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## **This makes \$5.8 million given away**

By Chris Smith, Press Democrat Columnist

Just imagine being Gladys Bates.

Here you are, a 78-year-old woman who has adored Sonoma County since you took a job in the service department of Santa Rosa's Lincoln-Mercury dealership in 1958.

You worked loyally for the same man until he died in 2004 -- after asking you to give much of his money to local schools and other worthy human service endeavors that want to grow and improve.

On Sunday, Gladys and some people from Exchange Bank handed \$400,000 to Petaluma's Giant Steps Therapeutic Equestrian Center. That's a lot of hay.

The center, which allows magic to happen between gentle horses and children with physical, emotional and other challenges, will use the money to build arenas at a large new home at the Riverside Equestrian Center on Lakeville Highway.

The gift, which ecstatic Giant Steps staff, volunteers and supporters celebrated Sunday, brings to \$5.8 million the amount Gladys and Exchange Bank have dispensed from the estate of late car dealer/land investor G.K. Hardt.

Gladys has strived to honor Hardt's passions and wishes as she and the bank have helped fund capital projects of the Green Music Center, the 6th Street Playhouse, Montgomery High, Santa Rosa High, the Petaluma Arts Council, the Children's Village, the Assistance Dog Institute, SRJC's Shone Farm, the Blood Bank of the Redwoods, the Salvation Army, Meals on Wheels and the Earle Baum Center of the Blind.

Gladys and Exchange Bank's Linda Burille said that's about it for the large grants, at least until some property of Hardt's can be sold.

"We're definitely trying to do what I think he would want," Gladys said.

She's a modest woman grateful to her late boss for allowing her to travel the county and grant socially important wishes.

"It's amazing, I think," she said.