

# Siblings leave a legacy to city, parents with their special gift

**E**lmer and Catherine Hrabe raised their six children in Rochester. And what their children received from the community in their upbringing they now want to give back.

The siblings – four brothers and two sisters – came to a quick decision very shortly after their mother's death last year that they wanted to create a lasting memorial for their parents – something that would be around for a long time. Their father had died a year earlier.

The idea was spearheaded by brother Jon Hrabe, who works with the Greater Des Moines Community Foundation in Iowa. When he told his brothers and sisters about his idea, it didn't take them long to put the plan into action.

Each of the siblings kicked in with a contribution and the genesis of a donor-advised fund with the Rochester Area Foundation was under way.

"This is a wonderful way to remember people instrumental in building our lives," Jerry Hrabe, the only sibling still living in Rochester, said. The family hopes the fund will grow over time to benefit local organizations that the family wants to support.

The fund is seen by the family not only as a memorial to the elder Hrabs, but also as a way to return a "thank you" to the community that raised the couple's six children.

All four boys played in community sports programs in the 1950s, Jerry Hrabe said, and St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church was the center of the family's social activity. The Hrabs raised their children on Seventh Avenue by Oakwood Cemetery, just five minutes from the



*Pat and Jerry Hrabe in their Rochester home with a photo of Elmer and Catherine Hrabe.*

church.

Elmer and Catherine Hrabe came to Rochester in the early 1940s so that he could open and manage a Red Owl grocery store. Elmer started work for the chain when he was 14 in South Dakota, and the couple moved to St. Cloud after marrying and then to Rochester.

The first Red Owl store was located in the downtown building now housing the Fred Astaire Dance Studio on Fourth Street SE. In 1954, the grocery store moved to the then-modernistic Miracle Mile. Elmer Hrabe worked for Red Owl for more than 50 years, retiring in 1980.

"My dad was a tough but fair employer," Jerry Hrabe recalled, noting that he loved teaching young people in the business world, something that continued after his retirement with his involvement in SCORE, the Service Corps of Retired Executives Association.

Elmer Hrabe also was a member of Kiwanis, the Elks and the Knights of

Columbus. Jerry Hrabe recalls his father working as a bingo caller once a week to help raise funds for their church. He also served the church as an usher and was a former trustee and Eucharistic minister. In addition, he served on the city planning and zoning commission.

Catherine Hrabe worked at the Casual Shop from the early 1970s until her retirement in 1983. She was a member of the Phi Sigma Alpha service sorority, St. Catherine's Rosary Group and was a former member of St. Francis' choir. She enjoyed knitting and gardening. When she retired, she would knit items for single mothers with babies in conjunction with Catholic Charities, Pat Hrabe, Jerry's wife, said.

"It's a real tribute to Jerry's parents," Pat Hrabe said, with Jerry Hrabe adding that his parents were low-profile and pretty private.

"Everyone in the family is generous within their means," Jerry Hrabe said, noting that their generosity comes through volunteerism or donations.

The siblings and spouses include Sister Joan Hrabe OSF of Golden Valley, Minn., Anne and David Mendenhall of Lakeville, Minn., Jim and Koyla Hrabe of Waterloo, Iowa, Jerry and Pat Hrabe of Rochester, Jon and Barbara Hrabe of Des Moines, Iowa, and Bill and Mary Hrabe of Medford, Wis.

The family hopes to continue adding to the fund over the years, and hopes that their children and grandchildren contribute, too.

"We hope other families will do the same thing," Jerry Hrabe said, adding that it's appropriate for those who have been blessed by the Rochester area.

**Where generosity takes root**