

# One of a kind

## Virjean Burton

BY DORIS MCMICHAEL

**N**o other area fund-raising organization is quite like the Northland Community Fund, and there's nobody quite like its fashionable founder, Virjean Burton.

Upon first impression one might envision the striking widow modeling on the runway, perhaps in a show of designer styles for the mature woman. She maintains her trim lithe figure with regular aqua fitness workouts at the Clay-Platte YMCA and dresses *a la chic*. This is one woman who never had a bad hair day in her life and says she does nothing but blow-dry her magnificent short-cropped gray mane.

But Virjean Burton is never casual. She goes at everything in life full tilt in several directions. She works on behalf of a half-dozen Northland church and charity organizations and plays bridge. She's a world traveler to exotic, far-away places, and she's a homebody grandmother. At home in her gracious Green Meadows abode, she keeps a magnificent four-tier dollhouse, complete furnished and inhabited by exquisite miniatures for her two granddaughters when they come from Texas for a visit.

Before retirement she was a career woman. This intense, tough-minded retired Farmland Industries executive brought financial foresight and the hard work and dedication to the Northland



Virjean Burton

Community fund, the organization she and her late husband, Lawrence, founded along with 22 community leaders in 1987.

This is her number one passion, a fund that perpetuates itself and will serve our community for generations to come. The fund is unique in that the endowed funds are in perpetuity with the principle remaining invested and only the interest used to benefit Clay and Platte counties. It serves as a vehicle to receive tax-deductible contributions or bequests. The Harvest Ball is a major contributor, with 25 percent of each year's net income marked for this specific charity.

Early this year Harvest Ball chairwoman Linda Ward presented a \$60,000 check to NCF, represented by Edie Ballweg, this year's chair.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Northland Community Fund, and

the first year a donation has been made. Last November a \$10,000 check went to the Children's Center capital fund of Safehaven. Ballweg presented the check to Tom Brown, chairman of the board.

Safehaven is the first of ongoing grants to organizations in human services, education, community action, and arts and humanities.

A second separate fund exists, which Burton says was the idea of John Dillingham. The Harold Hamil Scholarship Fund is given annually to a high school senior nominated by one of six schools in the former city councilman's school or council district. The scholarship goes to an outstanding youth who plans to enter journalism or public service, both of which were of interest to the late Hamil.

This year the group hired Carol Kuhns to serve as executive director. Kuhns was director of Synergy. The immediate fund-raising goal is an additional \$100,000 by the year's end. Burton says they have been offered a challenge grant of an additional \$25,000 if that sum can be raised exclusive of money received from the Harvest Ball.

Linda Ward has served on the fund's advisory board since its inception. Ward described the fund as "seed corn for future harvests." Patty Garney and Jinny Fickle also represent the Harvest Ball on the present committee. By year's end the Northland Community Fund is projected to reach \$300,000. It is managed under the auspices of Greater Kansas City Com- >

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munity Fund Management. This past year the fund earned more than 12 percent on its investments. At this rate, the \$300,000 should double in six years. Even a more conservative 10 percent return on this amount will provide income of about \$60,000 per year. With fewer government dollars available, the projected perpetual income of the fund is even more important. It can provide seed money to start other large-scale ventures. It means catalytic money to get the attention of other funders and can be used as challenge money to encourage other worthy fundraising efforts.

Burton says that she is still active in the organization. "They gave me a plaque that calls me 'Emeritus,' but they haven't gotten rid of me yet. I'm still around, and the fund will outlive me!"

"As long as this fund is perpetuated, part of me will live far into the next century."



Edie Ballweg presents a check to Tom Brown of Safehaven.

She is past president of the Northland Symphony Guild, serves on the United Way board, and is active in the American Association of University Women. Her efforts extend to activities at North Cross United Methodist Church, where she chairs the Memorial Fund and serves on the board of trustees. She co-chairs

Adventures in Learning, an ecumenical effort involving several Northland churches, and works with Shepherd's Center of the Northland. She is a past president and still active in the North Kansas City Hospital Auxiliary.

But even while reeling off a long list of

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other volunteer services in our area, her eyes light up when she talks Northland Community Fund — the highlight of her long years of work and dedication.

"The best thing I remember was getting the continued support of a wonderful advisory committee for NCF. We still have a number of our original council members, who have been so supportive.

"It's one thing to get a few people together but having such busy folks retain interest and support has been just great."

Burton was born in Topeka, of parents she describes as "supportive but not into volunteer work." She says they often joked that her intense efforts in that area made them wonder if "somebody got me mixed up in the hospital nursery."

When son Bruce was growing up, Burton was active as a den mother and worked diligently with the PTA. Bruce and his family now live in Lake Jackson,



Linda Ward of the Harvest Ball board presents a check to Edie Ballweg.

Texas. She recalls that in the family's early world travels, the couple took Bruce along. This year, she has visited the Panama Canal and plans a trip to California

with friends to visit elderhostels. Past itineraries include Scandinavia, Russia, China, Australia, New Zealand, Morocco, Portugal and Spain. ■