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# Lorabeth Fitzgerald leaves legacy of activism, caring

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GRAND LEDGE - Those who knew Lorabeth Fitzgerald describe her as a dedicated friend, mother and activist who left the Earth a better place than she found it.

Lorabeth died Friday, July 31, at the age of 82 at her summer home on Mackinaw Island.

"She was a lively, lovely lady," said longtime friend Marilyn Smith, who worked alongside her on many community projects over the years. "She is a visionary, able to listen to all of the opinions and then say, 'Well, this is what I think we need to do.'"

And the community listened. Lorabeth Fitzgerald leaves a list of accomplishments in Grand Ledge too long to fully name.

"She was committed to Grand Ledge and committed to the community for herself and for her family to make it a better place to bring up her family," Smith said.

Chief among her accomplishments was her role in the preservation of the Grand Ledge Opera House, on which she worked tirelessly, the founding of the Grand Ledge Historical Society and the creation of the local museum.

"She worked from the very beginning, from the time we inherited the building, from fundraising to restoration. She was one who made sure it was restored, not just remodeled," Smith said.

After that, Smith said, Lorabeth used her skills as far as creating bylaws and working as secretary for the group.

"She was a delight to work with," Smith said.

She was active in any number of groups and committees and graciously opened her house for the Garden Club home tour each year.

"She grew up in a small town, Hillsdale, and she moved here after she married my father," said her son, Adam, 48, now of Denver. "Having grown up in a small town atmosphere, she knew how important community was."

A teacher in the 1950s, Lorabeth left her career to raise her family. The wife of the late state senator and supreme court justice John Fitzgerald, as well as being the daughter-in-law of Gov. Frank Fitzgerald, Lorabeth had three sons, two surviving. Her eldest son, Frank, died in 2004; her husband died in 2006.

"I think she'll be remembered as the definition of a lady," Adam said. "She was always caring and respective of others, was always involved with community. She never sought any kind of accolades for her efforts, but she was constantly working for causes she felt were important."

Because of his mother's passion for the Opera House, Adam said he and his brother, Eric, will be donating his mother's baby grand piano to the venue, in her honor. A baby grand is something the Opera House committee had been attempting to raise money to buy.

"My mother and I discussed it recently," he said of the donation. "She asked me what I thought of it, and I said 'that's a fantastic idea.'"

In addition to community work, Lorabeth was active in her church, said longtime friend John Baumgartner, retired pastor at First Congregational UCC in Grand Ledge.

"She was also one of the first persons in that congregation who spoke out for egalitarian treatment of women in the church," Baumgartner said. "It didn't always endear her to everyone but she dealt with it quite well. She was always outspoken on women's issues and she moved the congregation along on those issues."

In addition to sons Eric and Adam, both of Denver, Colo., she is survived by daughter-in-law, Ruth Davie Fitzgerald, as well as grandchildren, Ellen and John, children of Frank and Ruth. Lorabeth also leaves a niece and her husband, Emily and Paul Fullerton and their sons, Joseph and Samuel, of St. Ignace.

Services have been held.