

True North donors, changing students' lives...and their own

Bill and Eileen Breitzke create a legacy at NIU

By Angela Johansson, M.A. '05

We all like to believe we make good investments.

We channel our time, talent, and money where the payoff will be greatest...for ourselves and, more importantly, for the people we care about.

Most of us find that resources like time and money are in limited supply, and only the most gifted investor achieves unlimited returns on his ventures. Bill Breitzke was just such an investor.

"Bill loved numbers," recalls his wife, Eileen. "Investing wasn't work for him...it was like a game. He didn't care how much he accumulated. He just thought it was great fun."

All that fun paid off. Over the years, Bill did well for himself and for those he loved. So well that he was able to leave a legacy that will far outlive his short time on this earth, a large part of which he left for students at NIU. But Bill's financial gifts were just the beginning of what he left behind.

Bill earned his bachelor's degree in marketing at NIU in 1964 and later came back for his master's degree in education in 1969. After graduation, he built a 27-year career teaching marketing and cooperative education at Maine West High School in Des Plaines, Illinois.

Bill was known at Maine West as a dedicated and caring

teacher. "His students loved him," says Dick Beard, who taught with Bill for more than 20 years. "He spent a lot of time on job sites as part of the co-op program for those kids. He worked long hours with their employers. He never thought twice about going the extra mile, because he really cared about his students' success."

Anyone who knew Bill knew he was dedicated to his students; they also knew that when he wasn't helping them find success, he was finding his own on the fishing boat. Beard was Bill's long-time fishing buddy, and the two teachers spent many a summer together on Lake Michigan, in Wisconsin, and in Canada.

"We made a lot of great memories on that boat. It was so peaceful and quiet. Bill always said sitting out there was a God-like experience. It gave him perspective. He said it put him where he belonged."

At age 62, Bill found another place he belonged: with the love of his life, Eileen. She was his college sweetheart and the two reconnected in their sixties. "Bill had been a bachelor his whole life," recalls Beard. "I never thought he'd get married, but he sure showed me. Eileen made him very happy."

"Dating was one of the most exciting times of our lives," says Eileen. "We felt like we were 20 again. It was a wonderful

surprise to feel that way after so many years...just wonderful. We felt like our lives were just beginning."

Unfortunately, the happy couple's new start was short-lived. Bill was diagnosed with a brain tumor at the age of 64.

The following months were tough as Bill underwent surgeries, radiation, and chemotherapy. Eileen was at his side every step of the way. "He fought hard and almost never complained," she recalls. "He lived much longer than anyone would have expected, and he made the most of every moment. When I look back, I don't know how he did it. He was always upbeat."

Through it all, Bill never stopped wanting to help others. "There was a van that would pick patients up for treatments at the hospital," says Eileen. "It was the dead of winter and we really appreciated it. Many people who used the van were elderly and alone. We wanted to make sure others could benefit from that life-saving service for years to come, so we donated a new van," she says.

Both Bill and Eileen have been long-time believers in education. Eileen studied business at McHenry County College and both of her children, Bryan and Kathy Plinske, are teachers. The couple's belief in the power of education is so strong that before Bill's passing, they chose to create three endowed scholarship funds at the NIU College of Business.

"He knew he wanted to help students," says Eileen, who was by Bill's side helping him make his last investment. "We wanted to help students, and it was very important to leave the estate with an organization we could trust. Bill needed to know it would be well invested," she says.

"The confidence of donors like Bill and Eileen is a great compliment," says Mallory M. Simpson, president of the NIU Foundation. "We have amazing volunteers on our finance committee. Thanks to them, we've had many years of great returns. We are very fortunate to have such expert financial leadership, especially in these tough economic times," she adds.

In his final weeks, Bill and Eileen created a living trust with several beneficiaries, including family members and charities. The university will also receive the proceeds from a marital trust the two created before his death.

"I wish I would have had the opportunity to meet Bill," says NIU president John Peters. "His story has been such an inspiration. People like Bill and Eileen who believe so much in this university community remind us why we do what we do. We are very proud indeed that they chose to leave their legacy at NIU."

TRUE NORTH

True North Campaign Update

Goal: \$150 million (by July 2010)

Focus: Endowment to support NIU's deserving students

To date: \$129 million

Scholarships awarded in past year: 940

Highlights:

- Scholarship dollars awarded from endowment have more than QUADRUPLED since the beginning of the campaign.
- In the past year alone, donors have informed NIU that they intend to leave us a combined total of \$4.4 million through their estate plans.
- Our investment performance is stellar, even better than the average performance for endowments of many comparably-sized schools and better than the performance of all public schools.
- Even as economic woes put a damper on giving across the nation, NIU still seems to be holding strong. We've received \$5.7 million in pledge commitments so far this year, up 67% from the same time last year.
- Hundreds of alumni have reconnected with their alma mater at regional True North events in Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, Phoenix, and San Francisco. Events showcase the heart and soul of NIU—our faculty and students.

For more information about True North, visit us on the web at www.truenorth4niu.edu.



At his funeral, friends and family said Bill Breitzke's three passions in life were his wife, fishing, and investing. In his final days, he and his wife were able to do something else that was very important to Bill—help others. The two created an endowment for NIU business students. Bill is pictured in his prized fishing boat.