

Hugh Ralston's legacy lingers in town he loved

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Friday, 04 April 2014 14:07 -



Philanthropist would now be 100 years old

Mortar and bricks reveal little of the human touch behind grand buildings like the Gothenburg Public Library.

Or Gothenburg Memorial Hospital, that houses the sick and injured, and its Wellness Center that helps keep the community well.

Hugh Ralston, who died nearly 14 years ago, gave more than a million dollars to renovate and add to Gothenburg Public Library.

Ralston supported the construction of the Wellness Center with a \$100,000 donation and contributed many dollars to the United Methodist Church. He bought the land for the American Legion Baseball field and supported a myriad of other projects.

What was best for the community was always at the top of Ralston's list, according to Glenn Bartels, who worked with Ralston for 32 years.

Ralston was a vice president of First State Bank and Bartels, who is now retired, was president.

"He taught me a lot about being good to the community and contributing, monetarily and through his work," Bartels said, noting that Ralston was involved with several boards and organizations and was city treasurer for 40 years.

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Ralston also gave financially to people who needed help.

"You just don't realize how much he gave to people he didn't know," Bartels said. "He always wanted to help the less fortunate."

Former bank vice-president Marlene Anderson, who worked with Ralston for 40 years, remembers him giving to the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army and to folks passing through town who became stranded or had other problems.

Pam Slack, another former bank vice president, recalls how Ralston would loan money to people personally.

"He didn't care who they were," Slack said.

All three remember Ralston as humble, kind and even-tempered.

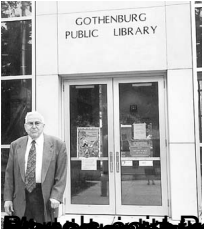
"He contributed much more than money," Bartels said. "He was the kindest, gentlest person I ever met and he never spoke a bad word about anyone."

Anderson said Gothenburg, where Ralston lived his life, was dear to his heart.

"When I think of Gothenburg, I think of Hugh because he is one of the people who made it what it is today," she said.

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