Ambassador & Mrs. Carol Price: On Volunteerism, Passion, and Eisenhower

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For Carol Swanson Price and her husband, former Ambassador to the Court of St. James's, Charles Price, the Coachella Valley and Eisenhower Medical Center are deeply rooted in their lives…and have been since well before Eisenhower Medical Center was even built. Carol spent significant periods of her childhood in the desert expanse whose open horizons characterized the Coachella Valley. And it was those early years spent here that Carol credits with her devotion to Eisenhower Medical Center.

Carol's father, W. Clarke Swanson, was the former President of Swanson Foods – pioneers of the TV Dinner® and other frozen foods. Having graced the cover of Fortune magazine, Swanson had just merged the Swanson Company with the Campbell Soup Company, where he served as Vice Chairman and a Director of the Board. In 1961, just a few months after celebrating his 25th wedding anniversary, the corporate magnate was golfing with former President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Freeman Gosden ("Andy," of Amos 'n' Andy), and his brother and business partner, Gilbert Swanson. The foursome was on the sixth tee of the Thunderbird Country Club (incidentally, about 100 yards from the Swanson's home), when Clarke suffered a massive cerebral hemorrhage. The central Coachella Valley had no hospital nearby at that time, and Clarke Swanson died. "Whether you're sharing your time, your financial resources, or both, the personal satisfaction is tremendous..."

"My father was just 51 years old when he died," explains Carol. "He was a vital, active man, and as far as anyone could determine, was in perfect health. His death was a shocking, deep, and tragic loss for our family."

Florence Swanson, Carol's mother, was convinced that had there been a hospital nearby, her husband's life might well have been saved. It was a conviction shared by her family, especially her daughter, Carol.

Mrs. Swanson soon became one of the first advocates of building a centrally located hospital in the Coachella Valley. She rallied friends Dolores Hope, Peter Kiewit, Walter Annenberg, and Paul Jenkins, among others, to raise funds for the hospital. "They shared the vision, as well as the burden. They were determined, and their dedication soon paid off," says Carol.

Bob and Dolores Hope donated the initial 80 acres of land that Eisenhower Medical Center soon came to occupy. Trustees, friends, and the Bob Hope Desert Classic (then called the "Palm Springs Golf Classic") raised funds for the new nonprofit hospital.

"Charlie and I were married in January of 1969. In November of that year, Mother invited us for the groundbreaking ceremony of Eisenhower," says Carol. Of course, the Prices were on hand for the opening and dedication ceremony in 1971 as well; they've been involved with most every major Eisenhower milestone since.

"It was an honor to have been present at the first groundbreaking in 1969, and again at the groundbreaking ceremony for the new Walter and Leonore Annenberg Hospital Pavilion on January 12, 2007," says Charlie. "We have seen the hospital grow and mature in such a way that is very gratifying. Eisenhower has attracted dedicated nurses, volunteers, and doctors from all over – doctors who were at the Mayo Clinic and Johns Hopkins, and other worldrenowned institutions. Now they're here. Could there be a more compelling testament to the caliber of medical attention one receives at Eisenhower Medical Center?"

The late Walter Annenberg and Leonore Annenberg were special friends to Florence and Clarke Swanson, and important fixtures in Carol's life from an early age; Carol and Charlie's close friendship with the Annenberg's has been a constant in their lives over the decades. "Lee and Walter were – and remain – a real inspiration to me in life. When my father died, Walter was so good to our family. He said, 'I expect great things from you, Carol.'"

"We are devoted and fortunate friends of Lee, and we are filled with the utmost admiration for her and Walter's vision," shares Carol. "I love her as if she were family. Lee and Walter have always shared their time, and donated their money, to the benefit of others. Their enormous generosity to the hospital is just one small example of their vast philanthropic endeavors over the past 50 plus years. Lee loves Eisenhower and is dedicated to making good things happen here."

"Personally, we are so blessed to have Lee in our lives. But so, too, is the Coachella Valley blessed to be the beneficiary of Lee and Walter's generosity. The Annenberg legacy will endure long after every one of us is gone," says Carol.

