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[www.goldenbeltcf.org](http://www.goldenbeltcf.org)

For more information:

Christy Tustin 620.792.3000 [christy@goldenbeltcf.org](mailto:christy@goldenbeltcf.org)

Sue Cooper 620.792.3000 [sue@goldenbeltcf.org](mailto:sue@goldenbeltcf.org)



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Whelans' generosity supports six local entities

Don and Phyllis Whelan demonstrated their generosity with the local community throughout their lives and now are continuing a legacy of charitable giving.

The Donald and Phyllis Whelan Memorial Endowment Fund at the Golden Belt Community Foundation (GBCF) will directly support six local entities far into the future.

The first six grants will be awarded soon to Golden Belt Home Health & Hospice; Sunflower Diversified Services Foundation; Barton Community College Foundation; Great Bend Foundation to support the Great Bend Public Library; the city of Great Bend to support Great Bend Brit Spagh Zoo; and the Salvation Army to support its Kansas programs.

The amount of each annual grant will be determined by interest earned on the principal.

"Mr. and Mrs. Whelan requested that the amount available for grants each year be awarded in equal shares to each organization," noted Christy Tustin, GBCF executive director. "We are grateful to them for their generosity.

"This endowed gift will support the organizations they cared so much about during their lifetimes," Tustin added. "Each entity will benefit for decades to come."

Don Whelan passed away on Jan. 27, 2014, and his wife, Phyllis, on Feb. 10, 2008. They were married in 1947.

Don was executive vice president of First National Bank, which formerly was located at Kansas and Lakin. Phyllis was a homemaker.

The GBCF received the gift in 2015.

Howard Partington, Great Bend city administrator and friend to the Whelans, said he is not the least bit surprised by their charitable intentions.

"For example, it seems like a natural fit that they would choose the library and zoo as recipients of their donations to the city," Partington said. "They knew that both attractions are important parts of community life that are open to everyone.

"Don always wanted other people to get enjoyment out of life," Partington added. "He actually received joy by watching other people be happy."

In his city administrator role, Partington collaborated with Don a number of times over the years.

"I worked with him occasionally; he was one of those people you looked forward to meeting with anytime," Partington recalled. "He always showed humility and never put on airs.

"Don was always approachable and made time for anyone who needed him," he added. "He had true integrity, both personally and professionally."

Friends would describe Phyllis as a "classy lady" with a great sense of humor. She was always available to talk with others and offer encouragement and comfort.

Steve Dobratz, chief financial officer at Farmers Bank & Trust in Great Bend, was the executor of the Whelans' will.

"Don retired from First National in 1982 but he was still extremely active in community events," Dobratz said. "He 'worked' for the Chamber of Commerce for a dollar a year as a sort of goodwill ambassador.

"That was a role he truly enjoyed," Dobratz added. "He loved being around other people and wanted to make them comfortable."

Dobratz, who has served on the GBCF Investment Committee for many years, noted that establishing an endowment is a good way to plan charitable giving.

"An endowment is a good mechanism because of the stability it provides, as well as the professional local management of the funds," Dobratz said. "You can be assured your money will go exactly where you want it to go; your intentions will be carried out to the letter in perpetuity."

The GBCF's territory includes Barton, Pawnee, Rush and Stafford counties. For more information about endowments or other types of funds, contact Christy Tustin by calling 620-792-3000.