

To Fund Dakota Kids Tree House Hollis Nappen Honors His Wife with \$400,000 Expansion Gift

A lifelong engineer whose family was among the first residents in the Walsh County town of Lankin in northeastern North Dakota has given a \$400,000 gift to the State Historical Society of North Dakota Foundation.

Hollis Nappen, 93, now of Bismarck, gave the gift to establish the Hollis and Theodora Nappen Dakota Kids Tree House education area in the mezzanine of the expanded North Dakota Heritage Center. Theodora is his late wife, a Velva, North Dakota native who was a longtime teacher and an accomplished musician.

For four years following his high school graduation in 1936, Nappen worked in road construction for Walsh County. He then enrolled in the North Dakota School of Science in Wahpeton for two years, before transferring to the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks. He graduated with a degree in electrical engineering in 1943.

From 1943 to 1945, Nappen worked for the Tennessee Eastman Company at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, on a phase of uranium enhancement for the atomic bomb, as part of the Manhattan Project. He then served in the U.S. Army for two years, and was stationed in the Phillipines immediately following the end of World War II.

Returning to North Dakota, Nappen was employed by Westland Oil Company in Minot as the construction foreman from 1947 to 1968. Theodora and Hollis were married in 1965, and had a daughter who died in infancy.

In 1968, they moved to Oxnard, California, where they operated coin laundries and acquired business properties until retiring in 1982. They lived in Montevideo, Minnesota, until 2006, when they moved to Mandan to be closer to Bill Schott and his late wife, Leah, and their family. Leah and Theodora were sisters; Theodora died in February 2007 and Leah passed away in March 2008. Schott is the SHSND Foundation's trustee development consultant.

He has long had an interest in history, having served on the board of the Chipewewa County Historical Society while living in Montevideo, and being a Trustee of the SHSND Foundation. "Now that I am in my later years, I realize that history can be lost with each passing generation, it can be lost forever, and we need to do all within our power to preserve it."

In Bismarck, Nappen is active in the Lions Club and Sons of Norway.

He said he decided on his gift to establish the "Dakota Kids Tree House" to honor Theodora. "She loved kids, and this gift is an opportunity to help youngsters appreciate history and to know that there is a past. It's fitting that we leave something to remind people that we were here."



Hollis Nappen and his wife, Theodora, in 1976.

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— Hollis Nappen, 2011



Hollis Nappen in 2010.