freedom and independence on her career path while working part-time for a Memphis non-profit.

When she learned about GROWWTH's Microbusiness Bootcamp, she enrolled, which helped her launch Dolly P's Janitorial Cleaning Service.

"It's been wonderful for me," Davis said. "I graduated GROWWTH, I graduated Microbusiness Bootcamp. Now, I'm looking into enrollment for truck-driving school. Just in case my cleaning business doesn't go as planned. I want to travel."

Through GROWWTH's available resources, attentive Care Coordinators and milestone payments, neighbors like Romena can provide for their children, pay bills and work towards a high-quality career.

Romena now shares her experience with GROWWTH's program with her friends and even strangers.

"I always ask 'Do you want to change your life?' I have referred a few of my friends, strangers," Romena said. "I ask them that question, listen to their story and ask, 'Do you want to change the story?' Then I introduce them to GROWWTH. Afterwards, when I ask them how they feel about GROWWTH, they love it and they're growing with it."



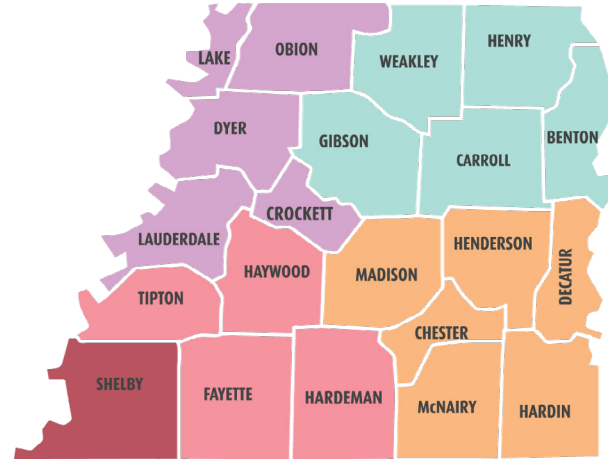
## Groups Served

**Group A 116** Experimental Group - *Immediate access to program services*

**Group B 127** Control Group - *Waitlisted for one year after randomization*

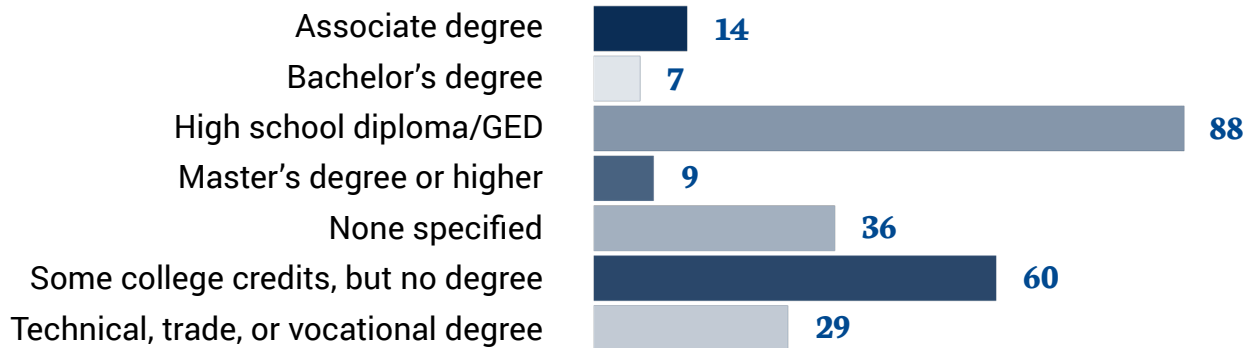
### Participants served per county GROWWTH grant year 1

Carroll	6
Dyer	6
Fayette	2
Hardeman	1
Henry	9
Lake	2
Lauderdale	2
Madison	18
Obion	2
Shelby	189
Tipton	1
Weakley	5

