

"Dr. Elizabeth "Betty" Gazda-Smith Fund"
For water and wildlife research at "Ding" Darling



After a life-long, hard-fought battle with autoimmune diseases and their complications, Betty passed away in May 2021.

Born in Minneapolis, she started her career in medicine at the early age of 16, working in the research labs at the University of Minnesota (UMN). Betty worked multiple jobs while taking a full course load and putting herself through college

-- graduating summa cum laude from UMN in 1979 with a bachelor's of science in biology and minors in behavioral biology and biochemistry. She then graduated with an MD degree from UMN, became board certified in internal medicine, and went into private practice. From there, Betty joined Prudential Life insurance company as the medical director and was promoted to vice president and chief medical officer for Individual Life Insurance. She became recognized around the country as an accomplished presenter, speaking often to medical and healthcare professionals. She also wrote a monthly "Rx for Success" column as well as being a regular contributor to the *Broker's World Journal*. Betty then opened her own medical consultancy business.

Even in the 80s and 90s, it was a still a challenge to be a woman in a male-dominated field. Raising a family, working full time, and also battling autoimmune disease for most of her life, Betty was strong and courageous in all areas of her life, personally and professionally.

In addition to her interest in medicine, Betty had many outside interests, with her family and grandchildren at number one. She became therapy dog team-certified through Pet Partners. She volunteered at the Ronald McDonald House and was active in North Stars Therapy Animals. Later in life, when Betty was more disabled by her illness, she expressed her creativity through art, even becoming a professional artist in 2019. Art was a journey for her that helped transform her mind, body, and spirit into what she created.

Betty and her husband, Jerry, were frequent visitors to Sanibel before they purchased a condo in 2010. They both loved the island and what it represented for conservation and inspiring future stewards of our lands, water, and wildlife around the world. Her family established this fund in her memory as a tribute to her love of the island and the beauty of nature and her interest in water, wildlife, and the health of both.

Individuals, families, businesses, or foundations interested in making a gift to support the Dr. Elizabeth "Betty" Gazda-Smith Fund for water and wildlife research can visit dingdarlingsociety.org and click the donate button. To learn more about establishing your own permanent endowed fund, call 239-472-1100 ext. 4. Donors can establish an endowment with a gift of \$10,000 or more. Proceeds earned by the investment go towards supporting the Refuge mission.