

Denver Forum's top 10 stories of 2013

\$1.4 million gift to endow scholarships

By Peg Abbas - March 20, 2013

The obituary in area newspapers read simply:

Evelyn F. Ducker, 91, of Waverly, Iowa, died on Friday, May 25, 2012 at the Bartels Retirement Community, Waverly.

The obituary continued to state the facts about Evelyn Ducker, her parents, where she was born, where she received her education, her church affiliation, her marriage, the death of her husband and other pertinent facts.

The obituary continued: **3** *Evelyn taught for 18 years in country schools and later with the Denver Schools, for a total of 47 years.*

Evelyn Ducker's life and passion was in the field of education. She graduated as valedictorian of her Waverly High School senior class and went on to obtain her teaching degree from Wartburg College.

Her first teaching experience was in several Bremer County country schools, but the greatest share of her 47 years as an educator was in the Denver Elementary School.

Evelyn never had biological children, but over the years she could have easily claimed any number of children as her own. Her students and the opportunity to teach and nurture them became the great love and passion of her life.

Longtime friend, Lynda Hassman was not surprised by her generous gifts of \$1.4 million each to Denver Dollars for Scholars and St. Paul Lutheran Church in Waverly.

"During my long association with Evelyn as a dear friend of my family, I heard her express on several occasions that her greatest desire was to someday leave part of her estate to organizations that would benefit many students far into the future."

Kim Buenneke, President of the Denver Dollars for Scholars, agreed with Hassman and said: "Mrs. Ducker's gift to our organization will enable us to give scholarships to students in perpetuity. We are almost guaranteed that any student who applies for help for higher education will be guaranteed that help."

It would be hard to come up with an exact number of young lives she influenced. It would also be hard to come up with any of her ex-students, teacher peers, or administrators who didn't remember her in a positive way.

Former Denver Elementary Principal Duane Boehmke remembered her as "gentle and caring, always kind and always happy."

"She took a personal interest in every student, getting to know them and she always went the extra mile to do what was best for the student," Boehmke said.

One of her former students remembered a time when Mrs. Ducker put an avocado in a bag, had the students feel it inside the bag without looking at it, trying to identify what it was. After they all had a chance to feel and try to identify it, they had a chance to taste it...and they weren't penalized if they chose not to sample something that was other than the norm.

Another student praised the kindness of Evelyn Ducker. The girl had an accident, didn't make it to the bathroom and wet her panties. Mrs. Ducker helped her, the student remembered, and none of the other students ever knew it had happened.

"She was always fair. If you were doing well, she praised you and encouraged you. If you were not, she would not hesitate to set you back on the correct path. She didn't play favorites," said another student. "Everyone was treated with the same measure of respect.



Denver Dollars for Scholars Chapter President Kim Buenneke accepts a check in the amount of \$1,387,724.63 from Mike Dempsey, nephew of the late Evelyn Ducker last Thursday. The Denver Dollars for Scholars Chapter and St. Paul's Christian Day School in Waverly received identical checks. Pictured with Dempsey and Buenneke, left to right, are Wanda Burkholder, Terry Seegers and Dawn Grainger. Seegers, Treasurer of the DS Chapter said "This is a fantastic gift for the school and community. By investing this, we can perpetuate the benefits far into the future." Seegers added that the total amount of the Ducker bequest exceeds \$1.4 million, due to earlier gifts already received.

And she always dressed so pretty."

Duane Boehmke described her in a nutshell when he said: "She loved teaching and she was always on top of her responsibilities."

Evelyn's nephew, Mike Dempsey of Waverly, remembers with a chuckle how his son, Kevin, was often the chauffeur for Evelyn, her husband, Clarence, and Kevin's grandparents. They often shared meals — with Evelyn providing the strawberry pie.

Direct family survivors in the obituary in addition to nephew Michael Dempsey included great nieces and nephews, great-great nieces and nephews and great-great-great nieces and nephews. Mike pointed out that none of those nieces and nephews, no matter how far down the line, were denied the opportunity for higher education. "Auntie paid for anyone who wanted to go to college," he said.

She enjoyed her family and traveled a lot with them. But, one of her greatest pastimes was to go fishing and she'd rarely turn down an invitation to drop a line wherever it might

be.

Family and former students knew about her love for fishing. They all remember her and her sing-song challenge as she chuckled: "Fishy, Fishy in the brook. Fishy, Fishy on my hook."

Dollars for Scholars Chapter Trustees and future recipients of the scholarships her bequest creates will remember the kind generosity of Evelyn F. Ducker, truly an icon of education, and a teacher extraordinaire.

Her final gifts will fulfill her last wishes to advance the education of students for many years to come.



The late Evelyn Ducker