

GIVING BACK

A Minnesota couple's love story leads to a philanthropic legacy

Gerald and Henrietta Rauenhorst worked their way out of hard times with the goal of making a difference. Their legacy is GHR Foundation, one of Minnesota's largest philanthropic organizations.

By Shannon Prather (<http://www.startribune.com/shannon-prather/188067161/>) Star Tribune |

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One of Gerald Rauenhorst's earliest childhood memories was of walking behind the family wagon, loaded down with possessions. The Catholic family of 10 had lost their southwestern Minnesota farm to foreclosure in the 1930s and were now destined to scratch by as tenant farmers.

Yet those formative hardships couldn't dim the ingenuity and generosity that came to define Rauenhorst.

Rauenhorst, with the support and savvy of his wife, Henrietta, grew up to become one of Minnesota's most successful contractors. His company, the Opus Group — a series of commercial real estate development, construction and design companies — helped sculpt the Minneapolis skyline. The couple also became one of the state's most generous philanthropic teams, quietly giving millions to local and global causes close to their hearts until their deaths in 2010 and 2014.

Now Gerald and Henrietta's vast fortune is being rolled into what will be one of Minnesota's largest philanthropies: [GHR Foundation \(http://www.ghrfoundation.org/\)](http://www.ghrfoundation.org/).

The Rauenhorsts' youngest child, Amy Rauenhorst Goldman, runs the Minneapolis-based foundation, which has assets around \$495 million that are expected to eclipse \$1 billion when her parents' estate is settled. That could propel GHR into the top five best-endowed philanthropies in the state, funding everything from Catholic elementary schools and universities in the Twin Cities to a peacemakers' conference this fall in India where young leaders from war-torn nations will meet with the Dalai Lama.

"GHR has a really important voice that contributes to greater understanding of peace-building in conflicts and peace-building among religions. That's really a critical issue for us to grapple with globally," said Nancy Lindborg, president of Washington, D.C.-based United States Institute of Peace, which is collaborating on the Dalai Lama conference. "We work with other foundations, but the depth of the partnership with GHR really stands out."

Over the past decade, GHR grants and commitments have totaled \$175 million, of which \$75 million went to local recipients. The foundation funds global development with an emphasis on peacemaking and supporting children and families; health research, including work on Alzheimer's disease at the Mayo Clinic and Harvard; and Catholic education, including the couple's alma maters, the University of St. Thomas, St. Catherine University and Marquette University in Milwaukee.

St. Thomas President Julie Sullivan said she doesn't think the school would be what it is today without Gerald Rauenhorst, not only because of his generosity but his vision and boldness. "What he cared about was giving opportunity to people and giving people the education they needed to fully realize their potential," she said.

Hardscrabble roots

In life, the Rauenhorsts long resisted publicizing their giving. Gerald Rauenhorst declined St. Thomas' offer to name its College of Business after him (he later accepted the use of his business name, Opus). Now Goldman, realizing that brand recognition can deepen partnerships and the foundation's work, is opening up about her parents' love story, life's work and legacy.

Gerald Rauenhorst grew up farming in Olivia, Minn., while Henrietta "Hanky" Schmoll, the daughter of dairy farmers, grew up 5 miles away in Bird Island.

"His childhood by any standard was tough," Goldman said.



(http://stmedia.startribune.com/images/ows_151008849599200.j) Gerald and Henrietta Rauenhorst on their wedding day in 1950. Provided



(http://stmedia.startribune.com/images/ows_1490662) Amy Goldman is the CEO and Chair of the GHR Foundation. She is standing in front of a giant photo of a child from the M'Lop Tapang, a day...

To help keep the family afloat, he started a series of small businesses as a youngster, including raising turkeys — he later recalled it as a miserable enterprise — and running the high school baseball-field concession stand. He and his brothers built a plane from a kit and he taught flying lessons to pay for college.

Rauenhorst, a Tommie, asked Henrietta, a home economics student at St. Kate's, to attend homecoming. They quickly became a couple, staying together even as Henrietta left college for a year to help on the farm after her father's sudden death and Gerald moved to Milwaukee to earn a second degree in civil engineering.

