

**July 19, 2011**

**Legacy gift honors former Ord High School business teacher**



A gift in memory of Mrs. Helen Kokes, a long-time Ord High School business education teacher, will provide opportunities for lifelong learning to Valley County residents for years to come. The \$60,000 gift was given by the family of Mrs. Kokes' daughter, Dot Kokes Speidel, of Minneapolis. The gift was made to the HomeTown Competitiveness Endowment within the Valley County Community Foundation Fund.

In the years she taught, Mrs. Kokes helped prepare a generation of students for careers in business, particularly as support staff.

"My mother was a passionate supporter of good public education for students in rural areas," said Ms. Speidel. "The developments that we're seeing in Ord, such as the Ord Learning Center through Central Community College, would have pleased her. Lifelong learning for people of all ages, whether it's related to your career or your personal life, is so important," Ms. Speidel said.

Helen (Hamsa) Kokes grew up on a farm in Colfax County. She started teaching in a one-room schoolhouse after graduating from high school at the age of 16.

"She had 48 students at one point," said Ms. Speidel. "I imagine some of the boys were bigger than she was, and maybe even older! My mother was always very sensitive to kids in rural places. She thought it important that they, as much as others, deserve every opportunity to develop to their full potential." Mrs. Kokes and her two younger brothers all graduated from the University of Nebraska.

Mrs. Kokes' teaching career at Ord High School began in 1922 when she was newly graduated from the university.. She returned to teaching in 1947 and taught until 1964, with a three-year break when, in 1952, she was elected to the Ord school board, the first woman to serve in that position. The 1951 Ord High School yearbook was dedicated to her.

Although skills required for business now reflect monumental technological advances of our time, Gregg shorthand, bookkeeping and typing on manual typewriters were once vitally important skills needed by office workers. And although those functions may now be performed in different ways, workplace experience of the kind Mrs. Kokes arranged and supervised for her

students sometimes makes the difference between whether a business succeeds or fails, she said.

During her more than 40 years of living in Ord, Mrs. Kokes was active in many community organizations and also served as state president of the Nebraska Business and Professional Women's Club. She was married to Edward L. Kokes, son of early Ord immigrant Vincent Kokes. She died in 1965.

"I think that having a statewide community foundation is wonderful," said Ms. Speidel. It was interesting to look at a map of all the communities that the Nebraska Community Foundation serves. By having a community fund in places like Valley County, people have a way to help make life better by giving back to help they themselves had once received."

The Valley County Community Foundation Fund is an affiliated fund of the Nebraska Community Foundation. VCCFF supports community education, recreation, health services, leadership and economic development throughout Valley County.

The Nebraska Community Foundation is a 501(c)(3) corporation which provides tax-exempt status, financial management, strategic development and education/training services to 209 communities, organizations and donor-advised funds across the state. Since its founding in 1993, NCF and its affiliated funds have reinvested more than \$118 million in Nebraska.

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