

EXECUTIVE SUITE



LOGAN NEWELL/SPECIAL TO THE NAPLES DAILY NEWS

Richard Mellon is giving \$1 million to Quest for Success. Beginning with 10 students in 1993, Quest now helps over 340 local high school students to ensure a future of limitless achievement. One hundred percent of Quest participants are accepted into college.

Rick Mellon on the joys of getting through giving



EXECUTIVE SUITE
JUNE FLETCHER

As an heir to one of America's most storied fortunes, Rick Mellon didn't have to work very hard at school — or anything, for that matter.

But he did, anyway.

And after a career that included time as an attorney, judge and academic, the 69-year-old North Naples resident is devoting most of his time to his hobbies — flying, skiing and riding motorcycles — board work, and especially philanthropy.

To that end, he said Friday that he was donating \$1 million to Quest for Success, a Naples-based nonprofit college preparatory organization, to provide a perpetual endowment for scholarships for high school students to attend Quest programs.

The gift is made in memory of the lives of his granddaughters Grace Yet-

ta and Willa Jane Yurick, who were both born with complex medical conditions and passed away as infants.

"The greatest legacy we give our children is a good education," said Mellon, who with his wife, Melanie, has five children, ranging in age from 25 to 38.

At the announcement, Mellon was joined by his daughter Hallie, a ski instructor, and son-in-law Matt Yurick, assistant director of space planning at the University of Utah, who are the parents of Grace and Willa.

As their toddler son Bodhi reached for a plastic bag of crackers and his father-in-law wiped away tears, Yurick praised Mellon for providing a gift in memory of his infant daughters.

"We're very grateful," he said. "Now the rest of the world will know their lives mattered."

Mellon has long been involved as a board member of Quest, which gives students a place to hang out, learn about various colleges and how to get financial aid, get help preparing for college essays and SATs or ACTs, and work on life skills as basic as how to behave at dinner with a potential employer.

Students must have a solid academic record, be motivated to attend college and become involved in community service before they're

accepted into the program.

His own son Cory attended Quest programs and is a third-year medical student.

Students who have the means pay tuition for the program; about 40 percent of the 381 students currently in

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Mellon

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the program receive scholarships.

While some participants have affluent parents, the program welcomes students from all socioeconomic backgrounds, said Susan Zumstein, Quest's executive director.

"We have some kids who are homeless, who have lost their parents, or who live in abject poverty," she said. "We help them all."

She said the diversity of backgrounds enriches the experience of all the students, whom they may not have met otherwise.

"We teach kids to listen to and respect each other," she said. "Economic backgrounds and race go out the door."

For Mellon, the duty to give back to the community was ingrained in him by his family, who are the descendants of Thomas Mellon, a lawyer, judge and banker.

In the 19th century, the family patriarch planted the seeds of a banking fortune that grew larger as his heirs branched out into railroads, coal, steel, aluminum, oil pipelines and the media.

Spread among 200 descendants, that fortune is now worth an estimated \$11.5 billion, putting the family collectively at number 22 of the country's richest Americans, according to Forbes magazine.

Yet Mellon lives relatively modestly full-time in North Naples and only keeps one other home, a cottage in Colorado.

And he plans to give away at least \$20 million to charity and isn't telling his children how much he's leaving them, believing that oversized trust funds rob future generations of motivation.

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For Richard Mellon, the duty to give back to the community was ingrained in him by his family, who are the descendants of Thomas Mellon, a lawyer, judge and banker. "My father was a reluctant millionaire," Mellon said. "So am I."



See more
photos and a

video of Richard Mellon.

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aire," Mellon said. "So am I."

An only child nicknamed Rick, Marvin Richard Mellon grew up in Pittsburgh and was expected to help out at an early age in some of his family's businesses.

"My parents didn't want me to have a privileged lifestyle," he said. "So at age

7 I was putting price tags on things in my family's food service equipment business and getting underfoot."

Inspired by his father, who was a flight instructor in World War II, Mellon learned to fly at age 14.

He dreamed of becoming an airline pilot, and after graduation from Auburn University, he joined the Air Force, hoping to serve in Vietnam where the war was then raging.

Instead, he was made a meat inspector for a military veterinary corps.

"It was a crazy time," Mellon said, adding he was frustrated when he was caught up in a reduction-in-force before he could have a chance to fly in

combat.

Since the airlines then wanted pilots with military flying experience, Mellon decided to go to law school at Duquesne University.

He chose a school close to home so he could help care for his parents, who were both ill with cancer.

He decided to become a trial attorney and discovered he loved blending showmanship and strategy.

And he loved the feeling of helping clients, including a cruise ship passenger who had a ceiling collapse on his head, and two mentally handicapped brothers who were falsely accused by their mother of killing her boyfriend, to cover up for her crime.

"They didn't understand when the judge said they were not guilty," he said. "They did understand when I told them they could go home. It was heart-breaking."

During his career, Mellon held faculty positions and lectured at a number of universities, including Penn State University, Gannon University and Mercyhurst College.

He also was appointed to the bench as a judge but found the work boring and the judicial process inefficient.

"Young lawyers were being taught to perpetuate cases rather than resolve them so they could up their billable hours," he said.

So he and his wife, Melanie, whom he met on a blind date when he was 38, decided to move to Naples.

That was more than two decades ago. Since then, besides Quest, he's been active with the Pelican Bay Rotary Club, the American Arbitration Association and the Civil Air Patrol.

He also enjoys taking older veterans up for rides in his 1946 open-cockpit plane, one of two he owns.

"It's my way to honor them," said Mellon. "It's the richest feeling in the world."