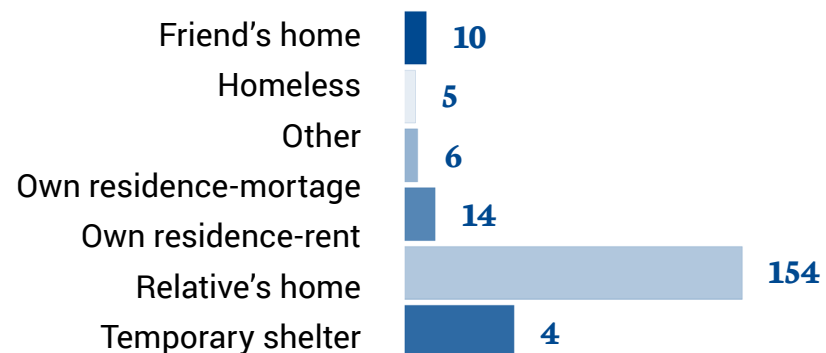


**Average Participant Age: 31 years old**

### Education background Cumulative

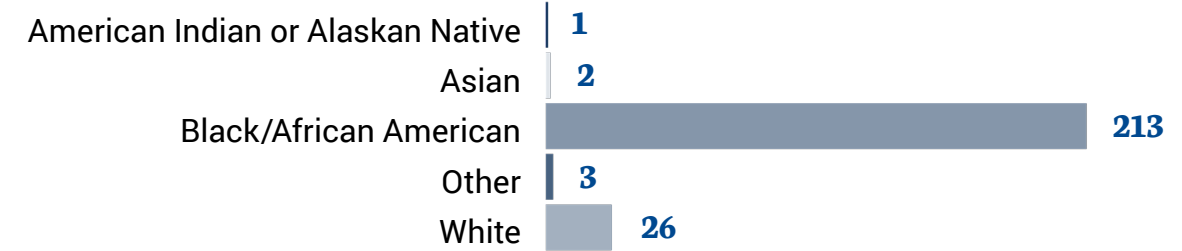


### Residency Cumulative



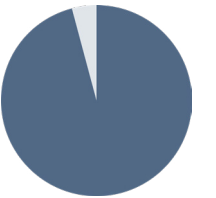
## Demographics of Participants

### Race / Ethnicity



### Gender

Male 10  
Female 233



**Children served as part of the GROWWTH Participant's household: 716**

## Meet Rico

Rico is resettling his life after spending time in prison. A single father of six, he's experienced jobs with low employee support and nepotism from management. The struggle for Rico has been to ask the right questions and better advocate for himself when applying for positions in welding.

"There had been a lot of bias where I had worked," Rico explained. "I realized I wasn't going to grow there and didn't want to be somewhere for the rest of my life earning only \$21 an hour."

Since the age of 14, Rico developed a passion for working with his hands in carpentry and welding. At the age of 31, he's now determined to forge a career path on his own terms.

We welcomed Rico as a new GROWWTH Participant in early 2023. Through GROWWTH's accelerated workforce readiness program, GROWWTH Academy, he learned to ask the tough questions when it comes to securing a high-quality job best fitting him.

"Before, I never thought to ask about certain company rules or procedures, even employee relationships," Rico said. "GROWWTH helped me to broaden my mind and ask more questions."





# Spotlight on Microbusiness

One unique feature of GROWWH is the selection, coaching, and nurturing of West Tennessee microbusinesses, which are trending and bolster local economies. Our “Microbusiness Bootcamp” focuses on empowering participants to combine their existing skills and knowledge with business competencies and resources.

The Microbusiness Development Program (GMDP) gives qualifying GROWWTH Participants the opportunity to access capital not traditionally available to small businesses. The

program provides milestone-driven, achievable ways to obtain forgiveness of capital borrowed, therefore boosting the Participant’s ability to grow their business as well as better qualify for future capital if needed via traditional Small Business Administration program lenders.

In October 2023, the first cohort of Microbusiness Bootcamp started. After the six weeks, the program graduated nine individuals who will be moving on to start or expand businesses in the community.



# Year 1 Impact

At the time of enrollment, many GROWWTH Participants come into the program with uncertain living situations. In some instances, parents are under threat of eviction or recently displaced. In these situations, our Care Coordination team takes on a triage approach, offering assistance for the most time sensitive issues facing the Participant before moving on to address education and career goals.

**Individuals impacted as part of GROWWTH Family households: 679**

**Participants set and achieved educational goals: 45**

## GROWWTH Expenses for Participants Nov 2022 – Oct 2023

GROWWTH Academy Milestone Payments	<b>\$37,000.00</b>
Employment Milestone Payments	<b>\$5,000.00</b>
Training Stipends Awarded	<b>\$3,800.00</b>
Training Program Tuition Paid	<b>\$9,052.37</b>
Childcare Assistance	<b>\$1,100.00</b>
Emergency Funds	<b>\$512.00</b>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$56,464.37</b>

In the last two months of 2023, GROWWTH was able to increase service delivery for active Participants. This increase in Participants enrolled and served, resulted in additional milestone payments, training stipends, childcare assistance, and emergency funds dispersed. That additional spending, resulted in GROWWTH ending 2023 year with more than \$136,000 spent.

With many GROWWTH Participants beginning training programs in 2024, embarking on new careers and telling their friends and family members about GROWWTH and the benefits of the program, we are excited about our growing impact on West Tennessee.

## Employer Readiness Training

GROWWTH Employer Readiness Training includes interactive discussions and simulations to increase awareness of stereotypes relevant to low-income workers and action-based strategies and tools to help create positive work environments. In Year 1, GROWWTH provided training for 29 employers across West Tennessee.

### Objectives covered in training:

- 1. Stereotypes about poverty.** *Understanding what stereotypes are, why they exist, and how they can lead to bias.*
- 2. We are all biased! But we can overcome it.** *Understanding that we are all vulnerable to harboring bias but can also strive to overcome it.*
- 3. Showing compassion, empathy, and sympathy.** *Enhancing emotional intelligence through increasing understanding of the role of emotions at work.*
- 4. Strategies and tools we all can use.** *Offering action-based strategies and tools to reduce biases toward applicants/employees from low-income backgrounds.*

## Meet Britannia

After having her third child, Britannia knew her family was complete. She wanted to spend as much time as possible loving on her newest addition. Her previous career in business management didn't allow extra time at home so Britannia sought out a more flexible line of work in truck-driving.

