

Longtime GF businesswoman dies at 94

■ Ethel Torreson Stone opened Torreson Oil in 1938, when gas was 25 cents a gallon, and she was only 25

By Yangyoung Lee
Herald Staff Writer

Longtime Grand Forks businesswoman Ethel Torreson Stone, the first and the only woman board member of Northwest Petroleum Association, died Tuesday at age 94 after suffering a heart attack.

Stone still was actively involved in her gas station business and her community up until she

passed away Tuesday, according to David Miedema, her personal representative.

"She was a dynamic lady," said Barb Hangsleben, 69, a longtime friend of Stone's who was present when Stone passed away.

"She was old enough to be my mother, but she always had me going. And she was so proud of her age."

Hangsleben said Stone drove to Minneapolis last week and re-

turned the same day, which wasn't unusual at all for this nonagenarian.

Stone was born in Ross, N.D., on Sept. 10, 1912, to Charlotte "Lottie" Torreson and Edward Torreson.

Her mother, daughter of Charles Klein, the first independent oil jobber in Minnesota in the early 1900s, opened a gas sta-

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Jackie Lorentz, staff photographer

◀ Ethel Torreson Stone stands near a gas pump at her Torreson Oil Co. gas station on the corner of Gateway Drive and Old Mill Road in August 2005.

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tion in East Grand Forks in 1922. Stone and her younger brother, Leo, grew up working at the station.

After Stone graduated from East Grand Forks High School in 1929, she decided to pursue advertising after studying at UND and moved to Chicago.

When her dream was met with strong objection from her parents, who didn't want their daughter to move far away, Stone accepted a compromise offer from her mother. And like mother like daughter, she got into the gas station business, opening Torreson Oil along U.S. Highway 2 and U.S. Highway 81 in north Grand Forks.

It was 1938, when gas was 25 cents a gallon, and she

was only 25.

Stone always valued quality customer service, and running a business in a male-dominated industry was not easy.

One of the toughest challenges she faced as an independent gas station owner was negotiating gas purchases from oil companies or brokers. But soon she learned how to buy gas at a low enough price to turn a profit.

Stone married three times. And when her last husband, J. Lamar Stone, died in 1971, she replaced him on the board of Northwest Petroleum Association, a post she was re-elected to twice.

At one point, she owned a gas station in St. Cloud, Minn., which she later sold. In 1993, she purchased her mother's gas station in East Grand Forks, which she closed in 2004.

And while others in the in-

dustry were rapidly changing to self-service, Stone always was a fan of the full-service gas station.

"It's nice to get the windshield washed when the weather is bad," she said in a 1988 interview with the Herald.

When she wasn't pumping gas, she developed another passion, aviation. She was a licensed private pilot and achieved the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Civil Air Patrol.

Stone also set up two endowments: one for entrepreneur internships for women entrepreneurs at the Center for Innovation at UND in 2005 and another Ethel Stone Aviation Endowment with the UND Foundation to support the Center for Aerospace Sciences in 2001.

Stone didn't have children, and her only brother, Leo, died in 1993. Funeral arrangements are pending.