Robert Ray, Drake 50

Mr. Iow

He answers his own office phone with a simple "Bob Ray."

The ex-governor of 14 years, long out of public office but still very much in the public view, is a true Iowa icon.

By Tom Fruehling



liked and trusted than any other politician in state history. He was elected to an unprecedented five terms in office, serving from 1969 to 1983, then embarked on a distinguished career with two of Iowa's largest insurance companies.

When a broad-based non-partisan coalition recently formed to lobby legislators for Gov. Tom Vilsack's Iowa Values Fund, it turned to Ray as their spokesman. The thinking was that if Bob Ray thought it was a good idea, well, then, it must be the thing to do.

Over the years, he's been given dozens of honors, most recently a lifetime humanitarian award from the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library Association and the Des Moines Register's first Iowa Star Award for community involvement.

He's still promoting the ambitious Iowa Child project. He raises funds for Keep Iowa Beautiful and the Iowa Games.

These days, in addition to serving on myriad boards and volunteer positions. Ray says his "passion" is the Character Counts program in schools and communities that he spearheaded in connection with the state's sesquicentennial celebration in 1996.

He chaired that effort. Indeed, he seems to lead anything with which he's involved.

"A group of 20 of us met for several years to plan for it," Ray recalls. "And when it was over, we wanted to leave a legacy. Not just build a monument, but do something that would make a significant change in our state and would affect future generations."

Scott Raecker, an Iowa native who was lured back from a big-time business position in Vail, Colo., to serve as director of the 150th anniversary commission, says that from the time he was first interviewed for the job in 1992, Ray had a vision in mind.

"The first question he asked was what I thought we could do to really impact people's lives and have a positive influence on the quality of life in Iowa."

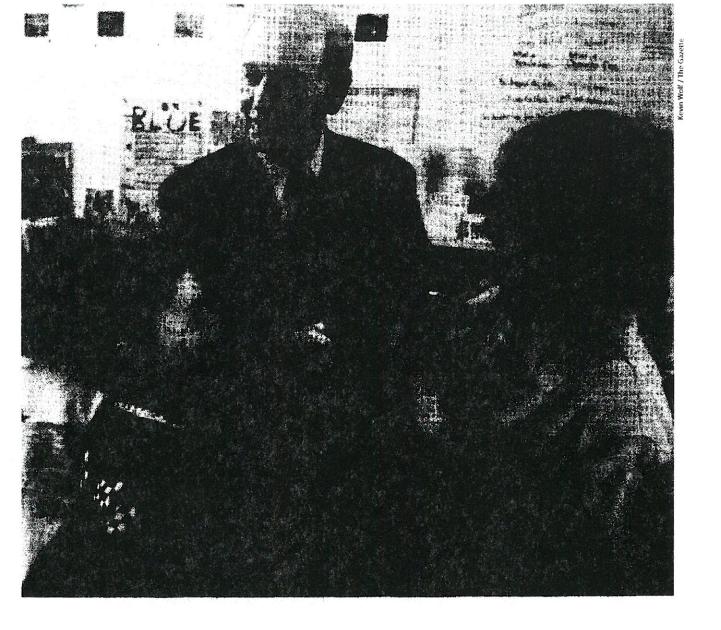
Raecker says it was Ray's idea to somehow enhance how people treat each other, to improve civility and to show respect. In short, to make decisions that reflect good character.

"We knew what we wanted to do." Ray says. "We just didn't know how to go about it."

The upshot was the creation of the Institute for Character Development, based at Drake University, which began to look around the country for programs that fit its mission.

What the group settled on was Character Counts, a California-developed system of character education based on six





sillars of conduct: trustworthiness, espect, responsibility, fairness, caring nd citizenship.

"It's not a curriculum," Ray explains. It's a way to change how people think and orm a different way of life. It's a way to timulate pride in schools and throughout those communities."

It's now being used in more than 350 chools throughout the state, including nany in Eastern Iowa; some cities in other arts of the state have also adopted it.