GROWWTH connected with Britannia to train in truck driving and earn her CDL. She earned milestone payments which helped her pay bills and focus on completing all her training.

"My perspective as a single mother with kids, it looks like a trial and a test to see how we can help Memphis, keep people employed, get out of poverty and see people grow," Britannia said. "Anybody that wants the same thing, I would definitely recommend going through GROWWTH and find a career."

## Year 1 Partners

GROWWTH launched services to the community February 1, 2023 along with a group of community and workforce partners. We are grateful for the work we were able to accomplish and look forward to creating an even bigger impact in 2024 by strengthening relationships with the partners who are moving with us into Year 2 as well as new partnerships.

- **Abyssinian Baptist Church**
- **Community Lift**
- **Economic Opportunities (EcOp)**
- **Organizing Expert**
- **Whole Child Strategies**
- **Northwest Tennessee Workforce Board** (American Job Centers of Northwest Tennessee)
- **Southwest Tennessee Workforce Board** (American Job Centers of Southwest Tennessee)
- **Workforce Midsouth** (American Job Center - Greater Memphis)

## On the Horizon...

We are rapidly growing and will be expanding service delivery across West Tennessee with the help of new partners and a growing ecosystem of organizations, training providers, and community supporting agencies. Expansion of services will include additional cohorts of Microbusiness Bootcamp, the launch of early childhood education training for Participants who desire to open centers in the area as well as the opening of our community-facing location that will allow us to serve people better. Our team will also become larger in the coming months to assist in our capacity to meet our Participants needs.



# In Memoriam

Honoring the Legacy of an Innovative Leader  
**Dr. Richard L. Irwin**  
1957 - 2023

“We want to make a successful transition from the benefits program into a quality, good-paying job. The whole point is to never go back and never look back. We want to put people on a pathway to thriving not surviving.”

— **Dr. Richard Irwin**

With heavy hearts we bid farewell to our visionary leader, Dr. Richard “Dick” Irwin, who served as Executive Dean at the University of Memphis. Dick was instrumental in the inception, planning, and development of the program and was extremely proud of the work accomplished by the team throughout the past year.



In his 30-year career at the University of Memphis, Dick had the opportunity to author and collaborate on many grants. However, this program was particularly important to him as evidenced by his decision to delay his retirement until 2025 so he could work through the entire grant period. Dr. Irwin was a vital part of our mission at GROWWTH and the reason for the work that we do: serving west Tennessee families.

Dick was known for his innovative spirit, unwavering commitment to student access and success, exceptional leadership, and a unique ability to create interesting acronyms like this program (GROWWTH). His staff always tried to entertain his “crazy ideas” because they knew it came from his true desire to remove barriers and increase pathways to educational opportunities for all, particularly adult learners. Dick saw potential in others even if they didn’t see it in themselves and provided opportunities for his staff and students beyond anything they could have imagined for themselves. He also had a knack for turning challenges into opportunities and always encouraged others to do the same.

Richard was not only a well-respected educator

“I had the privilege to work with Dr. Irwin and learn from him. Over the past year, I saw his strength and how he never wavered from true north. He had a vision that was certain, clear, bold, and full of heart. He faced challenges head on and always planned for navigating difficulty. The only time I ever saw him lose composure was during a moment he discussed the importance of this work with our team. He could see the impact on generations to come. It meant a lot to him and it means a lot to us.”

— **Stephanie Godwin-Chu**  
*GROWWTH Project Director*

“The road ahead without him will never be the same. But we can do hard things - he taught us how and more importantly showed us how by his example. His legacy extends far beyond the physical structures and institutional changes he spearheaded; it will live on in the countless lives he touched and seeds of innovation he planted in the hearts and minds of all he encountered. The GROWWTH team collectively promise we will do everything in our power to continue to carry out his vision and will honor his legacy in all that we do. We are all better people because of Dick Irwin, for that we will be eternally grateful.”

— **Tracy Robinson**,  
*Director of Professional and Continuing Education*

and administrator, he was also a much loved husband, father, grandfather, and brother. Richard leaves behind his wife of 44 years, Dr. Carol Irwin; his daughters Beth (Justin) Miller, and Abby (Fielding) Ables (all of Germantown, Tennessee); grandsons James, Henry, and Jack Miller; granddaughter Miller Jane Ables, and another Ables granddaughter expected in May; plus Richard’s sister, Lynn (Jim) Bowen of Indialantic, Florida. Dr. Richard Irwin was a man who lived life to the fullest and an inspiration to many. He will be dearly missed.

“In addition to his impressive and numerous professional accomplishments, Dr. Irwin was also invaluable to our campus as a mentor, colleague, and friend to many faculty, staff, students, and community partners,” said UofM President Bill Hardgrave. “The University of Memphis is eternally better thanks to Dr. Irwin’s commitment, leadership, and service. Our thoughts are with his family.”

To connect with the Dr. Richard Irwin Memorial Fund, visit  
<https://supportum.memphis.edu/IrwinMemorial>

