

Millionaire leaves money to help people in need



NEW YORK (AP) — It has been 30-odd years since Gregory Condolucci, an elevator operator, laid eyes on Milton Petrie. It turns out that neither man forgot. Petrie left the 85-year-old Condolucci \$9,999.96 a year for life.

Petrie, known in life — and now, in death — for his generosity, remembered hundreds of people, a few famous, most unknown, in his \$800 million will.

"He got a big kick out of me," recalls the 85-year-old Condolucci, who operated the elevator at a New York City tennis club frequented by Petrie decades ago. "I always kidded him."

Petrie, 92, the down-to-earth son of a

Russian immigrant pawnshop owner, died on Nov. 6. He built his fortune with a chain of women's clothing stores.

Petrie's will names 451 beneficiaries, including strangers he'd been helping since he read about them in the newspapers, and loyal employees whom he'd promised a more comfortable retirement.

He also provided generously for his own family members and for a few celebrities such as former Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek, writer Elie Wiesel and Marla Hanson, the model whose face was slashed on the street.

The value of his estate fluctuates with the stock market, but one of his lawyers, Jerome A. Manning, believes it's around \$800 million.

"He said he never forgot where he came from," said Cordelia Fuller, whose son, transit policeman Robert Venable, was killed five years ago by a car thief.

A dozen times, Petrie asked Mrs. Fuller to bring Venable's daughter, Januari, now 15, to his office.

"He would give her teddy bears and a check," Mrs. Fuller recalled. "He wanted to know about her progress in school. She was very crazy about him."

Under the will, Mrs. Fuller, a nursing supervisor in Brooklyn, will receive \$5,000 a year for life.

"It's nice what he did but I'd rather for him to be here," she said.

The will divides the beneficiaries into groups, each of which will be paid from the income of a particular trust. So in some groups, the beneficiaries get an odd amount.

Condolucci, a widower, said he'll use his money to help his brothers, nieces and nephews. And he'll replace his couch, which was ruined in a flood.

"He always took care of me," Condolucci

said. "I had polio. He paid for my two pairs of shoes. They were \$500 apiece."

Ruth Dran, of Bayonne, N.J., was a Petrie supervisor for 23 years.

After years of helping her boss make discreet financial arrangements for needy employees, she is getting \$20,000 a year for the rest of her life. The money will help her move to Israel to be near her daughter and grandchildren.

She recalled the time when she told Petrie that she missed her daughter, and Petrie told her to get Kollek, then the mayor of Jerusalem, on the phone.

Kollek, who gets a \$100,000 lump sum from the will, promptly invited Mrs. Dran's daughter to his office for an official welcome to her adopted country.

"Milton Petrie was a good friend," Kollek said. "I guess it shows that he thought of me, too."

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Donations drop at soup kitchens

The Thanksgiving larder is anything but bountiful this year at soup kitchens preparing holiday meals for the poor.

From Buffalo, N.Y., to Boston, from Lansing, Mich., to Louisville, Ky., donations are down and demand is up.

Church workers and social service agencies blame a steady decline in government funding and also say many Americans, themselves struggling to make ends meet, are losing sympathy for the unemployed and the homeless.

"Homelessness has been around for a long time now, and people are beginning to say, 'Gee, if we can't solve the problem, maybe we ought to pretend it's not there,'" said Rick Roberts, chairman of the Chicago Christian Industrial League. The league expects to prepare 1,500 Thanksgiving meals — 200 to 300 more than last year.

In Lansing, Mich., donations are way down at the Cristo Rey Community Center, said senior citizens' program coordinator Toni Diaz.

"By this time last year, we had people who had donated four turkeys and the fixings. This year, we haven't had one turkey donated," she said.

"Donations are dropping like a stone," said Tom Wilder of Friends of Night People, a Buffalo soup kitchen expecting to serve up to 300 Thanksgiving meals.

In California, where Proposition 187 was recently passed to deny most government services to illegal immigrants, at least one soup kitchen director sees a less charitable attitude.

Proposition 187 "has created or perhaps brought to the surface a lot of unspoken feeling from people directed not just at illegal immigrants, but poor people in general," said Willie Jordan of the Fred Jordan Mission along Los Angeles' Skid Row.

Westy Egmont, director of the Boston Food Bank, said: "1994 has been a tough year for donations. There is a level of compassion fatigue."

In New York City, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani has proposed closing a deficit by eliminating a \$6.3 million emergency food program. Without that money, many soup kitchens and pantries may be forced to close by the start of winter.

The soup kitchen at St. Bartholomew's Church in New York has already seen its government funding drop from 40 percent of its budget to about 25 percent in the past five years, said the Rev. Elizabeth Maxwell.

