

Entrepreneur of the Month

Maxine Moul

Home: Lincoln, Nebraska
Age: 58
Family: Husband Francis, 1 daughter (deceased) 1 son and 1 grandchild
Education: B.A. in Journalism, University of Nebraska, 1969
Graduate work towards an M.B.A., University of Nebraska
E-mail: maxinemoul@nebcommfound.org
Website: www.nebcommfound.org

Nebraskan Mixes Entrepreneurship with Social Conscious to Benefit her Native State

From her start as an entrepreneur to her stint as lieutenant governor to her current role as a foundation administrator, Maxine Moul weaves a common thread along her chosen career path – the economic health of rural Nebraska.

Growing up on a farm near Oakland, Neb., Moul learned to appreciate the value of hard work and risk-taking and developed a strong faith in her fellow Nebraskans.

“Nebraskans have a creativity and a passion about making things work,” Moul said.

She’s dedicated a good part of her 58 years to business, civic and political activities that benefit rural Nebraska.

The News Business

Born in Burt County, Nebraska, Moul attended a one-room school from grades 1-8 and graduated from Oakland High School in 1965.

Moul met her husband Francis in 1969. By 1970, they started working together to found Maverick Media, Inc., a printing and publishing firm, by purchasing Francis’ hometown newspaper in Syracuse, Neb.

“(Francis and I) were barely engaged at the time,” Moul said, “But we both had journalism degrees and at the time it just made sense to start a business in journalism.”

Eventually consisting of five weekly rural newspapers, two magazines and eight free shopping guides, Maverick Media newspapers reported on local activities and politics, and the Moul family took editorial stands on local and state issues, including increased funding for higher education.

“To get us started, Francis put together a group of angel investors. They were people in the Syracuse area who wanted to see locally owned media,” Moul said.

The investors’ instincts paid off in stable employment for the area. Maverick Media started out with one full-time employee and 2 part-time workers; when the Moul family sold the business in 1988, there were 120 employees, 80 of them in Syracuse.

In addition, the bulk of Maverick Media’s earnings came from out-of-state printing jobs, so the company brought in much needed cash flow for the community.

“My entrepreneurial learning came from my husband,” Moul said. “He was the idea person and I was the detail person.”

By the time Maxine took over financial management of Maverick Media in 1975, she had experience in every aspect of producing a community newspaper. She had written sports stories and feature stories, covered city government, edited, taken pictures and worked in the dark room and set type. In the 1980s she was president and CEO of Maverick Media.

Moul received numerous journalism awards from state and national press associations and the Nebraska Press Women.

All along the way, the Moul family were highly engaged in their community – especially in economic development issues. Through their involvement with the Chamber of Commerce, the couple helped attract new businesses to Syracuse. And then-Governor Bob Kerrey asked Moul to serve on the state Economic Development Commission.

“When we sold the business in 1988, our major concern was to be sure and keep it local,” Moul said. Maverick Media is still a local business today, with a strong history of supporting rural areas.

Political Service

In 1964, Moul traveled to Washington, D.C. with her 4-H group. Her and her girlfriend were invited to meet their local congressional representative. But rather than meet “that conservative guy,” Moul and a friend wandered the halls of Congress until they came upon Sen. Robert Kennedy’s office.

“We just walked in and asked to meet him,” Moul said. “Then he ended up talking to us for a long time. Here we were in our 4-H uniforms with white gloves. And I still have the glove that shook the Senator’s hand.”

Ever since that chance meeting, Moul has had a passion for politics. She grew up in a Republican family, but, “I went to the University (of Nebraska) and changed politics.”

“But although I was against the (Vietnam) war, I always supported the troops,” she said, adding that she was commander of Angel Flight – an auxiliary of the Air Force ROTC at the University—and instituted a project for members to write to soldiers serving in Vietnam.

Moul and her husband have also participated in Democratic state and national conventions.

In 1990, she decided politics was the place for her to be. After some research, Moul made the decision that the lieutenant governor’s office would give her a chance to carve out her own programs. At that time in Nebraska, the governor and lieutenant governor ran separate races.

She won the seat in 1990 and served nearly three years.

At the governor’s request, Moul crafted the administration’s rural development policy and served as chair of the Nebraska Rural Development Commission. She was also a founding officer of the Nebraska Partnership for Rural Development.

“Coming from a farming family, I wanted to help small communities survive,” Moul said. “We had to deal with population loss and economic downturns in commodity agriculture.”

Moul said that there were a number of instances during her political career that made it difficult to be the only woman in the room. For example, a trade mission to China in 1994 brought an uncomfortable moment when the Chinese delegation ignored her presence. But when then-Gov. Nelson introduced her as second in command, they learned to show her respect.

“Gov. Nelson always made it clear to people that he relied on me,” Moul said.

Looking back at her tenure as lieutenant governor, Moul is most proud of creating the Nebraska Community Foundation. After studying a similar program in South Dakota and performing feasibility studies, she recommended funding for a Nebraska Foundation in 1993. Gov. Nelson approved the Foundation’s first Board of Directors and made it self-perpetuating thereafter.

After her stint as lieutenant governor, Moul joined Gov. Nelson’s cabinet to direct the Nebraska Department of Economic Development for five years. Department activities ranged from

business recruitment and tourism development to economic research and existing business assistance. During Moul's directorship, legislation was passed that included the Nebraska Microenterprise Partnership Fund, helping small businesses.

Life in the Non-profit Sector

As if a full career in business and then politics wasn't enough, Moul went on to help run the Nebraska Community Foundation. She now serves as president emeritus, with a focus on fund-raising, endowment building, communications, strategic directions and public policy.

She's currently working to get a law passed in the Nebraska Legislature that would allow tax credits for charitable contributions.

The Community Foundation is a nonprofit, charitable organization providing financial management, strategic development and education and training services to communities, organizations and donors throughout Nebraska since 1993.

Moul helped put together a goal of raising \$25 million by the year 2000, and the Foundation recently celebrated the fact that \$45 million has gone out to work in communities. The Foundation's current assets exceed \$20 million, with another \$20 million in expectancies from known planned gifts and bequests.

"The best thing for me is to go out into these communities across the state and say, "I had a part in that," Moul said, citing a new library in Gothenburg and a new telemarketing business in Chadron. "It's not that I made it happen, but we could get resources to people. So much of it is empowerment, letting people know that what they are doing is important to the whole state."

Moul's dedication to rural economic development in Nebraska stems partly from her family history and her strong women role models.

She's proud to relate the story of her grandmother traveling alone to Nebraska in the early 20th century from her native Sweden to meet her new husband for the first time.

And she recalls her mother's hard work on their diversified family farm.

Now, she writes her thoughts and hopes in a journal for her baby granddaughter.

A high profile woman in the state's rural economic development circles, Moul is a role model for young women leaders, sharing her hope that Nebraskans will prevail over tough economic circumstances.

"I've never been jaded about the future," Moul said.

-By Lisa Bauer, 05/04

For more information on...

... the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, go to www.ruraleship.org

... the Nebraska Community Foundation, go to www.nebcommfound.org