



# Then and Now EIHS News

September 2025

## Another Beach Icon Passes Away



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 waived 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. We will keep you posted when we learn more details about any planned memorials.

"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.



## County to Begin Work on the Preserve

Lee County announced this week that they are going to begin working on Matanzas Pass Preserve sometime in September. Stokes Marine has the contract to repair the boardwalks and docks that were damaged in Hurricane Ian. The staging area will include the parking lot, and the area in the rear of the cottages including the amphitheater. We were assured that our two buildings can remain open and we can continue with our events. They will leave a walkway to the cottages.

This is great news for EIHS since we benefit from the people who come back to see the preserve. They usually stop in to use the museum as well.

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## What to Expect Next Season at EIHS



ESTERO ISLAND HISTORIC SOCIETY  
AND THE FMB WOMAN'S CLUB  
PRESENT

# "GHOSTS OF THE GULF: MURDERS, MYTHS, AND MYSTERIES"



OCTOBER 29<sup>TH</sup> AT 7 PM  
161 BAY ROAD  
\$10 DONATION  
COSTUMES SUGGESTED

[ESTEROISLANDHISTORICSOCIETY.COM](http://ESTEROISLANDHISTORICSOCIETY.COM)

Mark your calendars for a fun filled evening on October 29 as we host the FMB Woman's Club social. The cottage will be turned into a haunted bungalow as we preview this season's murder mystery series. We have exhibits highlighting the Galloway Murders, the Sailboat Murders, and the Randy Lane Murder. Come in costume if you dare. We will provide the conversation, drinks, and food.



We are still collecting decorations for our Halloween party. Here are some that have been delivered. We will be planning a decorating party for sometime in Mid-October. [If you haven't seen our wish list yet, check us out on Amazon.](#)



## Get Ready for Live Streaming and Exciting Videos

We received a grant from the Community Foundation last spring to update our video equipment. With a little help from our friends, the equipment has been ordered and is being installed this week. Once we get some training, we will be posting some practice videos for your entertainment. Ultimately, we hope to be able to live stream the presentations we plan

for the cottage.

We have also discovered a treasure trove of old video recordings of past historical society meetings. These also include some great oral histories from some old timers who are no longer with us. We are presently going through these to see which ones we want to have digitized. Once that is done, we can begin incorporating them in our presentations and on our website. Stay Tuned.

## Thank you to the following donors:

FMB Woman's Club  
Ron Hemstreet  
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Thomas Myers Family  
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Anita Cereceda / The Islander  
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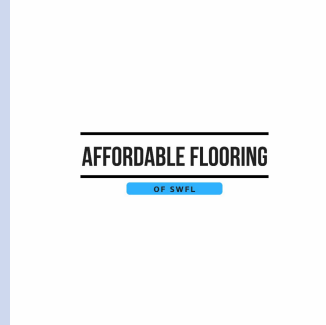


Beach Talk Radio





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If you are not yet an EIHS member, the annual dues are only \$30 for an individual, \$50 for a supporter and \$100 for a business.

Join us today! [Visit our website and click on Membership.](#)

Estero Island Historic Society | 161 Bay Road | Fort Myers Beach, FL 33931 US

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