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**Grinnell Herald Register**

**“Hunter’s biography of Claude Ahrens to be released here Tuesday”**

New memoir by Grinnell, IA author, Judith W. Hunter, tells the colorful story of the late Claude W. Ahrens, Grinnell entrepreneur and philanthropist. “Grinnell’s Entrepreneurial and Philanthropic Pioneer: A Biography of Claude W. Ahrens” is a 180-page book edited by Julie Gosselink and produced by the Claude W. and Dolly Ahrens Foundation. The book unveiling and reading presentation is scheduled for Tuesday, December 8<sup>th</sup>, 7:00 p.m., at the new Drake Community Library in Grinnell.

Claude W. Ahrens, 1912-2000, was a pioneer in the fields of agricultural and playground equipment manufacturing. As founder and owner of Miracle Recreation Equipment Company, Monett, MO, Claude was also an instrumental advocate for the national parks and recreation field. In 1993, Claude created a private family foundation (the first of others to follow) and built one of the nation's premier private parks and sports complexes in memory of his late son and late family friend, located in Grinnell, Iowa. Claude's motto "Leave it better than you found it" is the motto of the Claude W. and Dolly Ahrens Foundation today.

In creating this biography, first-time author, Hunter, worked from a list of interviewees provided by the Claude W. and Dolly Ahrens Foundation and from Claude’s own dictated memoirs. “Writing this biography gave me a wonderful chance to talk to people, both from Grinnell and from elsewhere, about some of the people, businesses, and events that have shaped our community. It also gave me a sense of how people view history differently depending on their role in the events. I hope that people enjoy reading about Claude’s life and legacy.” Hunter is sure that others may have different views of Claude, but she hopes that reading about Claude’s life might inspire others to emulate his philanthropy.

Gosselink, President and CEO of the Claude W. and Dolly Ahrens Foundation and Claude’s granddaughter encouraged Hunter to write this biography for the Foundation. “Our grandfather’s intention was to document the story of his life. He started this process a few years before he passed away in 2000 and unfortunately he did not have the opportunity to complete the final project in his life. We knew we had a responsibility to complete it for him and that’s where Judy came in. Judy was the perfect person to help us achieve this and she has done an outstanding job in telling and completing his story.” Hunter’s research, the interviewing of

thirty-nine people, her writing and Gosselink's work of editing, formatting, and submission of over one hundred photos found throughout the book accumulated to two-and-a-half years of continuous work.

The following are a few brief excerpts from the memoir written by Hunter:

*“Americans value success: they applaud people who control events, succeed in business, and make lots of money. By this definition of success, Claude Wesley Ahrens achieved it. He was a successful salesman, invented and patented many different products, owned and operated companies, and made a lot of money. But perhaps his greatest success occurred at the end of his life when he established a legacy for his family and community that will benefit people for many generations to come...”*

*“Claude Wesley Ahrens did indeed leave it better than he found it. And for that, all people living in Grinnell can be grateful...”*

*“The story of Claude is refracted through many lenses: through his own embellished stories, through many people's interactions with him, through their gratitude, through their resentments. Using those shiny and distracting lenses, I arrive at one way of telling Claude Ahrens's story.”*

Hunter is a transplanted New Englander who has lived in Grinnell since 1976. As Director of the Writing Lab at Grinnell College, she is more accustomed to dealing with academic writing than with memoirs, but she made an exception when Gosselink asked her to write this biography of Claude. Although Hunter did not know Claude personally, she appreciates the results of many of his acts of philanthropy, from walking at Ahrens Park to starting a local education foundation (GNEE) that benefits from the Community Support Services program offered by the Claude W. and Dolly Ahrens Foundation.

Shannon Fitzgerald, CFO/Controller of the Foundation, offers her perspective on the Foundation's fine selection of Hunter to pen the memoir. “We needed someone to write Claude's story who would be objective, tell the good with the bad, and who also understood the power of his legacy. Judy has had this first-hand understanding and experience through her leadership role of GNEE.” Fitzgerald adds her thoughts on Claude too. “I can remember meeting Claude as a little girl thinking he was larger than life. Of course, I didn't know then what I know now about Claude. He was a business person, an entrepreneur, who wasn't afraid to step outside the lines. He wasn't afraid to take a chance, he lived by his own rules but he did it all well. And yes, he was larger than life.”

This is the first published work of the Claude W. and Dolly Ahrens Foundation. The Foundation was established as a private family foundation in 1993 by Claude. The Foundation continues its

active commitment to improving the quality of life for the Grinnell community. They are dedicated to providing innovative charitable programs and support to community projects, with interest in the areas of parks & recreation, education, and health.

Copies of the memoir will be for sale for \$22.95 in Grinnell, beginning on Wednesday, December 9<sup>th</sup> and thereafter, at the Claude W. and Dolly Ahrens Foundation offices, located at Ahrens Park. Office hours open to the public are Monday through Thursday, 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Plans for additional distribution of the book will be made available at various retail outlets in the near future, with announcements to follow. Tuesday night's unveiling will take place at the new Drake Community Library, in the Community Room from 7:00 – 8:00 p.m. Books will be made available for purchase after the reading as well.

For more information about the Claude W. and Dolly Ahrens Foundation please visit our website at [www.ahrensfamilyfoundation.org](http://www.ahrensfamilyfoundation.org).