



prologue.

A walk around the campus reveals what a Noble endeavor this University has become.

When the University of Oklahoma women's basketball team kicked off the 2007 home season in Lloyd Noble Center, the aisle seat, row F, section RE4 was unoccupied. Mary Jane Noble, the stately, white-haired lady who seldom left that space vacant, matriarch of one of Oklahoma's most distinguished families, died October 26 at 81. She was quite a person.

There was nothing pretentious about Mary Jane. As Noble Foundation president and chief executive Michael Cawley said at her death, "She was a woman of prominence, yet she didn't think of herself as prominent. She was honest and open and candid to everyone."

It is doubtful that she changed much from the Tri Delta sorority girl from Idabel, who graduated in 1946 from OU in business administration, married Sam Noble and worked in departmental offices at two universities while he finished his degrees. Back in his hometown of Ardmore, she rode herd on their four children while stepping up to the leadership positions that being a Noble seemed to require – and for which she was admirably suited.

She cared about people, and they cared about her, responding to her down-to-earth practicality, good judgment and rollicking sense of humor. Her list of volunteer contributions to Ardmore, the surrounding region and the state reflected her wide-ranging interest in young people, church, education, state history, health issues – and the University of Oklahoma.

It was more than alma mater nostalgia that drove Sam and Mary Jane's support for OU. It was a Noble family tradition.

Sam's father, the pioneer Oklahoma oilman Lloyd Noble, helped President George Lynn Cross establish the University of Oklahoma Foundation in 1944. A year later, Lloyd Noble created his own foundation, named for his father, Samuel Roberts Noble. Dedicated to research in cancer and agriculture in addition to its philanthropic bent, the Noble Foundation made one of its early grants to OU, \$13,000 for Oklahoma education's first electron microscope. It was the start of a beautiful relationship.

Today you cannot throw a cat on the OU campus, especially in Norman, but also at HSC, without hitting a facility or project made possible by carefully researched, thoughtfully targeted Noble generosity. From OU's first million-dollar gift for construction of an all-purpose arena, the Lloyd Noble Center, in 1972 to the more recent \$5 million to build and support the OU Cancer Institute, the Noble name and influence are everywhere. The Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History. Faculty professorships and chairs. Student scholarships. The physical fitness center. Laboratory support.

When Lloyd Noble Center, home of Sooner basketball, needed a major upgrade and expansion a few years ago, once again the lead \$8.1 million gift came from the Noble Foundation, which Mary Jane had served in many capacities both before and after Sam's death in 1992. Over time, Mary Jane had become the No. 1 fan of Coach Sherri Coale's women's team, and when approached for her support, she wryly commented that she would be happy to comply – if the women's facilities matched the men's. The Mary Jane

Noble Women's Basketball Center is the mirror image of the Bob and Ann Coleman Men's Basketball Center.

If you have the money and the inclination, writing a check probably is not that difficult. Dedicating time and energy and assuming leadership requires a much more personal commitment. When Mary Jane was appointed to the OU Board of Regents in 1996, she was following her father-in-law Lloyd (1934 to 1949) and her husband Sam (1987 to 1991) in that office – this after having already served as a trustee of the University of Oklahoma Foundation and on the boards of the Alumni Association and the College of Fine Arts.

She was more than equal to her regental task. She came on board shortly after the arrival of President David L. Boren. He remembers her not only as a dear friend but also as one of the wisest and most farsighted advisers he had ever had. She remained constantly focused on the well-being of students, he recalls, especially concerned with creating opportunities for students from families with limited financial resources.

In the gender minority as all OU's women regents have been, Mary Jane could be conciliator, arbiter and counselor, but she held firm convictions. When she was convinced she was right, she did not back down.

Sherri Coale persistently seeks role models for the young women in her program, locally, statewide, nationally. She has not had to look very far for the perfect someone they should emulate. A glance into the courtside seats just behind the bench, a flash of snow white hair, a faithful fan cheering them on – told them all they needed to know. — CJB