



Betty Schoenbaum A force for good

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OUR VIEW

Helping deserving people dream

Just as there is an abundance of wealthy philanthropists in Sarasota, there is no shortage of superlatives to describe the life and impact of Betty Schoenbaum.

The grand dame died this week, a month before her 101st birthday. As Herald-Tribune news accounts and comments from her admirers made clear, she was a force for good in the community — and a source of goodness.

Unlike some wealthy Americans who claim to be selfmade successes, Betty readily gave credit to others for her life and ability to aid others. “She always said she had the most beautiful, privileged life, and she grew up in the most loving family,” said her daughter, Joann Miller.

Betty also credited the business achievements and acumen of her husband, Alex, whose restaurant chain provided the means for a fine lifestyle and the ability to share millions of dollars with human-service agencies and individuals.

That giving occurred not out of pity but out of a belief that people — including those struggling to improve their lives while living with financial uncertainty — should be treated with dignity and respect.

Betty’s approach to life and philanthropy could be summarized in words she once told the Herald-Tribune: “It is such a wonderful feeling to help all of these deserving people.”

Deserving people.

Not individuals lacking the power to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. Not people seeking to milk the system.

Deserving people who, with some help, could pursue their dreams, succeed and eventually write the thank-you notes that Betty Schoenbaum treasured.

“I tell people all the time that I am just going to burst with joy one day,” she also said.

Actually, she was filled with joy — and just as important, gratitude — every day.

There is, of course, sadness related to her passing. But the joy that Betty Schoenbaum exuded will transcend her long, fruitful life.

Affordable-housing appeal As we noted recently, the Sarasota Housing Authority has secured funding, mainly through tax credits and the ability to obtain mortgage financing, to build 80 units that would be available, for example, to a family of four earning less than \$42,000 annually. (Rent would be 30 percent of household income.) Those units would be constructed and operated by the authority on a three-acre site known as Lofts on Lemon. Lofts on Lemon will produce low-income housing, but it might do more. Russell proposes to expand Lofts on Lemon by adding 50 units of “workforce” housing for households earning between \$42,000 and \$70,000. The target market: teachers, firefighters, police, civil servants and others who want to live and work in the city.

This should be a community priority. Sarasota city government has, to its credit, pledged \$3 million. Russell has asked Sarasota County to add \$1 million and hopes to raise \$3 million from local philanthropists and foundations. (Monthly rent would be in the \$950-\$1,000 range; the Housing Authority would ensure long-term affordability).

The Barancik Foundation recently pledged one-third of the private-sector funds necessary. We hope other philanthropists will follow suit while there is time to turn this concept into reality.