

Leevers Family Scholarship



*I*n December of 1993, the Community College Foundation announced receipt of two special gifts to be used to launch the Leevers Family Scholarship. The Leevers Corporation established the scholarship with a gift of \$5,000. This initial gift was supplemented by \$2,500 from the Ramsey National Bank and Trust Company endowed scholarship matching fund. Norm and Marge Leever, founders of the Leevers family business, enlarged the fund with a gift of stock valued at \$36,000. Family members are committed to continued growth of the Leevers Family Scholarship fund.

Norm Leever immigrated to the United States from England with his mother, brother, and sister. He grew up in Minneapolis and began his grocery career as a teenager, working for the A&P grocery chain. In 1935, a co-worker decided to start his own grocery store in Fargo and invited Norm to come along. Norm accepted and watched carefully as his friend/employer built the new grocery into a flourishing business. Norm enjoyed his new surroundings and spent his free time at the soda fountain of the drugstore next door. The proprietor, George J. McCabe, was a clever fellow who patented several medicines which he labeled "Sip-O." Of even greater interest was the fact that Mr. McCabe had three daughters—Alice, Ruth, and Marge. It was Marge, the oldest, who really caught Norm's

eye, a bright and energetic pharmacy student at North Dakota State University. Allergies to the chemicals pharmacy students must handle forced Marge to change her career goals. She graduated from a business college in Fargo.

In 1938, Norm seized the opportunity to purchase a small grocery store in Devils Lake. The store had been closed for six months and needed lots of work. It was one of thirteen groceries in the downtown Devils Lake area, but Norm was not deterred by the condition of the store nor his many competitors. Marge appreciated Norm's determination, and in September 1939 they were married. Together, they worked to continually improve the store, a tradition that continues throughout the Leevers operation.

Along with their supermarket endeavors, Norm and Marge raised a delightful family—Jack (John), Tom, Bob, and Mary Beth. In 1968, after a stint in the Navy and several years of college, Jack returned to Devils Lake to help manage the thriving family business. Jack married his college sweetheart Sharon, and together they raised two sons and a daughter. Jack and Sharon now live in Colorado. Tom pursued a career in electronics but died in a traffic accident in Minneapolis in 1980. After graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a degree in economics, Bob worked for nearly five years in the insurance industry but decided the grocery business was more exciting. He completed specialized training in supermarket management and joined the Leevers Corporation in 1975. Today, Bob lives in Devils Lake with his wife Carol and serves as president of Leevers Foods. Their children, Jamie and Beth, are owners and work in corporate leadership roles. Mary Beth has a masters degree in elementary education from the University of North Dakota. She teaches and lives in Fargo with her husband Mel. They have two children.

Norm and Marge arrived in Devils Lake three years before Lake Region State College was launched. They were part of the downtown business community which supported development of a local college to provide opportunities for students to continue their education after high school. Then, as now,

Leevers supermarkets provided jobs for many college students.

With more time available for community work due to his quasi-retired status, Norm agreed to work with Fred Hoghaug to co-chair the fund drive which was tied to the college's fiftieth anniversary in 1991. The drive was successful beyond all hopes, raising \$152,000 and initiating an ongoing effort to gather the resources needed to expand and upgrade the college library. Thanks in large part to the leadership provided by Norm, construction on the new library began in January 1994. The project was funded with \$500,000 locally contributed and \$300,000 from the state. Marge, too, found a special niche in the library improvement effort. She put her considerable computer skills to work, cataloging the audio-visual reference holdings.

On March 2, 2001, Norman J. Leevers died. Marjorie B. joined him on January 7, 2002. Together, they left an indelible imprint on the Lake Region community as a true American success story.

Norm and Marge would be pleased with the Leevers Corporation's growth and the fact that the business remains rooted in North Dakota and in family hands. Today, there are seven Leevers stores in North Dakota—Devils Lake, Rolla, Langdon, Cavalier, Rugby, Valley City, and Jamestown.

"I wanted a chance to go to college so bad I could taste it," was Norm's response when asked why he worked so hard for Lake Region State College. Now, through the Leevers Family Scholarship, they are helping to make college education an achievable dream for others. ■