5 questions with Michelle Hardesty and Roger Hardesty

Staff Reports | Posted: Friday, November 6, 2009 12:00 am

Michelle Hardesty is executive director of Hardesty Family Foundation Inc. She is a member of the Funders Roundtable, a local group of foundations and corporate funders.

She also spent 11 years as a real estate manager. F. Roger Hardesty, her father, is owner of Hardesty Co. and founder, president and chairman of United States Aviation Co., a domestic and international charter company. He also is the founder of United States Aviation Museum Inc. Hardesty formerly owned Mid-Continent/Midco Concrete Cos. and co-owned BizJet International Sales & Support Inc. until both were sold.

1 What does the Hardesty Family Foundation do?

Michelle: It's a charitable foundation that has a broad base of giving, created in 2006 by gifts and bequests of Roger and Donna Hardesty. The board of directors consists solely of family members. The foundation makes grants to a variety of charities, primarily in Tulsa and surrounding communities. Some of the sectors of giving are education, health and human services, civic and community improvements, nature and wildlife preservation, and arts and humanities.

Our ultimate mission is to be part of the solution to our most compelling societal problems. A challenge facing our society is to create systems that promote education, human welfare and the sustainability of our life-giving environment. It's our goal to foster collaboration among the nonprofit and business sectors, and to promote participation by men and women at all levels of society.

2 You must get many requests. How do you decide which to fund?

Michelle:

Our foundation is relatively new. Our board spent the first year getting out among the nonprofit sector to meet the individuals who were managing the most prominent charities in our city. We spent time visiting their offices and observing their programs.

We look for community support when we make our decisions. It's very important to us that a charity...
or program has sustainability and is backed by the other funders in the community, the board and trustees, and private individuals.

3 What indicators have you seen of how the recession is affecting Tulsa's nonprofit organizations?

Michelle: Many of the agencies are reporting large increases in the demand for their services, especially in the areas of food, housing, job training and medical needs. I've seen cutbacks in budgets and layoffs at the agency level. Agency directors say the amounts of gifts they are receiving are less than during the last few years. Corporate sponsorships seem to be the most conservative since they, too, have had to tighten their belts.

Capital campaigns are not being funded as aggressively as they have been. We're trying to finish up campaigns that were already started, but many of the new campaigns are being turned down.

Nonprofit agencies normally keep their endowment and reserves in what are considered safe investments. But when the security and equity markets shrank, so did the endowment funds, reserves of the agencies, as well as the principals of the foundations and those of the corporate giving community.

4 The Hardesty name has deep roots in Tulsa, particularly in the real estate and aviation industries, as well as libraries. What are your pursuits today?

Roger: My plans are to continue to pursue the aviation business — to grow the charter, fixed-base operator and aircraft management operations — and continue to administer investments. United States Aviation Co. is a domestic and international air charter service with worldwide authority. We're an FAA-certified air carrier utilizing five aircraft, and we're available on a 24-hour basis.

Our FBO at Tulsa International Airport, another side of the business, consists of servicing corporate, charter and fractional aircraft that fly into Tulsa. We provide jet fuel, arrange for catering, rental cars and hotel reservations, as well as support the requirements of pilots at our facility. In addition, our organization manages aircraft for individual owners.

5 You've participated significantly in Tulsa's growth. What would you like to see the city's civic and business leaders focus on in the coming decade?

Roger: I would like to see them focus on the quality of life for Tulsans. I believe this is much more important that getting a few dollars in growth. I would also like to see continued development in downtown Tulsa and infill projects, which would result in higher tax revenues for local government.