"I'm so passionate about it because I've een too many places where it has had a eal impact." Ray says. "In the schools, iscipline rates have dropped dramatially. The kids are happy and helping thers, and the teachers can teach without unishing students. Kids don't learn in tat kind of environment.

"With Character Counts, everybody ins."

Raecker, who is now executive director of the Institute for Character Development in addition to having served three terms as a state representative from Urbandale, says the success of Character Counts is due in large part to the guiding principles Ray has exhibited in a long career of service.

"He is the epitome of civility and good character. He is just a great role model. He's always been committed to giving back."

DEMOCRATIC GOV. Tom Vilsack, who is a strong supporter of the Character Counts program, also has high praise for the onetime Republican governor who brought the idea to fruition.

"He's the embodiment of the program." says Vilsack, whose path has crossed frequently with Ray since he moved to Iowa in 1975. "When he was governor, he worked with and was respected by both sides. He's a good guy."

He says Ray's widespread credibility provided a key boost to Vilsack's Iowa Values Fund, particularly among some reluctant Republicans.

"He is universally liked and respected," says Gedar Rapids attorney Wythe Willey, who served as Ray's chief of staff from 1970 to 1981. "He was always hard-working and dedicated to his job and to the state of Iowa. And he could get things done."

Among many other accomplishments. he credits his old boss with removing the sales tax from food and drugs, revamping school aid and increasing funding for the state's colleges, helping get the community college system off the ground and forming the Department of Transportation.

He also recalls when Ray once grounded the entire fleet of Iowa National

Born:

Sept. 26, 1928, in Des Moines

U.S. Army:

1946-48

College:

Drake University, 1952, business administration; Drake University law school, 1954

Marriage:

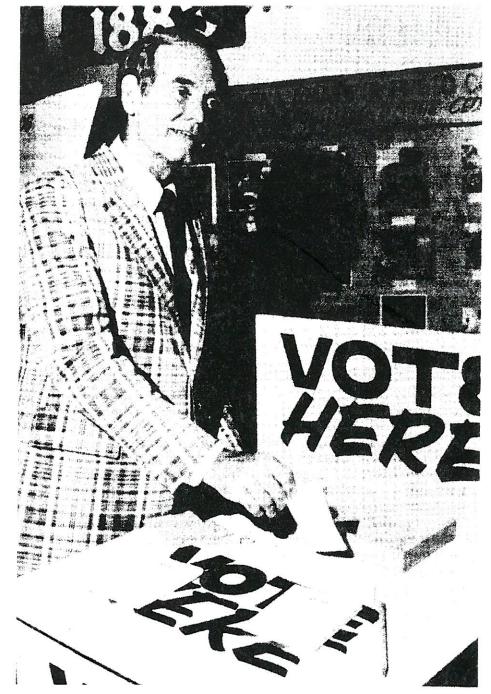
Billie Lee Harnberger, Dec. 21, 1951

Family:

Wife, Billie: three daughters, Randi, Lu Ann and Vicki; eight grandchildren

Career:

Attorney with Lawyer, Pawyer, Ray & Crouch, Des Moines, 1955-1968;
Chairman, Iowa Republican party, 1963;
Governor of Iowa, 1969-83; U.S. representative to the United Nations, 1984; President, Life Investors Inc. Cedar Rapids, 1983-89; Chairman, Iowa Sesquicentennial Commission, 1991-96; President, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Iowa, Des Moines, 1989-1997; Interim mayor of Des Moines, 1997; Interim president of Drake University, 1998-99



Gov. Bob Ray votes in a Gazette (Cedar Rapids) straw poli in 1980.

Guard aircraft — much to the chagrin of federal officials — because of safety concerns.

"That shook up Washington, D.C.," Willey says.

But Vilsack and others feel Ray's most lasting legacy is his unceasing efforts to bring Southeast Asia refugees to Iowa in the aftermath of the Vietnam War.

"He literally saved thousands of lives and impacted hundreds of thousands of others," the current governor says. "One thing a lot of people don't see is how revered he is in the Asian-American community. They still have a great deal of respect for him."

