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EDITORIALS

Take the Norris ethic to work

Bill Norris was a Nebraska farm boy who came to Minnesota with an engineering degree and made business history. He built a huge computer firm when most people didn't know what the word "computer" meant and became a voice for "corporate responsibility" — the idea that businesses can do well by doing good.

His death in Bloomington on Monday at the age of 95, coming at a time when news about the business world focuses on princely stock deals, scandal and bankruptcy, leaves a legacy of innovation and commitment that continues to bear fruit.

"He was a true business statesman, in the sense of social responsibility," said Kenneth Goodpaster, professor of business ethics at the University of St. Thomas.

Norris was the founder of Control Data Corp., which employed 60,000 people around the world at its peak in 1984. He located plants in near areas of the Twin Cities and in the

located plants in poor areas of the Twin Cities and in the Appalachian region of Kentucky. He was an early advocate of computers in the classroom and was forever on the lookout for partnerships that would make a difference in unemployment, blighted cities and rural poverty.

Wall Street was critical of his vision, particularly when Control Data began having difficulties in the hyper-competitive technology business. He once told a reporter that addressing society's unmet needs is "the wave of the future — and we're out in front."

We leave it to the biz whizzes to judge whether Norris should have zigged toward personal computers when he zagged toward mainframes. The eventual breakup of Control Data made it easier to dismiss his views as quaint and soft-headed.

MEMORIAL SERVICE

A public memorial service for Bill Norris will be held at 11:30 a.m. Friday at the University of St. Thomas' Schulze School of Entrepreneurship, 46 S. 11th St., Minneapolis, at the corner of 11th Street South and Harmon Place.

But we view Bill Norris as a unique American leader — an outspoken, independent, why-not-try-it sort of guy who put into practice what we are supposed to believe. That being: that capitalism, making a buck — doing well — can also be guided by what is good for the larger community — doing good.

That idea certainly did not die this week.

The Center for Ethical Business Cultures at the University of St. Thomas is the direct descendant of the Minnesota Project on Corporate Responsibility, founded by Norris and several dozen like-minded business leaders in 1977.

Ron James, president and CEO of the center, said those leaders believed businesses had responsibilities to their employees and their community beyond their bottom-line concerns. The center tries to instill this ethic into corporate culture.

The William C. Norris Institute, also housed at St. Thomas pays forward the Norris vision. "I think his legacy is in identifying business opportunities that are also addressing social needs," said Mike Moore, director of the institute, which provides seed money for startup companies with socially beneficial technology.

Who knows? The next big thing could be in the institute's inbox.

In the meantime, we see business leaders every day who volunteer to help a new mayor solve his budget problem or help a hospital or a concert hall raise funds. We watch a computer mogul devote his billions to eradicating disease. And we see people going to work with the unspoken idea that they will be of service to their communities, sometimes against great odds.

Bill Norris was a risk taker and a visionary. He helped teach us to put our money where our beliefs are. Putting the Norris