



EISENHOWER
HEALTH

24/7 CONNECTIONS

SPRING 2020

Way Ahead



Ronald and Sherrie Auen chose to move their lives and the H.N. and Frances C. Berger Foundation to the desert from the Los Angeles area in 1996. They didn't realize it at the time, but their decision would have a deep-lasting and positive impact on a remarkable number of non-profits in the Coachella Valley, including Eisenhower Health.

Ron and Sherrie had only been married a few years when they moved. It was definitely a case of opposites attracting. She was sophisticated and very social and he was a workaholic with a successful land-planning and construction business. As Sherrie's daughter, Catharine Reed, recalls, "When Mom met him, he had an El Camino, OP shorts and he was living on a boat." They were quite the team she observes, "He had a great business sense and she has the biggest heart in the world."

All of their lives were about to take an unexpected turn, sending their collective futures in a new direction. Sherrie

remembers a phone call Ron received, "Mr. Berger called him when he was in the hospital saying, 'I won't be here too long, but I want you to go check on things.' And he died the next day." Contact with the Bergers, his former in-laws, had revolved mostly around his son, their grandson, Richard, but it became clear they wanted Ron to run the Berger Foundation.

H.N. and Frances C. Berger, known as "Nor" and "Fran" were frugal, but charitable people. Early on, she was a Berkeley educated schoolteacher and he, an accountant at an oil company. Together, they began investing in real

Below

Sherrie, reliving fond memories of her beloved, Ron, with a replica of the sign for the street dedicated to him at Eisenhower Health main campus.



Ron Auen WAY



“ Ron liked to provide services to charities to help them, guide them in charting their path and that’s what we did. ”

estate and then developing it. Building on their success, Nor saw opportunity in the savings and loan business. He worked constantly, quietly amassing an impressive fortune. His contemporaries were the likes of Mark Taper and Howard Ahmanson, two of L.A.’s best-known philanthropists, but Nor was a very private man, who shunned opportunities for recognition. However, the Bergers were not shy about giving and the foundation they started in 1961 at their kitchen table was created to “help people help themselves” by focusing on education, health care and social services.

The Bergers lived so simply that even in 1988 when Nor died, they still didn’t have a clothes dryer. According to Christopher McGuire, the president and chairman of the board of the Berger Foundation, Mrs. Berger was concerned about a future without her husband, “She asked her daughter if they had enough money to live on. I think at the time, it was about \$200 million. So Joan said, ‘I think you do Mom,’” he says with a grin.

With Nor’s death, half of the family fortune went to the foundation and overnight it ballooned to a \$100M operation. Fran was extremely fond of Ron, holding him in high regard. He had promised to look after the family, so he agreed to lead the foundation, running it with his son Richard. Tragically, within a year Richard succumbed to a

case of viral pneumonia at 25. At that point, Ron accepted the responsibility of upholding the Berger family legacy, taking the helm of the foundation.

In 1990, Ron needed help and began to seek out trusted friends with the right skill sets. “Ron was the visionary, Lew (Webb) was the finance guy, I handled grants and was spokesman for the foundation and Doug (Vance) was the real estate man and that’s how we divvied it up,” notes Chris who adds that they agreed decisions would be made by committee. Ron had no patience with the corporate day-to-day and freeing him up to focus on the big picture was about to become critical. Fran Berger died in 1991 and the foundation doubled in size, so growing and managing the organization successfully was essential.

Ron and Sherrie became trustees of the Auen Foundation in 1991. The charitable foundation focuses on end-of-life issues and intergenerational programs. To date, the Auen Foundation has distributed 1,400 plus grants to Coachella Valley charities. Sherrie, as program director, and Catharine, as senior program officer, ran the day-to-day operations until recently, when a succession plan shifted Catharine into the role of vice president of charitable programs for the Berger Foundation, where she was already serving as program director and board member.

Left

Christopher McGuire, President and Chairman, H.N. and Frances C. Berger Foundation, stands near art inspired by the founders. Busts of the Bergers created from full bronze statues and a painting commissioned from a photograph of the Bergers visiting a favorite destination, the Matterhorn in the Alps.



Above
Sherrie Auen and daughter, Catharine Reed, who championed partnerships through the Auen Foundation, looking forward to philanthropic projects ahead.

The size and impact of the Berger Foundation is not to be underestimated. Since 1988, it has expended more than \$800M for charitable endeavors throughout the U.S. Currently 80% of the foundation's grants are gifted to desert charities. Catharine was instrumental in launching the Coachella Valley Spotlight in 2008 with television partner News Channel 3, which selects 12 local charities a year for \$25K grants.

Sadly, Ron Auen lost his battle with a rare cancer, sarcomatoid mesothelioma, last November, and the foundation staff is coming to grips with missing their friend and visionary. Fortunately, Ron was a dynamic leader who trusted people to do their jobs and shared his philosophy on running things and choosing worthy causes. Catharine learned the lessons well and will apply his yardsticks, in her new position, as the board continues to identify non-profits in need.

"One is, we're always looking for a 'spark plug' – someone who is going to partner with us and really build that partnership – and the other is basically the accountability of what we do in philanthropy. He was very much about accountability," she says.

Chris agrees the "spark plug" factor was always key to winning Ron's support, "This is one thing he liked at Eisenhower, people like Michael Landes and Aubrey Serfling. He could say 'Hey, I want to talk to you, let's do this.'"

The relationship has been a strong one with \$16M coming from the Berger Foundation, plus contributions from the Auen Foundation to various Eisenhower projects and more on the horizon. In December, Ron's support and contributions were acknowledged when a road on Eisenhower Health's main campus was designated Ron Auen Way.

Chris, along with Sherrie and Catharine, are touched by the tribute and pleased to see Ron honored for growing the foundation to a point where it impacts the lives of so many Coachella Valley residents. And Sherrie is especially proud of their long affiliation with Eisenhower and the special care Ron received through 24/7. "There is nothing like 24/7. It was a godsend for us. Ron spent so much time at Eisenhower that I began to wonder...is it his illness or his fondness for the 24/7 nurses?"

*Ron was always thinking.
Wherever we were, his computer was there.
The foundation was in his heart and mind 24/7.*