A Trustee of Eisenhower Medical Center since 1996, and currently serving as a Director, and a member of the Board of Governors as well as other committees, Carol has inherited her mother's raison d'être for Eisenhower. "The hospital has a firm and resolute leadership, and a very strong board," shares Carol. "It's exciting to be part of it…especially now, as we usher in a new era of technological advancement and impressive growth."

Carol's enthusiasm extends to her philanthropy and volunteerism. "It is one of the greatest pleasures to be able to give money in support of things you truly believe in," shares Carol. "But volunteerism has its own real rewards. Whether you're sharing your time, your financial resources, or both, the personal satisfaction is tremendous, especially if you are making a positive impact on people's lives. And Eisenhower so clearly does that, in spades." "When you survive something potentially catastrophic," Carol explains, "you wake up each day with a broad smile, and a renewed vigor...and a real thanks to God."

Carol has served, and currently does serve, on a wide range of boards in addition to Eisenhower's: the James Madison Council of the Library of Congress; Sotheby's Holdings, Inc., New York; The Savoy Group of Hotels, PLC; the American Associates of the Royal Academy Trust; and the American Museum in Britain.

Twenty years ago, Lee Annenberg, Carol Price, and Wendy Leurs – all three of whom had represented America abroad at the side of their Ambassadorial husbands – founded the Foundation for Arts & Preservation in Embassies, which works in conjunction with the U.S. State Department and private donors to acquire, maintain, and present art and sculpture in American embassies around the world. Each of these ladies remains committed, and very involved with this successful program.

"I have been fully engaged on many things – the nonprofit board, and at the corporate level – but while I have enjoyed the corporate jobs I've had, I found volunteering to be the most fulfilling," Carol shares.

In 1981, Charlie was appointed by President Reagan to be Ambassador to Belgium. Two years later, in 1983, he was appointed Ambassador to Great Britain, where he served until 1989. "You're also volunteering because the pace is grueling, and the pressure on your family is significant, especially, as in our case, with three young children in tow," the Prices explain of their many years in government service. "The amount of hours we put in every day, and the many challenges we faced, were enormous. That said, government service is a satisfying, unique, and great honor, and we were so fortunate to have represented our country in such outstanding posts."

Ambassador Price returned to banking in 1989 as Chairman of the Board of Ameribanc, Inc, which later became U.S. Bank®. A distinguished corporate leader, Charlie Price has also served as a director of British Airways, Hanson PLC, US Industries, Inc., The New York Times Company, Texaco® and Sprint®.

When Charlie retired in 1996, he and Carol decided to make the desert their winter home. However, it was only recently that Carol experienced the extraordinary care provided at Eisenhower in a dramatic and very personal way.

"Carol is a shining example of someone so fortunate to have quality and comprehensive care at her disposal," explains Charlie. "Because in the process of evaluating an entirely different problem, her doctors discovered that she had a significant brain aneurysm. Nobody was looking for it, and it was not the purpose of her visit to Eisenhower at all. That they did discover it, demonstrates just how professional and dedicated is the staff here. Thank God for them, and Eisenhower."

It was just last fall that Joel Hirschberg,MD, Section Chief of Arthritis/Rheumatology, and Brian Herman, MD,Medical Director of the Eisenhower Imaging Center, discovered Carol's aneurysm. Thanks to the comprehensive care that she received at Eisenhower Medical Center, Carol is alive today.

"Had it not been for that discovery," says Charlie, "it's entirely possible that Carol wouldn't be with us today. And had her father had the same opportunity to visit Eisenhower after his hemorrhage, he may well have lived a much longer life."

"When you survive something potentially catastrophic," Carol explains, "you wake up each day with a broad smile, and a renewed vigor…and a real thanks to God. For He's

given you another chance at life. I'm so thankful for it. I have a new spring in my step, and I feel remarkably blessed. Blessed by God, and blessed by the great doctors and health care professionals at Eisenhower."

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