KEN QUINN, executive director since 1999 of the Des Moines-based World Food Prize Foundation, worked with Ray on the resettlement programs and concurs with Vilsack's assessment.

Quinn, a career State Department diplomat who served six years in Vietnam through the fall of Saigon in 1974, came back to Iowa to work for Ray in 1978 through a loan program with the State Department.

During the first wave of Vietnamese who came to the United States following the war, several thousand came to Iowa. When several thousand Laotians asked to settle as a group in one place rather than be

scattered around the country, Ray invited them to lows, with the state serving as their official sponsor.

In the late 1970s, an international crisis cropped up when thousands upon thousands of Vietnamese tried to escape the country in rickety boats.

"Bob Ray led the charge to help these people by saying the state of Iowa would take more of them," says Quinn, appointed as ambassador to Cambodia by President Clinton, "He provided global leadership."

In the end, about 5,000 of the so-called "boat people" ended up in the state.

Later, Ray visited Thailand and took pictures of the hundreds dying each day from starvation and illness. The pictures were printed worldwide, leading to massive relief efforts. Ray started lowa Sends Help to Aid Refugees and End Starvation (SHARES), which collected \$600,000 in the last month of 1979 alone to send food overseas.

"Once again," says Quinn, "Bob Ray was at the forefront. He and Iowans reached round the world to save lives. He was a force to bring about change in the world."

FOR HIS PART. Bay says all the relief efforts were samply part of what he saw as his humanitarian duty.

People were dying. We couldn't sit out here in the land of plenty and watch people die. We couldn't turn our backs on them," he says. "The rewards have been enormous. The refugees who came here are hard-working people with family values.

They've done a lot for the state of lowa." Bay, who retired in 1997 after 14 years as a chief executive officer for insurance companies in Cedar Rapids and Des Moines, says he stays as busy as ever, indeed, he doesn't find time for the vard work he loves or for his photography hobby.

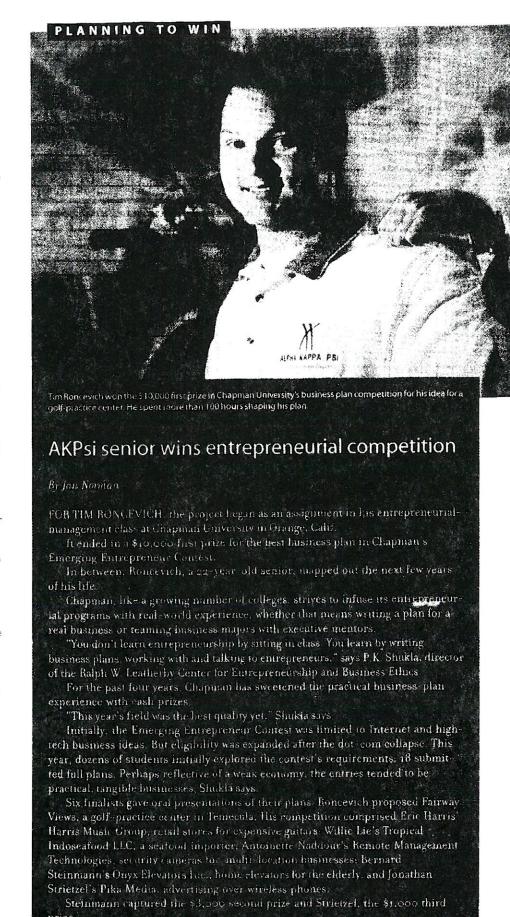
"We don't even watch television," says his wife, Billie, also an active volunteer who heads the board of the Blank Park Zoo in Des Momes.

The couple first met at a summer church camp in ninth grade when Billie was named queen and picked Bob as her escort.

In sum. Ray says he's satisfied with his life. Twe always felt an obligation to help. And

thank God. I have had the opportunity to be involved with a lot of others in good works." Si

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"I noticed a lot of these plans were not contest driven; they actually believed in

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