

Gary and Rita Stenson Scholarship Endowment



Gary and Rita (Elefson) Stenson grew up in Devils Lake, and both graduated from Central High School. Gary took two or three courses at the college in Devils Lake—now Lake Region State College—while in high school. LRSC was then located in the Pershing Building attached to Central High School. Elmer and Elsie Stenson were Gary’s parents, and Hardies and Florence Elefson were Rita’s parents.

After Gary graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1969, Gary and Rita moved to Washington DC where Gary served as legislative assistant to then-Senator Walter F. Mondale with responsibilities in the areas of housing and community development. Rita was a medical technologist at Arlington Hospital. Their sons, Kevin and Craig, were born during this time.

From 1973 to 1978, Gary was engaged in the private practice of law in Minneapolis/Saint Paul, and Rita was employed as a medical technician until she retired in 2006. In 1978, Gary learned of plans to auction the historic Great Northern Hotel in Devils Lake which had been vacant for a few years.

Gary acquired the Great Northern for thirty thousand dollars by using the proceeds from a second mortgage on their home in Saint Paul.

Rita was less than enthused about a second mortgage but went along with his plans. The next eighteen months were spent developing a plan and arranging financing for the adaptive reuse of the building into thirty-eight apartments for senior citizens and five thousand square feet of commercial space.

Following the Great Northern grand opening in 1980, Gary stopped practicing law and began developing, owning, and managing multi-family housing full time. With partners, Gary formed MetroPlains Properties, Inc. headquartered in Saint Paul and MetroPlains Management, LLC headquartered in the Great Northern.

MetroPlains and its related entities develop, own, and manage multi-family housing in nine Midwestern states. Approximately one third of the more than one hundred and thirty developments involve adaptive reuse of historic buildings resulting in approximately fifty-five buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Fifteen of these buildings are located in North Dakota.

Gary and Rita chose to establish the Gary and Rita Stenson Scholarship Endowment to generate scholarship support for exemplary students at LRSC. It is their hope that recipients will reach for their dreams and pursue successful careers and happy lives. ●