

# Catherine Winkler Herman

## Benefactor Avoided Recognition

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Catherine Winkler Herman, 93, a low-profile philanthropist who gave tens of millions of dollars to charities across the Washington area and the country and resolutely refused to allow honors in her name, died of a twisted colon June 7 at her home in Falls Church.

Mrs. Herman underwrote college scholarships for single mothers; day-care, legal aid and health-care projects for low-income families; medical research; and environmental education. She founded the 44-acre Winkler Botanical Preserve in Alexandria, named for her first husband, Mark, a developer whose firm had one of the largest real estate portfolios in the area.

"Even though she gave all this money away, she studiously avoided being recognized for it," said Randy Kell, a former chief executive of the Mark Winkler Co. who was also her tax attorney. "She would not be honored, in name or [by a banquet]. She didn't do it for recognition or tax reasons. . . . She just did it because she thought it was the right thing to do."

Mrs. Herman, a native of Wolf Point, Mont., and a graduate of the University of Washington, came to the District during World War II to work for the Commerce Department. She married in 1942, raised a family and went back to school to earn a master's degree in social work from Howard University in about 1968.

The Mark Winkler Co., a closely held family firm that had been in business in Washington for 60 years, was sold last year to several developers for an estimated \$2.3 billion. It owned more than 5,000 apartments in 12 Northern Virginia complexes, the Reston International Center, a 15-story office building on the Dulles Toll Road, and 1801 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, the former MCI headquarters, among other holdings.

Mrs. Herman's interest in social issues began while she was employed by the Jewish Social Service Agency in Washington as a psychiatric social worker during the 1960s and 1970s. She primarily counseled single mothers and developed a deep empathy for them. The young women's lack of education and of access to affordable day care led Mrs. Herman in later years to endow scholarships for single mothers at eight colleges across the country.

She also began making major grants to the ACCA Child Development Center in Annandale. Over the past 25 years, the Mark and Catherine Winkler Foundation has become a major supporter of day-care projects for low-income families across the Washington area. It also supported Fairfax County's first reduced-fee legal clinic, the Healthy Families program in

Alexandria and Fairfax County and the Arlandria Health Center for Women and Children in Alexandria.

"She was very compassionate. She cared about people at risk," said Jody Smolik, director of the Winkler Botanical Preserve.

Health care for the indigent and medical research also attracted her attention and her money. Mrs. Herman subsidized the Northern Virginia Community College's Medical Mall, the Visiting Nurse Association's Living with Cancer project and Alexandria's Partnership for Healthy Kids. She was a regular donor for indigent care at Washington Hospital Center and Inova Alexandria and Inova Fairfax hospitals. With Georgetown University, she paid to send a fourth-year medical student to Third World countries.

She also funded research into colorectal cancer at Johns Hopkins University, skin cancer at Wake Forest University and diseases of the endocrine system at Georgetown. She endowed two professorships at Harvard University's School of Public Health for faculty interested in human health and the environment.

An avid environmentalist, she underwrote both the national Nature Conservancy and Montana Nature Conservancy. She was a major funder of the Montana group's efforts in the 1980s to preserve the Centennial Valley outside Yellowstone National Park and in the 1990s to preserve the North Fork of the Flathead River, on the western border of Glacier National Park.

Closer to home in Northern Virginia, along the edge of Interstate 395, Mrs. Herman proposed turning 44 acres of property, a former pig farm that had become a dump, into a preserve featuring native Potomac Valley flora. She had walked her dog, Lilly, on the land for years, and after her husband died in 1970, she sought to create "a place of beauty" in his name, Smolik said.

She was a regular visitor to the Winkler Botanical Preserve, looking for her favorite Virginia bluebells and pink lady-slippers, Smolik said. The land has become a popular hands-on environmental education center for schoolchildren, and as Mrs. Herman toured the park on a golf cart, children often recognized her from the portrait of her with her dog that hangs in the Catherine Lodge. (The lodge's name was a surprise to her, planned by her children.)

She enjoyed travel and the monthly singalongs that used to be held in her Lake Barcroft neighborhood. A lifelong Democrat who was active in civil rights causes, Mrs. Herman delighted in being included on President Richard Nixon's expansive "enemies list" during the 1970s, Kell said.

While attending the 50th reunion of her 1931 graduation from Wolf Point (Mont.) High School, she reconnected with one of her 17 former classmates, Dean Herman. They married in 1982. He died in 1996.

Survivors include three daughters from her first marriage, Tori Thomas of McLean, Kathleen Wennesland of Longmont, Colo., and Margaret Hecht of Kula, Hawaii; eight grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.