



Alice Hennessey

Planting an Orchard of Good in All 44 Counties

When Alice Hennessey moved to Idaho in 1958 – young, determined, and saying yes to possibility – she wasn’t chasing a title; she was answering a call. The West offered room to build, and she brought a builder’s heart.

Alice rose through Boise Cascade with a steady, people-first style that earned trust from the mill floor to the boardroom. Along the way she discovered something essential about Idaho: in small towns, a little help goes a very long way. A new refrigerator at the senior center means thousands of meals. A grant to a volunteer-run library keeps the lights on for a whole winter. Modest investments, multiplied by neighborliness, can change a community’s trajectory.

So, when civic and business leaders began imagining a *statewide* community foundation – one that belonged to every county, not just the capital – Alice rolled up her sleeves. She helped design a structure that was distinctly Idahoan: regional representation to keep power close to home; grants that reached all corners of the state; an ironclad promise that rural Idaho would never be an afterthought. In 1988, the Idaho Community Foundation (ICF) was born.

Then she did the unglamorous, essential work of turning an idea into a culture. First as a volunteer from Boise Cascade, she focused on helping to get the new organization’s administrative functions running smoothly. After retiring from Boise Cascade, Alice became ICF president and CEO. She set off across Idaho with an elevator message as clear as a mountain stream: we gather funds from donors, we grow those funds over time through sound investment, and we grant them to good projects throughout Idaho – *all to improve quality of life across this state*. She spoke at Rotary lunches and school gyms, met with librarians and ranchers, pastors and county clerks. She listened first. She translated philanthropy into plain language and everyday actions. And she told stories, because, as she likes to say, “the stories tell the story.”

Some of those stories are legend now. There’s the donor in eastern Idaho who created a scholarship to honor family lost in the Holocaust, asking students to write essays on some specific aspect of the Holocaust so memory would keep teaching the living. There’s the senior center that kept serving meals because a small grant arrived at exactly the right time. And there’s the day Alice slipped a transformative



estate check into her purse and walked it safely down the street – calm, practical, wholly devoted to getting generosity where it needed to go.

The road was not without blizzards, budget anxiety, and the quiet weight of stewardship. But Alice’s compass never wavered: make giving easier, make impact broader, and make sure all 44 counties feel seen, served, and invited into the work.

The reward is visible everywhere now. Thousands of Idahoans understand themselves as givers – some with donor-advised endowed funds, some with yearly gifts, many with both – and they follow their dollars to the good they most want to see. Regional councils make decisions close to the ground. Grants land where they will do the most good, whether that’s a youth theater, a food pantry, a veterans program, or a community park. The foundation Alice helped imagine and lead has become an orchard of generosity, rooted, resilient, and still bearing fruit.

Ask Alice what matters most and she’ll bring it back to people. She taught her own grandchildren to give a little each year. She insists that anyone can be a donor with the right guide. She believes the smallest towns deserve the biggest respect. And she delights in the way a single, well-placed grant can turn a flicker into a flame.

That’s why Alice Hennessey enters the Idaho Philanthropy Hall of Fame. Not just for building an institution, but for shaping a way of life: practical, joyful generosity that belongs to all of us. She came West to take a job. She stayed to plant an orchard. And the shade keeps spreading – county by county, story by story, gift by gift.