

Generous giver Jean Vollum dies

Philanthropy | The Tektronix founder's widow richly supported diverse causes

By D.K. ROW
THE OREGONIAN

Jean Vollum, one of Oregon's most generous philanthropists and the widow of Tektronix co-founder Howard Vollum, died Tuesday morning. She was 80.

Charles Vollum, Vollum's oldest son, said his mother died of congestive heart failure at her home, surrounded by her five sons, caregivers and family friend the Rev. Rick Sirianni.

Vollum's death is a huge loss for the many institutions she supported in a richly lived and deeply private life.

"She was a philanthropist in the truest sense of that word," said conservationist Spencer Beebe, who knew Vollum for 35 years and worked closely with her to create Ecotrust, a nonprofit organization devoted to regional conservation issues. "She was someone who loved humanity."

Vollum's range of giving was among the broadest in Oregon's history. Funded by Tektronix stock, Vollum and her husband gave money, often in the millions, to

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Vollum
"Quietly made Oregon stronger, better state"

Vollum: 'She always knew how lucky she was'

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finance the creation of many significant local buildings and projects. Among them:

- The Mount Angel Abbey Library, designed by the Finnish architect Alvar Aalto.
- The campus of the Oregon College of Art & Craft.
- The Vollum Institute for Advanced Biomedical Research at Oregon Health & Science University.
- The Native American Center at Portland State University.
- The Jean Vollum Natural Capital Center, better known as the Ecotrust building, in the Pearl District.

Vollum's philanthropy preserved as well as built. Opal Creek Wilderness, Table Rock and Sycan Marsh Preserve are just some of the areas that Vollum's gifts helped conserve.

Vollum's cultural, environmental and educational giving suggested an extraordinarily passionate individual with many interests.

Born Jean Kettenbach in Alberta, Canada, Vollum attended the University of Idaho and eventually moved to Portland, where she taught at Beech Elementary School. She met her future husband, Howard Vollum, ice skating. Howard Vollum would go on to change the electronics world and make a fortune as the inventor of the cathode-ray oscilloscope and as



Jean Vollum, photographed in her home in 2003, was one of Oregon's leading philanthropists, supporting an array of environmental, educational and cultural institutions. She died Tuesday at 80.

BENJAMIN BRINK/THE OREGONIAN

co-founder of Tektronix with M.J. Murdock.

In 1950, Jean and Howard married. Together, they raised five sons — Charles, Steven, Lawrence, Daniel and Donald — and gave away tens of millions of dollars to institutions that have benefited countless individuals.

In 1981, the Vollums' extraordinary philanthropic collaborations were acknowledged in a Governor's Arts Award. Five years later, Howard Vollum

died.

Jean Vollum, a devout Catholic, continued to champion their favorite causes. She also pursued new personal interests.

In her 60s, Vollum started to take accomplished photographs, eventually showing her work at local galleries. A few years ago she visited Antarctica, where she took pictures of the melting polar ice cap from ships and helicopters. The work, which was exhibited at the Oregon College of Art & Craft, em-

bodied the Vollum temperament: It was quiet, restrained, discreet.

"The most incredible thing about Jean Vollum is that she's not one of those grande dames who let you know how grand they are," said Thomas Lauderdale, founder of the band Pink Martini. He was a close friend who benefited from Vollum's charity, though on a smaller scale: When Lauderdale was in high school and college, he didn't have a piano, so Vollum

offered the future star the use of her Steinway.

"There are people who give and let you know they give," Lauderdale said. "Jean Vollum was the antithesis of that. She quietly championed all of the things she believed in, whether it was the arts, the environment or music. She quietly made Oregon a stronger and better state."

That sincerity, even earnestness, friends say, is what distinguished Vollum from other philanthropists.

"Jean gave to institutions with the greatest sense of trust and respect in that organization," said friend Lark Palma, head of school at Catlin Gabel School, another of Vollum's educational recipients. "I think the new donors today are much more about 'What's the return on my investment?'"

"Jean wasn't like that. She opened the world to people who didn't have as big a world as she had. And she always knew how lucky she was and what a great life she had."

Charles Vollum said a memorial service for the public will be held in the near future, but details are not set. The family requests that remembrances be made to these organizations: Oregon College of Art & Craft; Ecotrust; Providence St. Vincent Medical Foundation; Oregon Symphony; Delta Society; Project Pooch; Catlin Gabel School Distinguished Writer's Series; Chamber Music Northwest.

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