

# Mike & Ellen Connor

## Peace Officer Training Endowment Fund

**E**llen and Mike are both natives of Ramsey County who were born in Devils Lake. Ellen was raised by her parents, Alvin and Ethel Herda, on their family farm near Crary.

When she was only eight, her dad passed away at a young age, and she and her mother and brother moved to Devils Lake.

Both Ellen and Mike attended Devils Lake Central High School and graduated from there.

Mike went on to college for a year and was then employed by J.C. Penney Company, serving as assistant manager, Hard Lines manager, and finally a store manager at four different stores in North Dakota, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. He returned to North Dakota and was hired as manager of the Devils Lake Area Chamber of Commerce. He later owned and managed the Credit Bureau of Devils Lake, Inc., served as city administrator for the City of Devils Lake, and then as a vice president at Ramsey National Bank and Trust Company. He also worked for Western Finance and Leasing as a collection officer. Mike closed out this wide and varied career by serving as manager of the Devils Lake Basin Joint Water Resource Board (a nine-county organization).

Ellen worked in Minot in the hospitality field, then at Herbst Ladies Fashions, and

then North Dakota Telephone Company in Devils Lake. She retired, after thirty years of service, from the business office of Devils Lake Public School District #1.

Their two daughters, Christy Marie Werner and Lisa Marie Vetsch, both live in

the Devils Lake community.

Ellen and Mike have six grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

Mike's parents, Joe and Kathleen, loved trees and recognized their importance while they farmed



during the "dirty thirties." Ellen and Mike embraced that passion as they hand planted over one thousand evergreens at their farmstead and at Saints Peter and Paul cemetery near Garske. In later years, they shared that passion, giving away over one half of those trees to friends and neighbors all around the county. Those seedlings are now over thirty feet tall!

Ellen and Mike also love Christmas and all it stands for. From 1987 through 2013, they decorated their entire farmstead with lights and Christmas figurines. Each year, more than seventy trees, evergreens, and shrubs were lit up along with a nativity scene and other ornaments. During the Christmas 2013 season, the last year of the event, more than eight hundred vehicles visited their yard to see the lights and decorations. Children who had

visited “Christmas in the Country” in the early years brought their own children back to see the lights years later! In 2014, the decorations were donated to the Lake Region Heritage Center where they continued to provide enjoyment to all for several years.

Mike's grandparents and parents knew and helped a Jewish farm settlement located near Garske in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In later years, a group of descendants of those Jewish settlers and others formed the Sons of Jacob Community and worked to rehabilitate an abandoned Jewish cemetery near the Connor farm. The culmination of that work was a monument recognizing the Jewish homesteaders which was dedicated in 2006. Finally in June 2017, the Sons of Jacob cemetery was named to the National Register of Historic Places ([www.sojnorthdakota.org](http://www.sojnorthdakota.org))

Mike's parents always stressed to him the importance of “*giving back to your community*,” adding that some could give financially and others could give of their time. Both he and Ellen have always followed that credo giving as they could of their time and effort.

Over the past forty-plus years, Mike has been active in a variety of community and state endeavors including Dakota Business Lending board, Senior Meals and Services board, North Central Regional Planning Council board, National Weather Service volunteer weather observer, Community Development Corporation board, Sons of Jacob Community, Forward Devils Lake board, Academy Village board, Devils Lake Area Foundation, Little Hoop Community College advisory board, Greater North Dakota Association board, United Way board, past president of the Devils Lake Area Chamber of Commerce, past president of the Devils Lake Rotary Club and executive committee-1983 City County Centennial committee. He has been recognized with the *Outstanding Citizen Award* by the Devils Lake Chamber, *Distinguished Service Award* by both the Devils Lake and Hutchinson, Minnesota, Jaycees,

and the Greater North Dakota Association *Outstanding Community Service Award*. He is a Past Exalted Ruler and charter member of Hutchinson Elks Lodge #2427 and an Honorary Past Exalted Ruler of Devils Lake Elks Lodge #1216.

Both Ellen and Mike believe in the value of Lake Region State College. Ellen graduated with one of the first nurse training classes at the college. Mike served as a member of the Community College Corporation board from 1980 to 1986 serving as chairman in 1980-81. He again served on the Community College Foundation board from 1989 to 1992.

While serving as police and fire commissioner on the Devils Lake City Commission in the 1980s, Mike became aware of the importance of having peace officer training available for those interested in building a career in law enforcement. At that time, the only training program available in the state was provided at the North Dakota Highway Patrol Academy in Bismarck. Usually, the cost of the training a new officer was paid by the hiring community, and most often within a short period of time on the job, the newly trained officer would move on to a larger community. This “merry-go-round” of hiring, training expense, and again searching for replacements placed a heavy burden on smaller North Dakota communities. With the creation of the Peace Officer Training program at LRSC, individuals were given the opportunity to secure the training they needed as the first step in their career in law enforcement.

Professional, well trained, law enforcement officers are the backbone of public safety in North Dakota communities, and Lake Region State College's Peace Officer Training Program fulfills that need! The Mike and Ellen Connor Peace Officer Training Endowment Fund has been established by I. F. LaFleur and Sons, Inc. to strengthen the peace officer training for the Lake Region community and the greater state of North Dakota. ♥