

William H. 'Billy' Kutteh
 Managing partner, Fertility Associates of Memphis
 Education: B.S. in biology, Wake Forest University; master's degree, Duke University; Ph.D. in molecular biology and immunology, University of Alabama-Birmingham; OB/GYN residency, University of Texas Southwestern Medical School
 Hometown: Statesville, N.C.
 Family: Wife, Carol; sons, Will, 15, Michael, 12, and John, 10
 Last book read: *The Verdict*, by John Grisham
 Hobbies: Gardening, working in the yard, tennis, water skiing, playing with the kids

BY TOBY SELLS

Worried about finding a job after earning his bachelor's degree, Billy Kutteh sprung into action — he went deep sea fishing with his dad.

"I figured my mailbox would be full of job offers, but when I got back there was nothing," Kutteh says. "Then I really started worrying about what I would do."

That may have been one of the first decisions that led Kutteh down his "circuitous" path to finally becoming managing partner at Fertility Associates of Memphis. He was sure of one thing, though. He did not want to be an OB/GYN like his dad. He wasn't one of the "people that came out of the womb with a stethoscope around their neck." It wasn't the work, he says. It was a series of momentary ethical dilemmas he had as the son of an OB/GYN.

His father delivered all of his patients' babies though sometimes he and the other OB/GYNs in Statesville, N.C., would trade being on call. But some patients were adamant about having their doctor. If the hospital couldn't reach Kutteh's dad, the patient would call his house.

"We didn't have an answering machine so you'd have to decide as a kid whether or not you'd tell (patients) if he was at home or not," Kutteh says laughing. "If you tell him, you know he's going to be gone for the next 10 or 12 hours, but you could just lie to them and say he wasn't there."

But science was in Kutteh's veins. He studied biology at Wake Forest and Duke University. He went on to study molecular biology and immunology at University of Alabama-Birmingham. After successfully defending his thesis there, three of the five professors on the panel told him he should go to medical school.

While he was happy doing research in the lab, he says he didn't want to miss an opportunity to have a fine, professional career for the rest of his life.

Even then obstetrics and gynecology were barely on his radar. But a long, careful process of elimination led him there.

He eliminated psychiatry. ("A psy-

chiatrist told me I'd have plenty to deal with if I went into OB/GYN.) Then he tried pediatrics. ("I don't want to be treating people I can't talk to and can't answer my questions. I'd go crazy.") Then he looked at gastroenterology. ("One doctor told me I'd be frustrated because I couldn't fix people myself.")

He finally settled on obstetrics and gynecology. Kutteh had done a lot of research in ovarian cancer so, he says, everyone thought he'd go into gynecologic oncology. He eliminated that, too, because he wanted a more satisfying job than giving radiation and chemotherapy. Instead, he chose to help people make babies.

"I really enjoy helping couples that can't have children," he says. "I enjoy finding out what the problem is and fixing that problem. I imagine each couple is a medical research problem."

Sheree Capps had a problem. She

tried for five years to get pregnant to no avail. Then she found her way to Kutteh's office.

"We tried several things to find something that worked, but I finally

'I enjoy finding out what the problem is and fixing that problem.'

made it to term," Capps says. "Very few doctors in the U.S. have the experience he does in immunology. Most of my problems were based on things that wouldn't have gotten fixed without him knowing how to treat it."

Capps now has a 3-year-old and another baby on the way. She now lives in Chatham, Ill., a Springfield suburb, and says she has driven back to Memphis several times just to see Kutteh.

Kutteh says 40% of his patients come from Memphis. The rest come

from a 150-mile radius that captures Nashville, Birmingham, Ala., Cleveland, Miss., and Little Rock, Ark. He says it takes a population of roughly 400,000 to supply enough patients for

one reproductive endocrinologist.

Kutteh came to Memphis, to University of Tennessee Medical Group, Inc.,

in 1996. That's where he met his business partner, Raymond Ke. Those two established Fertility Associates in 2003. They handle all of the basic fertility services like in vitro fertilization and artificial insemination. They also run Reproductive Laboratories, Inc., from their Humphreys Boulevard office where they do specialized blood testing from large labs all over the country.

ALAN HOWELL | MBJ

Career creation

Kutteh rules out several medical career options before becoming reproductive specialist