

# PHILANTHROPIC GIANT, CHARLES DURHAM, TRANSFORMED UNMC

by Karen Burbach



Charles "Chuck" Durham will long be remembered for his visionary leadership, philanthropic spirit and the indelible impact he and his late wife, Margre, had on UNMC, where their names are synonymous with research excellence.

Durham, who served as chairman of the board and chief executive officer of Durham Resources, an investment company with interests in banks, health care and real estate development, died April 5 at age 90. Years earlier, he had served as chairman and CEO of Omaha-based HDR, Inc., one of the nation's top engineering and architectural companies.

Still, the civic leader wanted his legacy to be biomedical research.

"Chuck Durham was sincerely interested in building a strong nationally recognized research program at UNMC,

"He wanted to leave a gift for all of Nebraska that would endure for years. The buildings are monuments to his corporate genius, but they are really houses of medical invention and enterprise."

John Niemann, Ed.D., senior vice president,  
University of Nebraska Foundation

because he felt that he could do more, for more people, through research than through any other mechanism," said UNMC Chancellor Harold M. Maurer, M.D. "He would say that his gifts got things started and that he did nothing beyond this. He attributed all of UNMC's success in biomedical research to the scientists who used the facilities to their best advantage."

Signs of the couple's generosity to UNMC are visible on either side of the Durham Research Plaza, which was so named in 2004 to honor their commitment to research and UNMC. The single largest donor to the University of Nebraska in lifetime giving, Durham donated untold millions of dollars for two research towers at UNMC and established funds to benefit arthritis, prostate cancer and non-invasive surgery. The Outpatient Care Center was renamed the

Durham Outpatient Center; his gifts also made possible an employee parking garage.

In 2003, the 10-level, \$77 million Durham Research Center opened and the Research Center of Excellence II, as it is presently being called, is expected to open in early 2009. The building, which will be nearly identical to the DRC, will tower over a commemorative sculpture of Durham that UNMC has commissioned by Omaha artist John Lajba.

"(The DRC) has the potential to make a difference in so many lives," Durham said in the fall of 2003. "It is an honor to be associated with a medical center that has a vision to be world-class, to improve the health of all the people of Nebraska and beyond, advance medical knowledge through research and educate outstanding health professionals and scientists."

The spirit of Durham's giving is captured in a 14-word inscription, which hangs in the DRC on a plaque under his likeness: "Champion for medical research to prevent, cure, give hope and advance the common good." ∞∞

## DURHAM LEGACY INCLUDES:

- Research Center of Excellence II, UNMC (under construction)
- Durham Research Center, UNMC
- Durham Outpatient Center, UNMC
- Charles W. Durham School of Architectural Engineering and Construction, UNO
- Henningsen Campanile, UNO
- Durham Science Center, UNO
- Durham Scout Center, Omaha
- Durham Museum, Omaha (formerly known as the Durham Western Heritage Museum)
- Lied Humane Center, Omaha (Margre Durham helped raise the \$12 million to build the facility).
- Durham Center for Computation and Communications, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa.