

Talking with Gates

Microsoft chief says major giving must wait

Editor's note: The following exchange appeared recently in The Washington Post. It was excerpted from an interview with Bill Gates, chairman of Microsoft Corp.

POST: A personal question: You've made an extraordinary amount of money. People in the past who have made that much money have left great monuments in the society...Have you thought about what you'd like to do, if anything?

GATES: Well, I think there's prob-

ably a great number of people who made a lot of money who didn't leave monuments. You just don't know their names. You know, I'm in a phase of my life where my focus is working at Microsoft and seeing whether we can maintain our leadership. So for the next 10 to 20 years, that'll be my primary focus. I've decided not to give money to my children in huge amounts - I say that without even meeting them. [Gates currently has no children.] But if I still have substantial wealth when I'm in my late

fifties or sixties, then I'll really focus attention on that. At this stage, there are some things - like education, United Way, population control - that I'm giving \$10 million to \$20 million a year to. But it's more to get my toe in the water.

POST: One of the big worries, obviously, about this country is the growing divide between haves and have-nots and the extent to which that might be accelerated by computer power. From what I've read so far about your book ["The Road Ahead"]

and in your book, I don't see you addressing that question.

GATES: Well remember, the book is written by a technologist, and the goal is to take what I know about and those are fairly technical things. In terms of computers, if there's someone who has a little bit of motivation, a little bit of self-confidence as a youngster, having access to a computer can be a wonderful thing. When [Andrew] Carnegie put libraries out there, it wasn't like, "Hah, no more haves versus have-nots. Hey, there's a

bunch of books there!" I mean, he's actually one of the most, most hard-core individuals - "People who don't want to read, screw 'em! They're worthless! All I'm trying to do is help the ones who are sturdy and energetic!" I'm not saying I agree with that. But if there's a role for computers, it's where you've already got some stability and some structure for them to be used.

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SOS director Joseph Canty doesn't care who gets the credit; he's just glad Williams, Croom and Cal-Tone are around to help. Canty met Williams in 1991 when he was on the board of directors of the Wilder's Grove Youth Center. He invited her with the hope that he could convince her to help with fundraising. Williams responded by organizing a golf tournament for the organization.

Four years later, Canty called on Williams again to develop business support for SOS.

"She's been the catalyst for bringing business people into the program," says Canty, who lists Arby's, Glaxo Wellcome and Bruegger's Bagels among the businesses that Williams has helped shepherd into the SOS flock.

"She's not just giving her money, but she's giving her time - she'll talk to other businesses, work with a child or roll up sleeves and paint a wall," says Canty. "She'll do anything to get the job done."

Corporate executive, buddy of the governor, nonprofit hero - not bad for a small-town girl from Smithfield who skipped college to help raise her four younger siblings. Williams says nobody's more surprised by her success than she is.

"I never thought I'd meet the governor," she quips. "And I never thought I'd ever have a job like [the one at Cal-Tone]. I'm just a worker bee."

Williams got her first experience in the beehive in 1971 at the Sylvania TV factory in Smithfield. It was an experience she keeps in mind when she volunteers with SOS.

"A month after I graduated from high school, I was working, I made \$5.50 an hour and I was totally unprepared for the job world, just like a lot of these kids [in SOS] aren't ready," says Williams. "That's why I'm so big on this program - people need to tell these kids that education is important."

Williams planned to continue her

own education after high school, but a bitter divorce between her parents forced her into the job world prematurely. After a year at Sylvania, she moved to the Raleigh YMCA, found a job in the records office of the Department of Corrections and started sending checks home to Smithfield. For eight years, Williams worked for the state Department of Corrections during the day and added odd jobs during the evening.

"By 1980, I was working from 7 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Corrections, then I'd go out to Crabtree [Valley Mall] and manage a crafts store. When that ended at 10 p.m., I'd decorate windows at North Hills and The Emporium until 2 a.m. It was crazy."

Williams quit her job at the Department of Corrections in 1980 to start Capitol City Landscaping. But it wasn't long hours or a green thumb that put a rake in her hand.

"There wasn't enough money," Williams says. "By then, all of my brothers and sisters were in school and they needed books and transportation and tuition. I'd always been the one who mowed the lawn at home, so I bought a used truck and started knocking on doors, looking for business."

Within a few years, Williams had added interior decorating to the business and was turning a neat profit. But even more important, she says, her three sisters and brother were all college graduates.

"I didn't pay for everything - they did a lot of it on their own," Williams says. "But they are my family and it was my responsibility to help them."

Williams was still in the landscaping business when she met Milton Croom in 1988.

"I was landscaping a development owned by one of my customers, and all the homeowners kept complaining that the paint on their homes was peeling," she says. "I had used Cal-Tone paints before, so I went in to talk to them about selling paint to the developer. I was just trying to solve a problem so these people would stop bothering me about the paint and I could get my work done."

"I had my head in a 600-gallon

bucket of paint," chuckles Croom, who was 78 at the time. "She started talking about doing some decorating and then we decided to put her to work on sales without a salary. After a few months, I offered her a job at a store manager's salary."

Of her early days with Croom and Cal-Tone, Williams says: "He worked me like a dog. I'd work half the night for him for no pay, then go out and do landscaping during the day."

"He's very rigid, he's relentless. He always told me, 'If you don't want to do it my way, then quit.'"

Both Croom, who has no children of his own, and Williams, who is unmarried, readily admit that they have found something in the other that was missing in their lives. For his part, Croom admits to having a "father-daughter relationship" with Williams, but is still quick to point out that "everything she's accomplished, she's earned through hard work."

"Basically, he took the interest in me that a father would," says Williams. "He really stuck his neck out. I mean, here's this guy who's in his seventies and he's spending all this time teaching me about paint, which I knew nothing about."

Croom's bet that Williams could help Cal-Tone started paying off immediately. She centralized the company's purchasing, started visiting Cal-Tone's retail outlets and supervised facelifts for all of them.

"Without P.D., I don't think we would have made it," says Croom. "We were in a little bit of trouble when she arrived."

Despite her accomplishments at Cal-Tone and her friendship with Croom, Williams knows that business can be a tough contact sport. In fact, she says, she may lose her dream job if Croom decides to accept a recent offer to sell Cal-Tone from an undisclosed company.

But whatever her professional fate, Williams says she's not worried about the future.

"I can still crank up a lawnmower and I can still plant a tree. And I'll help kids for the rest of my life."

Surprise gift

\$800,000 for school

A long-time Henderson librarian surprised officials of Vance-Granville Community College in November by naming the college as beneficiary of an \$800,000 trust - possibly the largest gift ever to a community college educational foundation.

Nannie A. Crowder, former head librarian at H. Leslie Perry Memorial Library in Henderson, named the college as beneficiary of an irrevocable trust agreement with NationsBank.

Crowder's donation, payable upon her death, will enrich the school's endowment fund, which now has assets of about \$1.2 million. Interest earned on the fund's principal supports scholarships for academically talented students with financial need.

Crowder, who attended St. Mary's College in Raleigh and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, says she chose the community college instead of schools she attended

because she wanted her gift to remain in the community in which she was born.

She says she has stayed informed about the community college's activities through the school's dean of student affairs, with whom she attends church.

Ben Currin, president of Vance-Granville Community College, says Crowder's decision came as a complete surprise to him. When NationsBank's trust department called to tell him about it, Currin says, "At first, they didn't even want to give me a name. They said the donor wanted to remain anonymous."

Crowder retired in 1987 after working for more than 50 years at the Henderson library. She was head librarian for most of those years.

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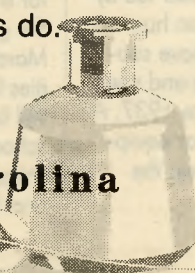
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