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Brice leaves a lasting legacy

She stressed can-do approach

By **BRIAN O'DONOGHUE**
Staff Writer

Whirling through construction sites, politics and society with the force of a living tornado, Helenka Brice left a bright, cheerful signature on Alaska's landscape.

"She was a very complex person. I don't think any one person could see all the facets of the jewel she was," said retired University of Alaska President William Wood of Brice, who died Saturday at the age of 83 following surgery at Mayo Clinic in Minnesota.

During her 30-year tenure as chief executive officer of Brice Inc., a family run, Fairbanks-based heavy construction firm, Brice encouraged her boys to tackle projects other companies would not even bid on.

"They always did the tough jobs, in the Pribilofs, the Aleutians, places that no one else would go," Wood said.

"Her deal was, 'Guys, there's nothing we can't do,'" said Sam Brice, one of Brice's four sons.

He recalled a telling incident. "I was complaining about all of the problems I had getting a project done. She said, 'Son, nobody cares about the labor pains, we just want to see the baby.'"

That attitude resulted in projects such as Drift River, a \$14 million dike erected in four months to protect an oil refinery installation in the Kenai from flooding caused by the eruption of Redoubt Volcano.

Brice, naturally, flew down to watch the boys on the job, later named by civil engineers as one of 1990's "outstanding projects."

"She went to the sites," said Beverly Beshalar, Brice's secretary for 12 years. "She was a hands-on person.

"She loved the navy," Beshalar said, referring to the construction firm's small fleet of tugboats and other vessels. The CEO's favorite boat was her namesake, "helenka B," the firm's first tug.

"She couldn't get transporta-



News-Miner/1984 photo

STATE BUILDERS—Helenka Brice, center, visited with Helen Fischer and Bill Egan at the 25th anniversary celebration of statehood in 1984 in Fairbanks. Fischer was a delegate to the constitutional convention and Egan was Alaska's first governor.

tion, so she had her own boat built," Wood said of the vessel Brice sometimes commanded to inspect jobs at remote sites.

The late Gov. Bill Egan's first lady, Neva Egan, met Brice at her husband's inauguration.

"She was so cheerful, she just bubbled into town," said Egan in a phone interview from Anchor-

age. "She was a lady you don't forget."

Egan said Brice approached politics with the cheerful abandon she applied to everything else.

"She was interested about knowing everything there was to learn about politics," said Egan. "She wanted to know what was

See BRICE, Back Page

Elderly c divorces medical c

By **SHEILA TOOM**
Anchorage Daily News

ANCHORAGE Arnold, master planner of a personal private eye anniversary of his without much ceremony he visited his wife. technically his ex-wife at the Anchorage Pi

"It's a paper thing," nie said of the court. solved their 48-year May. "It doesn't ha do with how I feel a

Gladys and Bro young warriors in t World War II. She w was in the Navy. Th where many others

They eventually l vice, moved to Al raised kids and got worry too much ab

During their worl paid into Social Sec money in an IRA. ward to their longev even bought a supp Medicare benefits.

Then about 10 ye health began to fade and a series of : circuted her come the Arnolds had kno homemaking, fishi and, eventually, to like being able to b self.

For a few year able, with help, to their apartment Senior Center. But nie is 71.

In the nursin Pioneers' Home slumps over in a mostly, puzzled by to put over simi

Man says he rode plane's wing for five minutes

Associated Press

ANCHORAGE—A Bristol Bay fish processing plant worker says he got a five-minute unscheduled, free ride-of-a-lifetime on the stabilizer wing of a MarkAir Express plane last month.

Griffin and a lawyer are seeking a settlement from the airline and threaten to sue if they don't get it.

MarkAir owner Neil Bergt says Griffin's story is not entirely true and he and his lawyer are trying to milk the company for cash.

The Federal Aviation Adminis-

tration and errands.

The day of the incident, he heard the buzz of the Cessna 207 landing on the beach near the plant and jumped in a pickup to meet the plane and pick up supplies.

He said he unloaded about a dozen boxes from plane with the

The pilot told Griffin to stand in front of the stabilizer, facing the rear of the plane, and push down on the mini-wing to try to seesaw the nose into the air and free the wheel.

As the plane began to move forward faster and faster, the small rear wing caught Griffin in the