



The Legacy of
Fern & Russell F. de Greeff

Our Story

By Mrs. Fern de Greeff



One enchanted evening in 1933, across a crowded room, Fern Grossenheider met Russell F. de Greeff. The place was Morse Mill, Missouri, a family-oriented community of clubhouses on the Big River. This meeting was the beginning of a happy and prosperous 63-year marriage.....

At the time I met Rus, he was managing the hardware department of the Sears Roebuck store on North Kingshighway in St. Louis, Missouri. Marriage stimulated his ambition and soon Rus became credit manager at the South Grand store. Eight years later, Rus returned to the North Kingshighway store as assistant manager, just before he was drafted into the Army. Because of his age, Rus was not sent overseas. He was stationed at Fort Warren in Cheyenne, Wyo., as a tech sergeant. I joined him and began working as the civilian personnel counselor. After the war, Rus returned to his position as assistant manager; and he later was appointed manager of the East St. Louis Sears, a position he fulfilled successfully for the next 22 years. He retired at the age of 60, ending a rewarding 40-year career.

Rus had a lifetime passion for horses and collecting antique carriages. A piece of property with a charming little barn on Kennerly Road in St. Louis, Missouri seemed like the perfect location for his lifelong interest. By chance, we became neighbors to the land owner's sister. This coincidence helped lead us to the purchase of the 10 acres of beautiful land and that charming barn. For 30 years, Rus and I lived our dream and created many happy memories here, until he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. At the same time another couple, Joe and Joan Lipic, was looking for land in the area. They discovered our land and spirited negotiations soon began. We sold the land to the Lipics - and also became members of their family, a relationship that continues to grow.

Neither Rus nor I had brothers or sisters, nor did we have children. We were dedicated to leaving a legacy. But what? Many plans were made, but none were satisfying. Shortly before Rus died, Joe was visiting him at the hospital. He couldn't stay long because he had to attend a meeting. In my usual straightforward manner, I asked "What kind of meeting?". It was then that we learned Joe was co-chairman of the committee to raise money to build a hospice house. I requested a brochure about this project and studied it carefully. The next day, I told Rus about it, adding "if we go for the 'biggie', they'll name the house after us". Rus, who could barely speak, said loud and clear "Let's do it!".

Even though Rus was in the Hospice program at St. Anthony's, we were pretty ignorant about what we had decided to support. Only after the building progressed did I begin to comprehend the magnitude of what we had done. The Fern & Russell F. de Greeff Hospice House is magnificently planned, beautifully furnished and staffed with competent and loving people, both professionals and volunteers. I am overwhelmed by the constant expressions of gratitude from all of them. There are no words to express the wondrous feeling inside of me.

We were, in deed,divinely led when we decided to make the Fern & Russell F. de Greeff Hospice House our legacy.