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Newcombe Foundation honored with award

By Lisa Rich

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Those who knew and worked beside Charlotte Newcombe said she was a humble, modest woman. Newcombe's biggest wish when she died in 1979, worth \$34 million, was for her money to go toward education -- and only education.

Since 1981, that's exactly what has happened: \$50 million in grants have been awarded to nearly 100 universities and colleges across the country.

Earlier this week, a foundation named in Newcombe's honor received its own award for the countless students who have received some of Newcombe's generosity.

The Charlotte W. Newcombe Foundation, based in Princeton, received the James L. Fisher Award for Distinguished Service to Education during a luncheon in New York City on Monday.

The honor came from the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE).

"I was thrilled to hear the foundation received this award, because I knew Ms. Newcombe and she would be proud of how much good her bequest has done," said Trustee Janet Fearon, who also served as executive director for the foundation for 28 years.

"I don't think she ever realized just how much money she had," Fearon continued, "or just how many people would benefit from the scholarships the foundation has provided."

In the foundation's lifetime, 98 colleges and universities have received major grants, and each year, between 800 and 1,000 students receive scholarships for more than \$1,000.

"Each year we get letters from about half of the students who receive scholarships, and they tell us how much they appreciate the money," said Thomas N. Wilfrid, executive director.

"But perhaps even more interesting to us is how many of them appreciate the recognition -- the encouragement and affirmation that a scholarship represents to them," he continued.

"It provides them emotional support and an incentive to continue down the path leading to a degree."

Grants given to institutions are designed for two purposes, Wilfrid said: programs serving students

with disabilities and programs serving mature female students.

At Rider University, that has meant the difference between affording an education and dropping out of classes, said Rider President Emeritus Bart Luedeke.

"Many of our students in the mature woman program chose to be part-time students," said Luedeke, who is now a foundation trustee. "The grant would cover their tuition for two courses -- and that was the difference between being in school and not being in school."

The same sentiment is shared at Fordham College of Liberal Studies in New York City. Cira T. Vernazza, associate dean and director of the college, said she has witnessed many students whose studies would have "floundered" without the financial support given from the foundation.

"Mature women learners who have returned to college for career advancement or transition will often put their needs last, after their spouses, jobs, children, family," she said, "and so they will delay or postpone or defer their career goals and personal enrichment."

Vernazza described the educational and career success of several past recipients, ranging from those in historic film research to quantitative studies to professional ballet.

It is examples such as these -- and the foundation's 30-year commitment to help underserved individuals -- that qualified the foundation for the prestigious award, according to John Lippincott, president of CASE.

"Another distinguishing feature of the Newcombe Foundation is the unwavering support and personal involvement of its staff and trustees with scholarship recipients and participating institutions," Lippincott said.

Wilfrid said the partnership-aspect of their scholarship and grant awards stands the foundation apart from others.

"We don't just give them the money and walk away," he said. "We truly operate in a partnership with the institutions. It's a mutually beneficial relationship."



Five current Trustees of the Charlotte W. Newcombe Foundation are seen in front of a portrait depicting Charlotte W. Newcombe. Those seated, from left, are all charter trustees: Aaron Gast, Janet Fearon and Robert Adams. Standing, from left, are Elizabeth Frank and Bart Luedeke.