

# PROFILES of PEOPLE in BUSINESS

## Mort November finds zest for life in giving

**Education:** 1945 graduate of East Technical High School; 1964 graduate of Chartered Life Underwriters.

**Military Service:** United States Army, 1945 – 1948, last years in Japan.

**Family:** Married for 25 years to Iris Flaxman Hollander; he has a son, she four daughters and between them the Novembers have eight grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

**Profession:** Early career as sales professional; from 1959 to retirement, life insurance.

**Awards:** Philanthropist of the Year, 2005, by the Association of Fund Raising Professionals (AFP).

**Hobbies:** Helping his wife Iris, an avid collector, find things that appeal to her! She donated the majority of her vast collection of Statue of Liberty memorabilia to the Strong Museum in Rochester, N.Y.

**Projects:** Memorials, named for Mr. November's late wife Phyllis Tetalman November and his late daughter Debra Ann November, established mainly for the benefit of children.



Mort November poses with a favorite portrait of his late daughter Debra Ann. (Photograph by Kathryn Riddle)

BY KATHRYN RIDDLE

A greeting by Mort November is just like being the single member of an audience for a stand-up comedian who periodically interjects a one-liner in his conversations. His humor is as warm and sincere as he is, and it's no wonder then that Mort had a highly-successful career in the life insurance business. He genuinely likes people and it shows.

"I've been a worker all my life, from the time I was 10 years old," said Mort, as we talked in the warm and lovely living room of the home he shares with his wife Iris. "Having grown up in the Depression, I have that mentality of working and saving, always careful."

A Cleveland native, Mort said that one of his first jobs was working in the flower shop owned by his parents Leah and Jack, in whose memory Mort recently gave a pavilion and garden on the grounds of the Center for Families and Children. Serendipitously, the Center is just down the street from the former location of his parents' floral shop on Euclid Ave.

Right after returning from military service during WWII, Mort married Phyllis Tetalman, and soon they were parents themselves of a son Larry (now himself in the insurance business) and a daughter Debra Ann. Tragedy struck years later when first Debra Ann, at the age of 24, died in 1977 and then Phyllis, barely two years later, in 1979. For Mort, the memories are still painful; he talked instead of how through mutual

friends, including a rabbi, he met Iris, herself a widow with four daughters. Mort and Iris just celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary in May, and obviously she too shares Mort's zest for life.

"He makes me laugh!" Iris said. "When I met Mort, I won the lottery without buying a ticket. Together we heal each other."

Iris has been a quiet, steadfast and understanding supporter of Mort's philanthropic projects created in memory of both his late wife and daughter.

"I couldn't let their names disappear," he said, "I am celebrating their lives."

The first of nearly a dozen and a half of Mort's gifts was the Debra Ann November Annual Achievement Award, established in 1993, for Cleveland School children. It is an ongoing award, providing first overnight and subsequently day trips for classes of children to places such as the Henry Ford Museum and most recently to the Holden Arboretum. Among the beneficiaries of Mort's philanthropy are the Cuyahoga Valley Environmental Educational Center; the East Cleveland Public Library; the Jewish Community Center; the CWRU Squire Vallee Vue Farm; the Cleveland Clinic Children's Hospital and more.

Most recently, as a surprise for Iris, the November Children's Library at the Lillian and Betty Ratner School was dedicated in her name. Iris said she had no inkling, even after seeing all the irises at the opening celebration; there is, in fact, an "iris" on the sign at the Squire Vallee Vue Farm Greenhouse that was dedicated last year.

I opined that Mort is in a way still in the life insurance business, and he said that could be true. His and Iris' gifts, predominantly benefiting children, will be a legacy enjoyed by generations to come.