

history

Founded more than four decades apart, the Howard Heinz Endowment and the Vira I. Heinz Endowment were both the products of a family commitment to community that began with H. J. Heinz and that continues to this day.



Howard Heinz (1877–1941)

Howard Heinz was born near Sharpsburg, a suburb of Pittsburgh, on August 27, 1877, the son of Henry John and Sarah Young Heinz. After graduation from Shady Side Academy, and then Yale University in 1900, he entered active service with the H. J. Heinz Company, where he successfully became advertising manager, sales manager, vice president and president.

He was a director and/or trustee of the Pennsylvania Railroad, Mellon Bank, N.A., National Industrial Conference Board, Pittsburgh Regional Planning Association, Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce, University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Institute, Shady Side Academy, Western Pennsylvania Hospital and the Pittsburgh Symphony Society. He was a ruling elder of Shadyside Presbyterian Church.

Long before creating the endowment that would lead to large-scale philanthropy, Mr. Heinz was actively engaged in personal charitable and civic improvement efforts. As president of one of the world's most recognized businesses, he was one of the founders of the Community Fund, one of the early efforts to create organized community-based philanthropy in the United States. He served as a director or fundraising chairman for dozens of national organizations and campaigns, including service as a trustee for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Despite frequently being tapped by governors and presidents to lead various projects, Mr. Heinz made time for city and regional concerns. All his professional life, he served on the boards of key community institutions. Mr. Heinz was a leader in the creation of Heinz Chapel on the University of Pittsburgh campus as a memorial to his parents. The church serves as a spiritual resource for university students but also is considered one of the country's architectural gems. He took a special interest in programs that would better the lives of young people. As a young college graduate, he established Covode House, a clubhouse for boys, near the Heinz plant. He also served as an active director of Sarah Heinz House, a larger development club for boys and girls on the North Side that continues to thrive.

Mr. Heinz died on February 9, 1941. He bequeathed his residual estate to the Howard Heinz Endowment for philanthropic purposes.

Vira I. Heinz (1888–1983)

In a city known for its active and concerned civic leaders, Vira I. Heinz was among the foremost. Born Vira M. Ingham in what is now the Brighton Heights district of Pittsburgh, in 1932 she married Clifford S. Heinz, son of Henry J. Heinz, founder of the food processing company. Clifford Heinz died in 1935.

Over the next five decades, Mrs. Heinz actively engaged in the philanthropic and civic work for which she is now remembered. She did so much for so many that it would be impossible to list the full range of her activities. To mention a few of the more prominent, she was vice president of the World Council of Christian Education and an active supporter of its work in Africa. She was a founder of the Civic Light Opera, president and principal benefactor of the Pittsburgh Youth Symphony, and a member of the boards of the Pittsburgh Chamber Music Society, the Pittsburgh Opera and the Pittsburgh Symphony Society.

Mrs. Heinz received the Chancellor's Medal from the University of Pittsburgh and honorary degrees from eleven colleges and universities. She was a trustee of Chatham College and the first woman trustee of Carnegie Mellon University. She served as a member of the board of Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh and was an honorary fellow of the American College of Hospital Administrators. As a member of the Board of Directors of the H. J. Heinz Company, she was the first woman board member of a multinational corporation headquartered in Pittsburgh. In the spirit of generosity that characterized her life, Vira I. Heinz provided in her will for the establishment of a charitable foundation.