

Betty Simpson: You Will Be Missed



Betty Davis Simpson was a board member of the EIHS since its inception. Her knowledge of local history and her support of every non-profit organization on the island is legendary. Betty was a hero to many of us on the board as she never wavered in her involvement as you can see as you read the following article that was written by our Vice-President, Janet Gottlieb and published in the Sand Paper. The article captures Betty's personality beautifully. She will be missed. Services are planned for September 11 and 12. The viewing will be held from 4-6 on September 11 at Shikany's Funeral Home, 2800 South Tamiami Trail, Bonita Springs. A Mass will be held at 2:30 September 12 at St. Leo's Catholic Church on Bonita Beach Road. A Celebration of Life and Reception will be held at 4 PM at St. Raphael's Episcopal Church, 5601 Williams Drive, Fort Myers Beach.

"We have all these gems on our little island, and I just enjoy being part of them," says Betty Simpson. Within her low-key, congenial demeanor and deadpan sense of humor resides a tireless civic champion who has shown extraordinary dedication to Fort Myers Beach, where she has lived since 1966. Her resumé of local volunteerism is staggering:

- Transition Team from Lee County to Town of Fort Myers Beach after incorporation in 1995
- Local Planning Agency - longest-serving member (1995 - 2005)
- FMB Chamber of Commerce, including one year as President
- FMB Fire Commissioner, 1993
- Chair of Friends of the FMB Public Library
- Member and Past Chair of Cultural and Environmental Learning Center Advisory Board (CELCAB) and Bay Oaks Recreational Campus Advisory Board (BORCAB)
- Member and Past Chair of FMB Pilot Club (now FMB Community Foundation), and Lt. Governor for the Southwest Florida District of Pilot Club; still serves on the Community Foundation Scholarship Committee
- Board member of both Friends of the Matanzas Pass Preserve and Estero Island Historic Society
- Docent and Board member of Friends of the Mound House

Born and raised in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, Betty Due became friends and sorority sisters with her future sister-in-law, the late Roxie Davis Smith. Betty married Roxie's brother Bob Davis, who owned a Firestone Tire dealership in Sioux Falls.

Betty and her husband both got their pilot's licenses, but it was Betty who became a commercial pilot. "I could fly out to a job site and drop off whatever parts the business needed," she recalled. She flew an air taxi and also piloted mercy flights out of Pine Ridge Reservation and into Denver Children's Hospital - where her own daughter spent some time during her first two years of life.

"In those days [the early '60s] in South Dakota, men tended to work and they didn't want their wives to work. But as long as I was out 'playing' at the airport, it was okay." Bob and Betty moved to Fort Myers Beach in 1966, where the Davis family bought the Pink Shell Resort when it consisted of a single rental cottage. She worked for local realtor Jim Newton, and opened her own real estate office after her divorce: Betty Simpson and Associates.

She also put her flying skills to use as a Flight Instructor at Page Field (prior to construction of the Southwest Florida Regional Airport). Among other lessons, she taught women non-pilots to take the controls, navigate and land a plane in case their pilot spouse had a medical emergency while in flight.

"I used to fly some guys who were a bit cocky out over the Everglades," she said. "I'd throw my hands up and say: 'Gee, I'm lost. Can you get us home?' Then I'd laugh and reassure them: 'Just kidding!' They showed more respect after that, and often they requested me as their instructor."

Betty had a technique to jolt any pilot trainee whose hands froze on the controls (apparently, a not uncommon problem). "Some of the bigger guys were maybe 300 pounds. I could never wrest the wheel away from them. So I jabbed them with a hatpin I kept just for that purpose. It never failed."

Still a broker for Lahaina Inn Resort, Betty has lived on the south half of the island for the past 30-plus years.

With all her activities, Betty found time to delve deeply into many intensive volunteer roles, simply because she saw a need and had both the energy and talent to contribute. "We are so fortunate to have amenities such as the Library, Historic Society, Mound House and Bay Oaks," said Betty. "I wanted to be involved in things that are important to the Town."

From turbulent times at the FMB Fire Department during the mid-1990s to the tragic death of FMB Library Director, Dr. Leroy Hommerding, on January 24, 2019, Betty and FMB have weathered many challenges. Her steady hand is as great an asset on the Island as it once provided in the skies.