Their children cherish a cache of love letters written between the two. They were among the first generation in their families to go to college, and money — or the lack of it — was always on their minds.

"I love the spirit and optimism my parents had at that age," said Goldman. "They wrote, 'What a good life we are going to build together. We are going to raise a family and make a difference.' They were scrambling but they felt so lucky to be going to college."

They married in 1950. Gerald went to work for a Wisconsin construction firm, but was dismayed by what he saw as poor-quality work. With his wife's urging, he started his own firm in the couple's small Richfield home in 1953 with \$2,500 he borrowed from his brother. The new company was chosen to build a Lutheran church in Olivia.

In time, Opus helped pioneer the "design-build" model of construction, one that relies on keeping a range of skills in-house, from architecture to engineering and construction, to better control the quality and cost. Opus' legacy includes the halo-topped Capella Tower in downtown Minneapolis and Mariucci Arena at the University of Minnesota.

"They knew they were incredibly lucky in life," Goldman said. "They knew they were no different from that waitress working her way through college because that used to be them."

Rauenhorst stepped back from day-to-day operations in 2003. The Great Recession in 2008 roiled the real estate industry and Opus, then run by one of Rauenhorst's sons and outside leadership, and resulted in bankruptcy reorganizations and litigation.

Through it all, Rauenhorst never lost sight of his goal to leave a legacy foundation that helped others, his family said. The couple had quietly founded GHR in the 1960s in an effort to give back to the community.

"He was very clear his personal wealth would go into the foundation," Goldman said.

Building from the inside

The foundation, which includes a mix of family and non-family directors on its board, also relies on what they call a "design-build" model of philanthropy. Instead of simply writing checks, GHR [partners with the schools and nonprofits](http://www.startribune.com/foundation-started-by-prominent-developer-launches-bridgebuilder-challenge/417248083/) (<http://www.startribune.com/foundation-started-by-prominent-developer-launches-bridgebuilder-challenge/417248083/>) to craft programs and solve social problems.

In 2016, GHR spent \$9.6 million on global development including an ongoing partnership with the Institute of Peace, a congressionally funded organization that promotes global stability by reducing violent conflicts abroad.

Other international charities GHR supports include the Spoon Foundation, which provides nutritional support to vulnerable children to prevent family separation in 12 countries including Zambia and Russia; UNICEF, Catholic Relief Services and Lutheran Partners in Global Ministry.

Locally, GHR supports Interfaith Action of Minnesota and poured nearly \$6 million into Catholic education, including a group of three urban Catholic elementary schools known as Ascension Catholic Academy. Nearly 80 percent of the students take free and reduced lunch, and 95 percent are students of color.

The goal: Close the achievement gap between students of color and their white counterparts.

"They are committed to help build from the inside out a structure that will ensure academic success," said Patty Stromen, Ascension's president. "The academy isn't adapting to the foundation. The foundation is listening to the needs of the academy and responding."



(http://stmedia.startribune.com/images/ows_1510088)
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Gerald and Henrietta Rauenhorst on their first date at St. Thomas' Tiger Homecoming Dance.

Perhaps GHR's greatest influence can be seen and felt on the campuses of St. Thomas and St. Catherine.

The Rauenhorsts contributed millions to both institutions in their lifetimes. In 2016, [GHR pledged \\$18 million to St. Catherine \(http://www.startribune.com/st-kate-s-gets-18-million-for-health-education/373920391/\)](http://www.startribune.com/st-kate-s-gets-18-million-for-health-education/373920391/) for growth and innovation in health care education.

As an alumnus, St. Thomas board member and donor, Rauenhorst played a part in the school's 1976 decision to admit women, to build its Minneapolis campus and reopen its law school. "Gerry was at the forefront of those discussions and really helped urge the university to be bold and to make decisions that might have been perceived as risky at the time but have certainly paid off," Sullivan said.

GHR continues its support for the Catholic universities that Gerald and Henrietta credited with making them successful.

"He built a wonderful company that continues to prosper and enjoy success, [but] that's not what makes him one of our most illustrious alumni," Sullivan said. "I think it's the role model he was in his family, his faith and giving back to others."



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The Rauenhorsts met Mother Teresa in 1981.
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