

\$5M Fulton Gift Establishes Childhood Obesity Center of Excellence

Gift establishes the Dr. Robin Blackstone Childhood Obesity Center of Excellence at Banner - University Medical Center Phoenix

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PHOENIX (Sept.10, 2019) - The Fulton Family Foundation has made a \$5 million gift to the Banner Health Foundation to establish the Dr. Robin Blackstone Childhood Obesity Center of Excellence at Banner - University Medical Center Phoenix. The Fulton Family Foundation is chaired by longtime Valley homebuilder and philanthropist Ira A. Fulton.

This gift establishes Arizona's first center of excellence dedicated specifically to pediatric obesity and metabolic disorders--a passion of Mr. Fulton's based on his own experiences as a patient of Dr. Blackstone, MD, FACS, FASMBS, and the experiences of several of his family members. "Dr. Blackstone saved my life," says Mr. Fulton, who struggled with obesity and its associated medical issues for many years before seeking treatment. "Because of her, I was able to go on with my life and business, and to be here today, able to give more money away to deserving programs and causes like this." He named the Center of Excellence in Dr. Blackstone's honor.

"Thanks to Ira's generosity, our Childhood Obesity Center of Excellence will be a beacon to attract the best research, public policy, and funding so that, in partnership, we can provide personalized solutions to children and their families," says Dr. Blackstone. "I am honored that it will bear my name and grateful to Ira for his continued faith in me and Banner Health to lead this critically important work."

This gift marks the Fulton Family Foundation's second investment in obesity care and research in partnership with Banner - University Medicine. In 2018, Mr. Fulton endowed the Ira A. Fulton Clinical Chair in Bariatric Surgery and Metabolic Disorders with a \$2 million gift. Dr. Blackstone was appointed to this prestigious position, leading the multidisciplinary team at Banner's Obesity and Bariatric Surgery Center.

Dr. Blackstone has performed approximately 5,000 bariatric surgeries over 15 years since first establishing her practice, one of the first institutions in the United States to be recognized as a Center of Excellence by the American Society of Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery. She is the first woman to have served as President of the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery, the largest association in the world dedicated to the specialty and is a certified diplomat of the American Board of Obesity Medicine.

"With this significant investment and under the leadership of Dr. Blackstone, the Childhood Obesity Center of Excellence has the opportunity and expertise to become a national and global leader in the treatment, education, and research of obesity and metabolic disease—particularly for our most vulnerable patients: children," says Venkata "Bob" Evani, MD, physician executive for Banner - University Medical Group. "Prevention, education, expert care, and research will ultimately help children to live longer, healthier lives free of the diseases that co-exist with obesity."

Experts agree that obesity is a national epidemic and one of the greatest health care challenges in the United States today. The prevalence of childhood obesity is increasing in the U.S. and globally. Eighteen percent of children (a staggering 13.7 million) in the U.S. are affected, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This is a dramatic increase over 1980, when only about 7 percent of children were obese. Today in Arizona, obesity affects more than 30 percent of our population, up from 15 percent in 2000.

More than a weight problem, childhood obesity is a risk factor for multiple chronic conditions and premature death in adult life. In the short term, related conditions include asthma, sleep apnea, social discrimination, low self-esteem, and increased risk for cardiovascular disease, including high cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, and high blood glucose levels. Long-term, obese children have a higher risk for heart disease and type 2 diabetes. Children and adolescents, particularly ethnic minorities and rural low-income populations, bear an excess burden of obesity and related diseases.

About Ira Fulton

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Mr. Fulton has been building homes in the Valley for more than 40 years through his well-known company, Fulton Homes. A native of Tempe and a proud ASU Sun Devil, Mr. Fulton has grown the company that bears his name from its early days of building fewer than 100 homes a year to building more than 2,000 homes annually today.

Mr. Fulton says he finds the most gratification in “developing people,” not homes. Through the Fulton Family Foundation, he sponsors the education of hundreds of Native American students. He also provided the means for 50 Mongolian and Cambodian students to attend Brigham Young University’s Hawaii Campus and has supported universities, students, and nonprofit organizations too numerous to list.

A generous Arizona philanthropist, the ASU College of Engineering bears his name and the Mary Lou Fulton College of Education is named for his beloved wife. Several schools and buildings at Brigham Young University also bear the Fulton name.

About Banner Health Foundation

Established in 2001, Banner Health Foundation secures and stewards charitable contributions to advance Banner Health’s nonprofit mission of making health care easier so life can be better. Contributions are invested locally to support patient care programs and services operated by Banner’s many hospitals and health care facilities across Arizona. For more information, please visit www.bannerhealthfoundation.org.

 [Ira Fulton](#)

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 [Robin Blackstone, MD](#)

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