

"I am who I am because of Mary."

Alejandra Silva Hernandez, a member of the I Have a Dream Project 3

Undying legacy of philanthropy celebrated

Mary Granger's support went far beyond money

By **TOM VOGT**
Columbian staff writer

As Dave Granger reflected on his mother's impact on this community, he said: "What we do for ourselves dies with us. What we do for others lives on."

Mary Granger died Nov. 27 of pancreatic cancer at the age of 78. But her spirit will live on. That was

apparent Saturday afternoon during a celebration of her life.

As he welcomed her friends and family to First Presbyterian Church, the Rev. Fitz Neal offered some perspective on Granger's approach to life.

"Her bouts of cancer early in her life made her want to make a difference in the world," Neal said.

Granger's legacies include support that helped local students achieve college educations. Those perspectives were provided by two products of the local I Have a Dream program, which has helped 330 students from low-income neighborhoods prepare for, get into and graduate from college.

Eder Pagola, a member of the first Dreamer project, recalled meeting Granger in 1995 as a fourth-grader at Washington Elementary School.

"I spoke broken English, and she was shaking hands with 60 kids," said Pagola, who graduated from Washington State University with a degree in criminal justice. "Because of her, I could achieve my dream. I hope my future children will be grateful for the opportunity she gave their father."

Alejandra Silva Hernandez, a member of Project 3, plans to go to medical school and become a reconstructive surgeon. She will receive

her two-year degree from Clark College this month and is in her first semester at Washington State University Vancouver.

Her Dreamer class started in 1999 at Harney Elementary School.

"I barely understood English well enough to know she changed my life," she said.

It's been a big step for a girl who came from a tiny village in south-



Mary Granger
Local philanthropist
died Nov. 27

Granger:

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ern Mexico, Hernandez said. Even though her family encouraged her college ambitions, it would have been very hard without Granger's support and the structure of I Have a Dream.

"In my junior year, I was so discouraged when I realized how difficult it would be," Hernandez said just before the service. Granger and the other Dreamer leaders kept her going, and "I am who I am because of Mary."

Then there was Granger's role in establishing a regional philanthropic powerhouse during an economic downturn.

Rick Melching, president of the Community Foundation, a Vancouver-based philanthropic organization, called her "a pioneer, an innovator and an entrepreneur in philanthropy."

"She was a key founder of the Community Foundation in 1984. It was the midst of a recession, and few people thought that such bold dreams would be realized," Melching said.

"The foundation raised \$1 million in the first three years," Melching said. "Now, after 26 years, it has distributed \$90 million throughout South-

west Washington."

To borrow a sports phrase, Mary was a triple threat of philanthropy, Melching said. "She was a generous donor, a board member and an effective executive director."

Granger's contributions have been widely recognized: She was named Clark County First Citizen in 1987 and a YWCA Woman of Achievement in 1989. She received Lewis & Clark College's Aubrey Watzek Award in 2001, and was inducted into the Vancouver Rotary Hall of Fame.

During all of her activities, Mary and Richard Granger Sr. raised a family of five children.

She also played a part in the lives of hundreds of other children in the community. Some will continue to benefit from the "principal's checkbook" program she helped establish. If a teacher or school administrator sees a child who needs eyeglasses or a warm coat, they have money to buy it.

Sometimes she provided a willing ear, said Crystal Drake, another Dreamer from Harney Elementary and an Evergreen High grad.

"I probably was not going to finish high school," Drake said after the service. "Mary would sit down and talk with me like an old friend. Sometimes that's what I needed."