

Vida's Legacy

Bend's Vida Ray adopted the goals of Bend Area Habitat for Humanity as her personal mission.

*by Kathy Oxborrow, for
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Mention the name Vida Ray to anyone associated with the Bend Area Habitat for Humanity throughout the past 22 years, and huge grins appear.

Seems Vida Ray was quite the character, only in the most positive sense.

"Tough," "feisty," "hard worker" and "generous" are words others used to describe her, a long-time volunteer and Habitat founding board member who passed away on Dec. 31, 2010, soon after celebrating her 100th birthday.

Vida began volunteering for Habitat for Humanity at age 78, first helping to organize the Bend division in 1989, later hammering nails to build Habitat homes, and finally, in her mid 80s, moving inside to help with office work.

Ruthe Giltrap, the accounts payable assistant at Habitat, recounted one of the many Vida stories from the early Habitat days. The story goes

Photo by Nicole Werner



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that Habitat's first executive director, Les Alford, was in a meeting with Vida and others when he declared, "... we need some men to step up and donate land."

Vida immediately quipped back: "Will a woman do?"

Vida did donate land and gave money monthly despite her limited resources.

"She probably gave more to Habitat of her personal wealth, time and energy than anyone I know," said Chuck Tucker, another former executive director.

A widow, she had no children. Tucker felt Vida adopted Habitat.

In 2005, Vida's Village, a neighborhood consisting of nine Habitat homes, was named in her honor. When Vida saw the

sign with her name on it, she was speechless. She gave of her time and money not expecting anything in return.

An avid, lifelong hiker and photographer, she was a member of the Central Oregon Senior Hikers. In her mid 80s, she had knee replacement surgery so she could continue to hike. In fact, if it was a nice day, she walked the 23 blocks from her home to the Habitat office.

Vida volunteered until she was 98, answering phones on Tuesdays. Vida's hearing was not the best in later years, but attempts to get her to consider other duties failed, so the staff started suggesting people not to call on Tuesdays.

"I'd be talking to people and they'd say, 'I called Habitat and

got cut off,'" and I'd say, 'Must have been a Tuesday!'" Tucker laughed.

Vida and her husband, a carpenter, moved to Bend in 1948. Vida's stories of her youth and the early years in Bend, supplemented by the photos she had taken, always captivated her audience.

"It was just wonderful to hear her talk about those times," said Tucker.

She grew up in the Willamette Valley and was proud of her pioneer heritage.

On the wall in her apartment hung the deed to her family's land signed by Ulysses S. Grant. Her great grandfather had migrated from the Midwest to homestead the land.

Sheila Pyott, Habitat's program manager, said Vida told her of

days working in a logging camp as a "whistle punk" when she was a young girl. The safety of others depended on the whistle punk's quick actions as the whistle punk acted as a lookout, signaling loggers of impending danger.

Vida's pioneering spirit never left her. Once a year, Vida and her niece traveled to the coast for a family reunion. Giltrap asked Vida, who was then in her 90s, if she stayed with her family. "Yes," she said, "I have my sleeping bag right here, and we sleep on the floor."

From all accounts, Vida Ray was a remarkable woman who left behind a lasting legacy of community service, and her passing leaves a big hole in the hearts of all who knew her.