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## **Meet the Hunts: Philanthropic El Pasoans adopt a higher profile**

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Woody and Gayle Hunt are slowly stepping into the spotlight. Since 1987, through their Hunt Family Foundation, the Hunts have anonymously donated millions of dollars to various El Paso causes, nonprofits and institutions. Rarely did they publicize what they were doing. But in the past year or so, the Hunts have gone public with some of their most generous donations -- \$10 million to Texas Tech, \$7 million to UTEP and \$1.2 million to the YWCA. Their reason for going public is simple, they said. "It's strategic," Woody said. "If others see what we are doing and that we are committed to El Paso, hopefully they, too, will step up and donate or help in any way they can. The endgame is to make El Paso a better place to live." And their reason for working to make El Paso a better to live is also simple. "This is home," Gayle said. "This is where I grew up. This is where our family is, and this is where we want to be." The Hunts' story

Woody Hunt is a native El Pasoan. Gayle Hunt, formerly Gayle Greve, moved with her family to El Paso when she was 6 years old. She graduated from Austin High School. He grew up in the Lower Valley, graduated from Ysleta High School at age 16 and immediately enrolled at Texas Western College, which is now the University of Texas at El Paso. It was there, in an English class, that Woody and Gayle first met. "All I remember is that she was pretty, very pretty," said Woody, a businessman and scholar who'd rather talk about economics. Gayle, however, has no problem talking about how they met. "We fell in love on our third date," Gayle said. "We sat next to each other at UTEP in English class. He was sweet and he was very smart. I tried to make A's to keep up with him. "On Valentine's Day he sent me roses, but he didn't know that three other guys also sent me roses. He had to work for me." Eventually, Woody won, and he persuaded Gayle to transfer with him to the University of Texas at Austin. They both graduated in 1966 from UT-Austin, Gayle with a degree in elementary education and Woody with an honors degree in finance. It was about then, April 1966, that they decided to get married. "His mother had to come with us to the courthouse to get the license because he wasn't old enough," laughed Gayle, who is 15 months older than Woody. "I was of age, but he wasn't." Upon graduation, Gayle went to work as a teacher. Woody returned to college to get a master's degree in business. "Back then I made \$330 a month, and that was enough to live, pay bills and have some money left over for Christmas presents," she said.

Throughout their college days, Woody maintained his ties to Hunt Building Corp., the family business started by his father, Jack L. Hunt, in 1947. By 1977, Woody had taken control of the family business by purchasing a majority share of Hunt Building stock. Back then, it was a publicly traded company. At that point, Woody and Gayle decided to stay in El Paso and build their business here. "The nature of our business is that we can operate it and grow the company from here," Woody said. "There was no need to leave." Hunt Companies Inc. has regional offices in Albuquerque, Honolulu and

Washington, D.C. Its headquarters are in El Paso on Mesa Street. Woody is the chairman and chief executive officer of Hunt Companies Inc. and its affiliated companies. He is also the chairman of the board of the Hunt Family Foundation, which he established with Gayle in 1987. Gayle is the vice president of the foundation, and their son, Joshua, is president. The Hunts have had five children and eight grandchildren. One son, Marcus, died in 2008. Joshua Hunt said his parents' willingness to help others has been evident for years. "All our friends loved to come over, and so on any given afternoon we'd have bigger kids in the pool and middle kids playing video games and younger kids in the kitchen," he said. "We were all over the place, and I know everyone felt welcome and easy in our house. My mom and dad made it that way, no matter who you were." He also saw the love his parents have for El Paso. "As we grew up, we saw, and felt, the passion that Mom and Dad had for this community," he said. "They lived it, and we learned it. "At that age, it seemed to us like they were involved in everything. But the experience of giving -- of sharing -- was what they were really teaching us. I think all of us realized, from an early age, that we inherited a responsibility to help. "And we're still here in El Paso through four generations, so I think that says something about where our roots are, where our home is and where that responsibility is focused." One of the ways Gayle taught her children to help others was by taking them to Bassett Center during the holidays. There, the children would pick a name off the Christmas Angel Tree and buy toys for the needy child who otherwise would not receive anything from Santa Claus. "Each time, we made sure the kid on the tree got more presents than our own kids," Gayle said. "It all comes from our thinking that those who have received need to give back. It also sends a message of hope for others." Sen. Eliot Shapleigh, D-El Paso, has seen the work of the Hunts up close for the past 14 years. Woody became a University of Texas regent while Shapleigh was a senator. Together, they fought Texas Tech over control of a proposed border health institute in El Paso. Texas Tech agreed to expand its medical school in El Paso to what is now the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine. "More than any other El Pasoan, Woody has given of his time, his money and his leadership to our community," Shapleigh said. "He is trusted, independent and always tries to do what he thinks is best." But more than his money, Shapleigh said, it is Woody Hunt's willingness to put his name and his reputation behind this community. "It's not just his money, it's his leadership," Shapleigh said. In 1999, Woody was appointed to a six-year term on the University of Texas System Board of Regents by Gov. George W. Bush. During that time, Woody was the chairman of the University of Texas Investment Management Co., which manages \$20 billion of endowment and operating funds for the UT and Texas A&M systems. Woody also served previously on Bush's gubernatorial re-election team, and he later became co-chairman of Bush's presidential fundraising campaign in western Texas. But it his work on the UT Board of Regents and with UTEP that endeared Woody to UTEP President Diana Natalicio. She, too, calls him the best community leader El Paso has ever had. "He's very smart. He's data driven, and he knows the power of data and research," she said. "But most importantly, he devotes his time to gather and have the information needed to make astute decisions." If it weren't for Woody, Natalicio said, UTEP might not be the research-based institute it is today. "I don't know anyone more knowledgeable than him," she said. Gayle agrees. That's why she snagged him back in 1966. Ramon Bracamontes may be reached at

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