



Lois Pope

When she's not running in marathons, she's giving millions to those who need it most. **By Michelle Genz**

PHILANTHROPIST LOIS POPE SITS IN her office dressed for success: fleece vest — inside out — over turtleneck, and the shortest of running shorts. Tending to the daily grind of raising money and giving it away, her mind is already racing to the end of her workday and a 10-mile run. Pope, 64, will run the New York marathon in November, her sixth in seven years. Running was her doctor's prescription for reducing stress. "They told me I had an abnormal drive and that I should do something about it."

Pope's distance running began after the death of her husband, Generoso Pope Jr., founder of *The National Enquirer*, in 1988. Six months later, she sold the tabloid for a reported \$412.5 million, and started the Lois Pope Foundation.

She donated the foundation's first \$1 million to build a theater in her home town of Manalapan, in southern Palm Beach County. It was a gesture born of a lifelong love. Once a singer, model, and actress, Pope had trained in New York from the age of 16, driving up with her mother every Saturday from Philadelphia, where she grew up.

After a year and a half at Chestnut Hill College, she moved to New York, found a roommate, furnished their apartment from the Salvation Army — including a \$50 piano. A Ford model, she made countless commercials and had the lead role in the National Touring Company's presentation of *Oklahoma*. She married a well-known theatrical agent, but five years later, he died, leaving her with two small children

A year later, she married Gene Pope, who had transformed a tiny New York weekly into *The National Enquirer*. In 1971, they moved it south to the Palm Beach County town of Lantana; Pope had two more children and worked as the paper's art director.

In 1993, Pope founded LIFE — Leaders in Furthering Education, a foundation that awards scholarships based on need and volunteerism, pays for day camp for hundreds of Palm Beach County children, and annually honors a disabled veteran with a \$50,000 award.

In 1996, Pope donated \$10 million to the Miami Project to Cure Paralysis. Actor Christopher Reeve had once danced the first dance at a LIFE gala with Pope. His paralyzing fall from a horse a year later inspired Pope's gift.

■ On moving to Florida?

When we first got here, the maid thought she saw an alligator in the house, and locked herself in the bathroom. I pulled all the kids out and called my husband from a neighbor's. I told him, "This is it, I'm going home. I've had it." He sent a fire truck over and these guys looked like they were from Mars, covered head to foot with protective clothing, with shotguns to kill the alligator. They came out holding this lizard, nine inches long.

■ Your inspiration?

Years ago, I read about a 13-year-old kid, Eric Perlym — he's now at Duke — who took his bar mitzvah money and bought shoes for abused children. Now he's up to 3,000 pairs. We get shoes for our kids for camp from Eric.

■ On self-awareness?

It took years of struggling to come to terms and forgive yourself for the things you've done that perhaps have hurt people, and to have the guts to say, I'm sorry. What brought it about is that I didn't remarry, that I've had time to myself to think. It's a luxury to find out who you are, and to improve relationships that count the most — which are my children.

■ Your idea of fun?

I just went to the Super Bowl. That enthusiasm is just magical, everybody with the same exuberance at the same time. It's the same thing in the theater. An athlete's moment is like an actor's — we call it being "down in one" — as close as you can be to the audience. One spotlight, the orchestra and you. Your soliloquy, your song. It's your time.

■ Goal in life?

To be my brother's keeper. That's what my mother taught me.

■ On getting older?

You should broaden your scope, bring in more people, and see more things. They claim we can live to be 150 to 300. I plan on that. I'm going on to 300.