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Scholarship a life of savings

'Frugal' former cook gives NKU \$81,000 endowment upon death

BY HOWARD MCEWEN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

When Etta Cowan died last September she gave an \$81,000 endowment to Northern Kentucky University for scholarship assistance to African-American students from Kenton County.

The 104-year-old wasn't a former corporate executive, business owner, or lawyer - she was a domestic cook.

"I know that she lived frugally and put money in four bank accounts from her wages every week for 60 years," said Cowan's friend of 40 years and executrix Jenny Stanton.

Born in 1901, Cowan was 67 when NKU was founded. She never went to college, but understood its value.

"As the endowment grows year after year, Etta will offer young people an education to change and improve their lives," said Stanton.

Cowan was born in rural Stanford, Ky., about 45 miles south of Lexington. She worked for the Youtsey and Lawton families in Covington for much of her life. Her husband William drove a Covington bus, then retired to work at a doughnut shop until he died in 1985. The two moved into their Russell Street home after their wedding in 1940, and Etta lived there until she moved to an apartment in 1997. They didn't have children.

"When you take a look at the fact we're a young university, a gift of this magnitude is still a very significant gift," said NKU Vice President of University Advancement Gerard St. Amand.

St. Amand reported that NKU received 106 gifts greater than \$100,000 in 2005. This was double the amount in 1999.

The largest individual gift NKU has received was \$3 million from David Iler, the owner of the construction firm that broke ground on NKU's Highland Heights campus.

After a lifetime writing weekly checks of \$5 for the offering plate each Sunday, Cowan left an amount equal to her NKU donation to the St. James African Methodist Episcopal in Covington.

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