

# Meet the Hunts

## Philanthropic El Pasoans adopt a higher profile

By Ramon Bracamontes  
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Woody and Gayle Hunt are slowly stepping into the spotlight.

Since 1987, through their Hunt Family Foundation, the Hunts have anonymously donated millions of dollars to various El Paso causes, nonprofits and institutions. Rarely did they publicize what they were doing.

But in the past year or so, the Hunts have gone public with some of their most generous donations — \$10 million to UTEP and \$1.2 million to the YWCA.

Their reason for going public is simple, they said.

"It's strategic," Woody said. "If others see what we are doing and that we are committed to El Paso, hopefully they, too, will step up and donate or help

in any way they can. The endgame is to make El Paso a better place to live."

And their reason for working to make El Paso a better place to live is also simple.

"This is home," Gayle said. "This is where I grew up. This is where our family is, and this is where we want to be."

### The Hunts' story

Woody Hunt is a native El Pasoan. Gayle Hunt, formerly Gayle Greve, moved with her family to El Paso when she was 6 years old. She graduated from Austin High School. He grew up in the Lower Valley, graduated from Ysleta High School at age 16 and immediately enrolled at Texas Western College, which is now the University of Texas at El Paso.

It was there, in an English class, that Woody and Gayle first met.

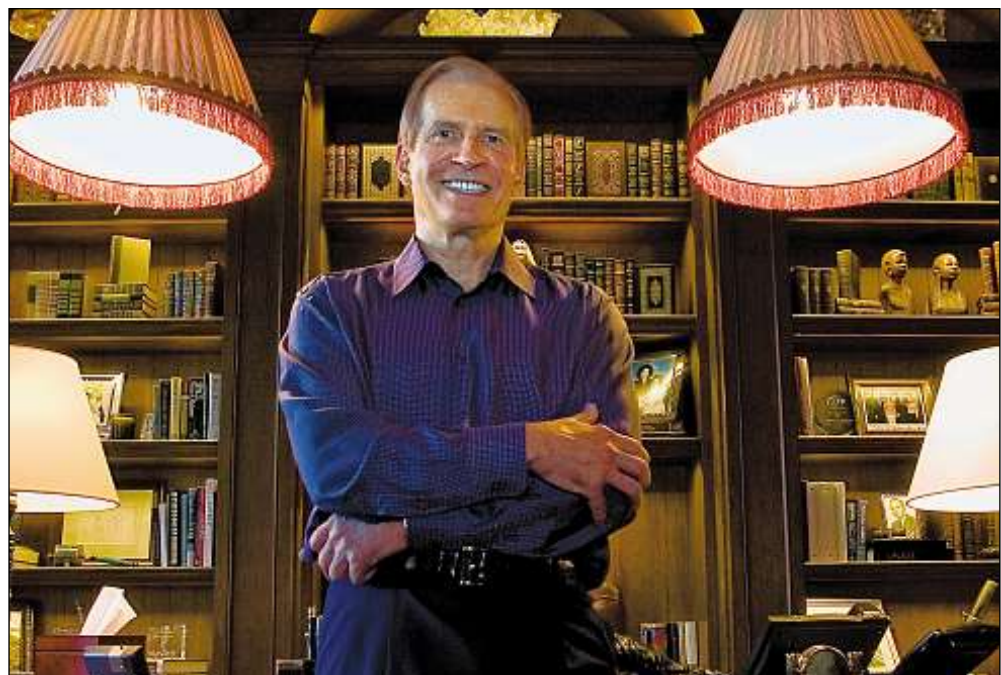
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### Major donations

- ▶ **October 2010:** \$10 million to establish the Gayle Greve Hunt School of Nursing at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center in El Paso.
- ▶ **September 2010:** \$1.2 million to name the Lower Valley YWCA branch the Dorothy Woodley Hunt Branch.
- ▶ **August 2010:** \$5 million to the University of Texas at El Paso to establish the Hunt Institute for Global Competitiveness.
- ▶ **October 2009:** \$2 million to UTEP to establish an endowed chair in international business and to support the Institute for Policy and Economic Development.

PHOTOS BY MARK LAMBIE / EL PASO TIMES

**Gayle and Woody Hunt** have donated more than \$18 million to El Paso-area organizations, including UTEP, in the past 15 months. "If others see what we are doing and that we are committed to El Paso, hopefully they, too, will step up and donate," Woody Hunt said.



**The Hunts** made a decision in the late '70s to stay in El Paso and run their real estate and related businesses from here. Hunt Companies, which has been operated by the Hunt family for four generations, has regional offices in Albuquerque, Honolulu and Washington, D.C.

## This time, Christmas joy came out of the blue

A couple of weeks before Christmas, I was sick of hearing every conceivable version of "Jingle Bells" on the radio. I was tired of being assaulted by ads shouting about holiday sales. Even the good cheer of our kindhearted bell-ringers overwhelmed me.

I was exhausted by manufactured expectations and just wanted some peace.

My wallet and digital camera had been stolen, hardening my humbug. As far as I was concerned, the spirit of the season was visiting some other relative this year.

On the drive home from work, I counted the names left on my shopping list and briefly considered sending apology letters instead.

A 1960s-model station wagon pulled in front of me on the freeway, interrupting my thoughts. The powder-blue Ford Falcon seemed to be stuck at 50 mph. I took a deep breath as cars on either side sailed past us.

I was trapped and missed the exit to Sunland Park Mall.

But twinkling blue lights caught

Minerva Baumann



my eye. In the early-evening dark, an eerie blue halo surrounded the back half of the nearly 50-year-old vehicle in front of me, sparking my curiosity. When finally I was able to pass, I glanced to my right and felt suspended in time.

In the bed of the old wagon, past the aura of blue light, I saw a Christmas tree less than 2 feet tall, decorated with a bit of tinsel and a handful of colored bulbs and trimmed with white lights. The tiny tree and its homemade miniature wonderland were lovingly lopsided. The scene appeared to be little more than a cobbled-together leftovers from a holiday garage sale, but the sight of it touched me.

I slowed down to get a better look at this unusual display and the

people who carried it with them. After a few miles driving on their left, I fell behind for a while, then moved to the right of the ancient Ford so I could see who was driving. An elderly man was hunched over the wheel, while a woman (presumably his wife) sedately sat in the passenger seat, hand on the dashboard.

I guess she felt me staring as I kept pace with their car. The little old lady looked over at me and smiled. So did I.

I considered following the couple home so I could discover the story behind their Christmas show on wheels, but I didn't want to alarm them. It was enough that I had witnessed the celebration they so willingly shared with any fellow traveler who slowed down long enough to experience it.

I don't know how many miles they had already had traveled or how far they would go in the nights to come before Christmas. But this humble couple, their half-century-old station wagon and the simple act of sharing their joy, had given me what all the sales and songs and

stereotypes had failed to inspire.

We all can get caught up in what we think the holiday should mean or what others tell us we should do to create the magic of a merry Christmas for our family and friends.

It wasn't a sleigh or Mr. and Mrs. Claus I saw that night, but I did receive a gift. For a while, I was swept up in a sense of childlike wonder and delight.

Taking a moment to let go of our burdens, to acknowledge an innocent appreciation for something wonderful that someone else has done or said may help each of us to recapture the spirit of childhood that allows us to believe anything is possible.

It's not hard to share the blessings of this season in any time of year. By finding us in our daily lives to demonstrate our love for whatever we cherish, we may unknowingly provide inspiration to people we might never meet but who may remember us because of one meaningful chance encounter.

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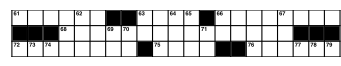
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