



## Irene Doretta Meagel - *Philanthropy*

She could have afforded a fleet of limousines and the staff of chauffeurs to drive them.

Instead, the late Irene Doretta Meagel lived a simple life in Wheeling during almost the entire 20th century, relying on her feet, her friends or public transportation to get her around the city.

When she died on July 21, 1999, just a few weeks shy of her 99th birthday, the surprise she left for her friends and acquaintances was that she had an estate that would be valued today at more than \$22 million and which she left almost entirely to charity.

Meagel was born in South Wheeling on Oct. 5, 1900, the youngest of the three children of Wheeling natives William and Nellie Kraft Meagel, who were children of immigrant Germans.

For many years, her family lived at 3535 Eoff St. Meagel's life centered around Wheeling. One of her brothers, William, died at 9 months of age in 1899 even before she was born. Her father, who was a potter at the North Wheeling Pottery, died in 1920. After the 1936 flood, the family moved to Forest Road in the Oakmont area of Wheeling.

Meagel made her home with her mother and her elder brother, Lawrence, until their deaths in 1961 and 1987 respectively. Lawrence had worked as chief clerk of the B&O Railroad freight office for 46 years. Meagel herself was a 1917 graduate of Wheeling High School and was an employee of Conservative Life Insurance until 1945.

She was an active member of her church, Trinity Lutheran Church, located at 3536 Eoff St., right across the street from her childhood home. She was a charter member of the Beta Sigma Phi Circle of Friendship, a women's group founded in the 1930's to foster friendship, and was a faithful attendee at her local AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) meetings.

At her death on July 21, 1999, Meagel's philanthropy became known. The estate she left in trust benefits 16 charities. Already, over \$2 million has flowed from her estate to the 16 non-profit organizations. Under terms of her will, almost \$1 million per year will be distributed to the 16 groups.

"Irene Meagel's generosity will benefit her community and so very many people for years to come," a spokeswoman for the Wheeling Hall of Fame Board said. She decided that the money she and her family had accumulated should benefit those less fortunate and should nurture the institutions that had made her

life a happy, if simple, one, or that she felt had enriched the community she loved.

A main beneficiary was Trinity Lutheran Church. Her bequest came as a surprise to church officials who had no idea she had such wealth, but her gift was most fortuitous because it helped the church resume the Meals on Wheels program after fire caused extensive damage to the church and program headquarters.

Other agencies that receive bequests from Meagel include the Wheeling Society for Crippled Children, Parks System Trust Fund of Wheeling, West Liberty State College Foundation, Community Foundation for Mount Zion Cemetery, West Virginia Northern Community College Foundation, the West Virginia University Foundation and the Wheeling Symphony Society.

Other beneficiaries include Wheeling Health Right, Lions Club of Wheeling, Children's Home of Wheeling, King's Daughters Child Care Centers, Salvation Army, The House of the Carpenter, the American Heart Association and the American Cancer Society.