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TOP STORY

Estate gift of late teacher tops \$2.5 million to WKU

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Beulah R. Winchel

Submitted

When Beulah R. Winchel turned 18 and left home at the start of the Great Depression, her father gave her \$100 and told her to make her own way in the world.

Now, after living to the age of 103 and passing away in 2015, Winchel has bequeathed a more than \$2.5 million estate gift to Western Kentucky University.

“It will have a lasting impact and carry on her legacy forever,” said President Donald Smith of the College Heights Foundation, who knew Winchel for more than 20 years.

A Breckinridge County native, Winchel studied teaching at WKU, which was then known as Western Kentucky State Teachers College. After graduating in 1939, Winchel went on to get her master’s degree in library sciences from Peabody College in Nashville and was a member of the Breckinridge County Retired Teachers Association, according to a news release.

While at WKU, Smith said Winchel worked in the cafeteria and was encouraged by faculty members around her.

“She credits that four-year period here for shaping her life,” Smith said.

As a teacher, Winchel began her career in a one-room school in the Axtel community of Breckinridge County. She returned to Hardinsburg after she retired and worked as a librarian in the Breckinridge County school district.

While serving as a civilian in the U.S. Army, Winchel was a librarian and education specialist in Japan, Germany, France and Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

In a 2001 interview, Winchel said: “I was willing to consider a gift to Western because of my experience there as a student,” according to the release. “If I hadn’t gone to Western, I wouldn’t have been able to experience the things I did later in life.”

Smith said Winchel’s frugal lifestyle and investment strategies gave her the ability to provide such a large estate gift.

She worked with the College Heights Foundation in 1998 to outline the Beulah Winchel Trust, which will be divided four ways.

As much as 45 percent of the annual endowment earnings will go to the Beulah R. Winchel Scholarship Fund, which prioritizes students from Breckinridge County who are pursuing degrees in education and agriculture.

Another 30 percent of the annual earnings will benefit the University's Elementary and Middle Grades Education Library Collection. The money will be added to the library collections budget and allow it to enhance its collection.

"It will have, I hope, a very positive impact on our students and on the school communities," said Roxanne Spencer, an associate professor and coordinator of the educational resources center.



Spencer said staff at the center are bubbling with ideas about how to use the money to better serve the library's audience.

Sam Evans, dean of WKU's College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, was unavailable for an interview but issued a statement through an email.

"This estate gift is significant in terms of providing recurring funds for the WKU Libraries, to enhance the collection of materials associated with our elementary and middle grades professional education programs," Evans wrote.

“Teacher candidates will have access to materials that facilitate innovative learning and teaching strategies as WKU prepares teachers to meet the needs of all students in diverse learning environments. We are honored to play a role in furthering Ms. Winchel’s commitment to the profession of education and the value she placed on providing appropriate resources to facilitate learning on the part of teacher candidates and students in our P-12 educational system.”

Additionally, 15 percent of the annual endowment earnings will go toward the Kentucky Museum to support the upkeep of items in the Beulah R. Winchel Collection, and the remaining 10 percent of annual earnings will be used to support the operation of Winchel’s farm in Breckinridge County. The university is working out how to use the property.

WKU President Timothy Caboni praised Winchel’s generosity in a statement.

“What a wonderful way to celebrate and honor someone’s life,” Caboni said. “I’m sorry I didn’t get to meet Ms. Winchel, but I am very grateful for her forward-thinking approach and willingness to include the university in her estate plans. Because of her generous bequest, the university will be able to continue transforming the lives of our students and serving as an integral piece of the southcentral Kentucky community.”

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