"It's frightening to think about what might happen to the people who come to eat here and who have so very little, if some of the cuts I've heard bandied about go through," she said.

Poll results: nation needs to improve

NEW YORK (AP) — A Harris Poll says Americans are feeling lukewarm about the country these days.

About two-thirds of those questioned rated the state of the nation as "only fair" or "poor." They cited crime, the government and the economy as the main reasons, according to a poll conducted by Louis Harris and Associates.

Only 2 percent of the 1,246 adults surveyed said the nation was in "excellent" shape in the days after the elections; 31 percent said it was "pretty good"; 49 percent said it was "only fair"; 18 percent rated it as "poor"; and 1 percent said they were not sure.

Of the 67 percent who said it was fair or poor, 18 percent cited crime as the reason; 15 percent said government, another 15 percent cited the economy and 10 percent cited "a lack of good jobs."

Other answers included a decline in family values (6 percent); President Clinton (4 percent); high taxes, foreign aid policy and Washington (3 percent each).

Asked to name the top two issues government should address, respondents most often mentioned crime and health care, by 37 and 30 percent, respectively.

Harris said it was the first time since the president was elected that health care was pushed out of first place. Taxes ranked third with 14 percent.

Teen cancer patient returns to school

BOSTON (AP) — When Billy Best ran away from home in a desperate bid to end his painful cancer treatments, the 16-year-old was afraid his parents or police might catch him.

But when the bus pulled away from Boston Oct. 26, a feeling of serenity replaced his anxiety.

"After a while I calmed down and realized that no one knew where I was. I was free," Billy told "A Current Affair" in an interview broadcast Tuesday.

The interview, conducted over the weekend at the Bests' home in suburban Norwell, contained Billy's first public comments since he returned home Saturday. The family was paid an undisclosed amount for talking to the syndicated show.

Billy ended up in Houston after riding the bus to New York City and Louisiana. He lived in an abandoned building and, later,

with a family that befriended him.

He called home Nov. 5 after seeing his parents, William and Susan Best, on TV pleading for him to return.

"I felt bad for them because the first time I called them they were blaming themselves for me running away. There was nothing they could have done," Billy said.

In a letter he left behind, Billy said he had decided to run away because he was afraid his cancer treatments were killing him instead of helping him. Billy has Hodgkin's disease, which affects the body's lymphatic system.

Doctors had told him he needed four more months of treatments to wipe out the remaining cancer around his windpipe.

"After each treatment I just came closer and closer to the final

decision to just leave," he said.

Billy returned Tuesday to his high school classes. He also discussed his future cancer treatments with his doctor, who refused to comment on the case.

Billy said he will not resume chemotherapy, which had caused his hair to fall out and left him feeling nauseous.

Some cancer specialists said he will not make a complete recovery without it.

"There are no alternative therapies in treating Hodgkin's disease to my knowledge," said Dr. Saul Rosenberg, professor of medicine and radiation oncology at the Stanford University Medical Center. "The chemotherapy and radiation are remarkably successful."

Billy said that since he first called home, he and his parents have reached an understanding about his future treatments.

Study: Lifesaving transplants delayed by refusal to release organs

CHICAGO (AP) — About 1,000 people a year may be going without lifesaving transplants because medical examiners refuse to release organs from the dead, usually for no good reason, a study indicates.

Thousands of people die each year awaiting organs, and many more linger on waiting lists, hoping organs will become available.

The study did not try to estimate directly the number of lives lost because of medical examiners' refusal to release organs, but most transplants are reserved for people with terminal or potentially deadly conditions.

Some medical examiners believe they might lose needed evidence in legal cases if they release organs, the researchers said in

Wednesday's issue of The Journal of the American Medical Association.

However, in areas of the country where medical examiners routinely release organs, apparently no legal case has ever suffered, the researchers said.

"There's no reason for this loss of human life to protect the judicial system. It's not necessary," said Teresa Shafer, lead author of the study and regional director of the LifeGift Organ Donation Center of North Texas in Fort Worth.

Seventy percent of all potential organ donors are cases that fall under the jurisdiction of medical examiners and coroners, Shafer's team reported. Medical examiners determine the cause of death in situations

such as accidents and homicides.

The study found that the rate at which they denied organ releases increased 65 percent from 1990 to 1992.

In 561 cases during that period, medical examiners refused to release organs to 39 organ procurement organizations that answered the researchers' survey. The 39 represent two-thirds of U.S. procurement agencies.

Extrapolating to all such organizations, the researchers said as many as 884 denials may have occurred. Since U.S. donors give an average of 3.37 organs each, 2,979 people may have been denied transplants over the three-year period, or about 1,000 a year, they said.

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