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(Neb.)-CSC Looking Forward To Chicoine Events Center

By: Chris Fankhauser Posted at: 10/24/2013 11:06 AM

(Chadron)-The generosity of a long-time Chadron State College supporter, the late Vernon P. Chicoine, will continue to strengthen Chadron State College and benefit its students.

Subject to the approval of the Nebraska State College Board of Trustees, the CSC event center, now under construction, will be named the Vern Chicoine Events Center.

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The Chadron State Foundation has received \$2.6 million that was specified for the college in the trust fund that Chicoine had established prior to his death in February of 2003 at age 89.

The trust agreement provided his widow, Madge Fortune Chicoine, with a life estate of the assets. She passed away in Nov. of 2012 at age 88.

The gift from the Vern Chicoine Trust is the largest gift ever made to the Chadron State Foundation. This gift will be held as an endowment, and the earnings and growth will be used far into the future to benefit Chadron State College and its students.

Outgoing foundation chairman Fran Grimes said Chicoine was an avid supporter of Chadron State College who contributed to many projects on campus over the years.

"This is an amazing gift that will greatly benefit ChadronState as we strive to continue to build on the tradition of excellence that it has had for many years," said Dr. Randy Rhine, the college's president.

Connie Rasmussen, executive director of the Chadron State Foundation, said the gift is the largest the foundation has ever received.

"It is special because it comes from someone who had already given much to support ChadronState. Vern did not attend college, but after moving to Chadron he saw how much this college meant to the entire region and what it could do for the people who live here," Rasmussen said.

Rasmussen said ChadronState's share of the trust at the time of Mrs. Chicoine's death was \$2.3 million. Because of the rise in the stock market, the foundation has received \$2.6 million. The trust stipulates that the principal must be left intact, but the earnings may be used at the discretion of the Foundation's board of directors.

The first \$1 million of the earnings from the principal gift will be used to fund the events center.

At the time of his death, it was reported that Chicoine's previous contributions to ChadronState exceeded \$800,000.

Chicoine was a businessman, rancher, civic leader, investor and philanthropist. He was born in Tripp County, S.D., grew up in Valentine and moved from there to Chadron in 1937 to work for the Ford agency when the family purchased it. He lived in Chadron for 66 years.

He wrote in the mid-1990s, "Chadron State College has been very important to me, providing thousands of hours of entertainment and pleasure."

Until a few weeks prior to his death, he and his wife attended practically every activity at Chadron State, including athletic events, drama productions, concerts and presentations by speakers.

That amount included the home he and Madge had constructed at 702 East 10th Street in Chadron. She continued to reside in the home for several years before moving to a retirement center.

The college took possession of the home in 2009 and it is now occupied by CSC president Randy Rhine and his wife Ann. The home is valued at \$365,000.

Chicoine's other contributions to the college included \$161,000 for the Vernon and Madge Fortune Chicoine Atrium that is a part of the Mari Sandoz Heritage Center, \$33,000 for a bronze statue of Thomas Jefferson in the atrium, \$40,000 for the football press box at Elliott Field and the establishment of several scholarships and an athletic endowment fund.

Friends have noted that Chicoine was an amazing individual, who quietly, but confidently, had many skills and interests, always did things in a precise manner and enjoyed sharing the fruits of his labor.

Among other activities, he was the mayor of Chadron 1950-51, was president of the Chadron Rotary Club and Chadron Chamber of Commerce and served on the Board of Directors of the Chadron State Foundation for nearly 40 years.

After he sold his ranch south of Chadron in 1973, he invested in the stock market. While he generally worked with a broker, he studied the stocks that were recommended before the purchase was made.

He was awarded ChadronState's Distinguished Service Award in 1994, was presented the first Friend of Education Award given by the CSC Faculty Senate and was inducted into the Chadron State Athletic Hall of Fame for meritorious service in 1997.

Although the Chadron State Foundation has received the major portion of the Chicoine Trust, numerous other entities also shared in the distribution.

(Story courtesy Con Marshall)