

A Giving Legacy Lives On

Carolyn Blackwell learned about helping others in the footsteps of her mother. It is with those lessons in mind that Blackwell recently established the **Velma L. Carey Family Fund** through the Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln (formerly the Sangamon County Community Foundation).

"She was that kind of person, always giving to a person in a bad situation or who was down and out," Blackwell said. "She was a model Springfield citizen. ... It was how we were raised - to do something, to give back and to be kind."

Carey, who passed away in 2007, left a distinguished legacy in Springfield. She was honored in 2007 as one of the 12 Women of Influence, "Skirting Convention: Twelve Women who Changed Springfield."

Among her accomplishments are being the first African-American salesclerk at Myers Brothers Department Store, chairperson for the 1908 Race Riot Committee, serving on the Springfield School District 186 Desegregation Committee and holding positions on numerous other boards and organizations. She retired from then Sangamon State University as director of personnel.

"(After her death) when people started writing all these things about her, it was like we shouldn't forget about her and forget about all she did," Blackwell said. "We can carry her name on. (The fund) just seemed the natural thing to do."

Setting the example of giving back to and being active in her community is Carey's greatest legacy. Her family hopes that establishing the fund through the Community Foundation will help others understand the importance of that giving tradition.

"At her services, people were lined up in the church to pay their respects, but it will be up to us, not to just remember her, but to teach the next generation that they need to learn about people and to carry on the giving tradition," said Blackwell, who used to call and talk to her mother at least three times a day.

Blackwell's husband, Robert, and daughters, Dr. Nicole Florence, Tracey Meares and Deanna Blackwell, were supportive in her decision to establish the fund and name it after her mother. The daughters had a very close relationship to their grandmother and she was proud of their success. Dr. Florence practices medicine in Springfield, Meares is a professor at Yale University and Deanna Blackwell recently received her Ph.D. from the University of Utah.

"They really, really worshiped her and she them. Where they are today, it's no surprise that she influenced their lives," Blackwell said.

The fund will not have a specific charitable focus in the beginning, choosing to vary its interests. This flexibility is a specific strength of donor-advised funds and helped persuade Blackwell to invest in this type of fund.

"She was about scholarship and education and the family fund allows us to be very thoughtful about our giving each year," Blackwell said. "We can change it up every year."

Blackwell, who is retired from the Springfield School District, is also excited to have recently joined the Community Foundation board (in 2009). She has been acquainted with several board members and understands the needs in the community.

"I know that we have some serious things to discuss, but it is fun to sit down and see people so enthusiastic about giving," Blackwell said. "I know the people and know they are giving people and interested in the community and love Springfield."

"We're thrilled to have someone with Carolyn's passion for giving and understanding of our community as a part of the Community Foundation board," Executive Director John Stremsterfer said. "She will be a tremendous asset in our efforts to help connect people who care with causes that matter."



Velma A. Carey with her daughter, Carolyn Blackwell.