

Scotts Channel Resources to Help Others

A fully-decorated Christmas tree resides year-around in the corner of Ruth and Bill Scott's Omaha living room.

As Ruth says, "We keep it up to exemplify the spirit of giving."

The Scotts know all about giving. They have quietly established themselves as one of Nebraska's most philanthropic couples. Since 1999, when the William and Ruth Scott Family Foundation was established, the Scotts have donated millions of dollars to more than 100 different local organizations. The foundation operates with little fanfare under the volunteer direction of the Scotts' oldest son, John, with assistance from their youngest son, David. Their middle son, Don, is an optometrist in Omaha.



Bill and Ruth Scott

The Scott Foundation is just part of the Scotts' legacy of philanthropy. Over the years, they have made numerous personal gifts to help needy children and young adults pursue higher education. One such personal gift was bestowed upon the daughter of Ruth's hairdresser to allow her to go to medical school.

The Scotts have made seven major donations to the University of Nebraska Foundation (see Great Scotts) – all aimed at transforming the University of Nebraska Medical Center into a world-class resource for the entire state. In addition, the Scotts have made other major donations to the University of Nebraska Foundation to help fund projects at the University of Nebraska at Omaha or to support a tutoring program for University of Nebraska-Lincoln athletes to assist them in completing their college degree.

Scotts epitomize true spirit of giving

Dedicated June 26, 2008, the Michael F. Sorrell Center for Health Science Education is the latest jewel on the UNMC campus. The \$52.7 million building serves as the new home for the UNMC College of Medicine. It will revolutionize medical education in Nebraska for decades to come. The Scotts are the lead donor on the Sorrell Center and could have had the building named in their honor. Instead, they elected to name the facility in honor of their longtime friend – Michael Sorrell, M.D., a legendary physician, teacher, scientist and administrator at UNMC for 37 years.

"Dr. Sorrell is a marvelous, compassionate physician," Bill Scott said. "He's a dynamo. He's the guy who helped build the medical center and make it what it is today."

"It's difficult to find the words to express our profound appreciation to the Scotts," said Harold M. Maurer, M.D., UNMC chancellor. "They epitomize the true spirit of giving. They never seek the limelight. They much prefer that others get the recognition. We are humbled by their generosity."

So, who are the Scotts? And how have they been able to do what they've done?

Both are small town Nebraskans. Ruth was born in Wahoo, Neb., while Bill was born in Ashland, Neb. Ruth's family moved to Ashland when she was 7 years old and the two attended school together. They started dating during their junior year of high school and attended the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. They got married after their junior year, some 57 years ago. At UNL, Bill was a business major, while Ruth wanted to be a teacher. Before they had children, Ruth taught first grade at Randolph Elementary School in Lincoln for four years. Bill's career eventually took the Scotts to Des Moines, Iowa, and Detroit. Then they got homesick and returned to Omaha, where he landed a position as a trust officer with U.S. National Bank.

In 1960, the Scotts' world changed forever when Bill met a rising young entrepreneur named Warren Buffett. "I had heard about Warren, and I made it a point to meet him by taking the investment class he taught at the University of Nebraska at Omaha," Bill

Scott said. “He was brilliant. . . .an expert in value investing. “Warren used to come over to my house on Sunday mornings. We’d come home from church and there would be Warren’s little Volkswagen waiting for me. We’d sit around and talk about stocks and drink Dr. Pepper.”

Good health is critical

Many nights, Scott would get the children to bed, then stay up until 2 a.m. poring over the Moody’s stock manual looking for good investments. Scott continued to work with Buffett for 33 years before retiring in 1993. By that time, the firm had evolved into Berkshire Hathaway Inc., one of the most successful firms ever on the New York Stock Exchange. Now, both 77, the Scotts are doing all they can to give back to Nebraska. “A leading philanthropist once said, ‘It’s a sin to die rich,’” Bill Scott said. “It’s more fun to see the results while you’re still alive.”

“It doesn’t matter how much money you have,” Ruth Scott said. “If you don’t have good health, you don’t have a life.”

In 2005, Bill Scott learned for himself how valuable good health can be. While on a golf vacation at the Sand Hills Golf Club in Mullen, Neb., Scott fell while outside on the porch of his condominium. He was by himself and wasn’t discovered until the next morning by one of his golf partners. Scott was taken by ambulance to Great Plains Regional Medical Center in North Platte, Neb., where he was treated for a condition known as central cord syndrome. He had hit his head when he fell, causing his neck to snap back. The sudden jolt caused the ligaments next to his spinal cord to puncture the spinal cord. Scott’s right hand was paralyzed, he tore a rotator cuff, and several disks in his back were ruptured. He was destined to be in a wheelchair for the next month. Once he was stabilized, Scott was put on an air ambulance and flown back to UNMC, where he was met by his longtime physician – Dr. Sorrell, who put Scott in touch with a UNMC neurosurgeon. Now, almost three years later, through lots of rehabilitation and daily workouts, Scott has made nearly a complete recovery. His wrist has recovered sufficiently to allow him to play his trumpet again.

Ruth Scott, meanwhile, has been engaged in her own entrepreneurial activities, starting the Omaha Bridge Studio in 1989 near 120th and Pacific streets. The studio, the largest one in Omaha, averages nearly 700 tables of bridge players per month.

At the opening of the Sorrell Center, a plaque was placed in the lobby to recognize the Scotts. Composed by John Niemann, Ed.D., senior vice president of the University of Nebraska Foundation and close friend of the Scotts, the plaque reads:

Ruth and Bill Scott

Principal benefactors.

Proud Nebraskans.

Champions of students in medical education.

Compassionate advocates for the well being of all.