

# DRIVING GROWTH

## Howards' farmland gift will benefit hospital foundation

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Dale Howard had a penchant for rolling the dice on an investment. Businesses, of course, as residents of Hardin County are commonly aware. But there were also horses, land, athletics programs and, fortunately for the community that adopted Howard and contributed to his success, investing in the future of Iowa Falls was his most common wager.

"I don't know how many times I heard Dale say Iowa Falls has been good to us, now we have to be good to Iowa Falls," Marilyn Howard said. "I don't think making money for Dale was the idea of accumulating wealth, it was a challenge."

Now, nearly six years to the day after Dale Howard died, his legacy of challenging Hardin County to progress adds another chapter as the Howard family announced it will donate a nearly 150-acre plot of Iowa farmland to the benefit of the Hansen Family Hospital Foundation. The donation will be part of the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines's Keep Iowa Growing initiative. It's a gift HFH CEO Doug Morse said will provide a major building block for the future of the hospital.

"We're thrilled with the generosity and support of Mrs. Howard and the entire Howard family," said Morse. "This will be one more arrow in our financial quiver to serve the needs of the community and we're all kind of in awe. This is the kind of asset that's available in other communities. The Howards recognized that gap and moved forward to fill it."

The seed for the donation was planted more than a decade ago when Dale Howard purchased the land in Hancock County. Jordan Jurgens, manager of another Howard business at the time, Vande Rose Farms, had family ties to the area and hammered out a deal with Dale to work the land. It was a fruitful partnership and can continue to be for the next decade based on the terms of the donation.

Steve Howard, the eldest of Dale and Marilyn's children and a longtime member of the Board of Trustees at Hansen Family Hospital, took up local health-care as a cause close to his heart as he watched his father battle cancer the last decade-plus of his life. When Morse mentioned that the Iowa Falls hospital, one of only a few in Iowa that receives no public funding, was the only hospital in the Mercy Network without a farm as part of its foundation, Steve took the ball and ran.

"I told Doug I think I might know somebody," Howard said. "I came over to Mom's that night and I mentioned it to her. And she says, 'You know, I think I might be interested in that, let me give it some thought.' And after about a week, she said, 'How would that work?'"

After surveying the options and consulting with advisors, the Howards stumbled upon Keep Iowa Growing, an innovative path to giving back through the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines. Donors can contribute land, farm equipment, even grain, to be managed by the Foundation with the proceeds going to the local causes of their choice. When the family realized they could do all of that and incorporate the Hardin County Community Endowment Foundation, the choice was easy.

"It's very important to me that the hospital succeeds and is a viable part of our community," said Marilyn. "So it's a no-brainer."



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Dale and Marilyn Howard have given back to the Iowa Falls community in myriad ways. The family's latest gift benefits Hansen Family Hospital.

"Heck, yes," said Steve. "As you know Glenda and I, and Tony and Julianne, we're big on keeping things local."

As rental funds for the land are received over the next 10 years, those funds will go toward the newly established Howard Family Fund as part of the Hardin County Community Endowment Foundation. Then, at the end of that period the land will be sold with proceeds planned at this time to go to the HFH Foundation.

"We really appreciate them wanting to work with us locally," said Tam Elerding, Program Director for HCCEF. "It's so exciting because then it can give others the opportunity to say, 'Well, that's a good idea. What am I going to do with my farm ground? Maybe I should trust it to the foundation.'"

This latest Howard contribution adds to a prolific history of giving since Dale transplanted Marilyn, sons Steve and Scott and daughters Diane (Gulick) and Donna (Embree) from Fort Dodge and opened an auto dealership here in 1975. It was his first big gamble on the community, leaving a \$13,000-per-year teaching and coaching job at Iowa Central to go into business in a town where he was viewed as a rival.

The Howards' previous generosity is on display with the Dale Howard Family Activity Center on the Ellsworth Community College campus, a multitude of donations for local school causes, the family purchased body cameras for the IFPD shortly before Dale's passing, and previous contributions to hospital causes. Morse said his team at HFH is just beginning to absorb what it means for the hospital's financial health, and hopes that the Howards' example could lead to further generosity.

"On a very practical level, this is just such a boost to everyone here at the hospital at a time when we all really needed it. It will be an important part of our recovery and stability," said Morse. "This kind of giving is consistent with our long-term view; similar to the refinancing of bonds, both are about the long view, planting seeds that will bear fruit years down the road." ■

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DOUG MORSE  
Hansen Family Hospital CEO



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Hansen Family Hospital CEO Doug Morse (right) stands with Steve Howard, president of the HFH Board of Trustees, and son of Dale and Marilyn Howard, who gave farmland to the HFH Foundation.