

Betty Gossage's kindness, love for others lives on in memorial donations

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MASSILLON – Betty Gossage was a sweet, thoughtful, loving woman.

She loved to write poems, including her last most appropriately titled piece, "COVID Sucks." Over the years, she penned personal poems for family and friends often pointing out what she liked about the person.

She never forgot a birthday and often sent handwritten cards year after year to mark the milestone.

She earned one of her many nicknames — Mother Goose — caring for children.

Gossage died Feb. 16, just nine days shy of her 75th birthday.

Daughters Lisa Church, Sue King and Amy Kubbins wanted to make sure their mother's love for children and the Massillon community lived on long after she was no longer around to spread her joy.

They created the Mother Goose Memorial Fund. Through the memorial fund, Gossage's family has provided gifts to several organizations, including the St. Joseph soup kitchen and the Towpath Trail YMCA.

She lived a life of service

Gossage, a 1964 Central Catholic High School graduate, spent 40 years off and on, keeping an eye on kids at the YMCA child care programs in Massillon and later in Navarre.

She cared for her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, too, and was the "other mother" to many.

A longtime member of St. Joseph Catholic Church, she volunteered at the soup kitchen.

The grandmother of 13 and great-grandmother to six made sure to pick up Christmas gifts for her favorite waitresses at eateries around town.

It wasn't a surprise when she died in February less than a month after being diagnosed with aggressive cancer, that people from near and far came to pay their respects.

"Everyone knew her," Church said. "Everyone who met her loved her."

Her best friends from elementary school, friends she made in a support group some 30 years earlier and so many of the people she spent time caring for over the years wanted to know what they could do.

The family was overwhelmed by the outpouring of love for Gossage and asked instead of sending food or flowers to contribute to a GoFundMe account. Donations would be handed out to groups that Gossage would have wanted to support in Massillon, her daughter said.

"Mom was a giving person, but never had the money (to give). She would have given you the shirt off her back," Church said. "She really taught us a lot about giving back."

Through the GoFundMe account, the family collected \$7,000.

Some of the funding has been used for:

- New pots and pans for the St. Vincent de Paul Society soup kitchen at St. Joseph Catholic Church.
- The Child Watch room at Towpath Trail YMCA, including purchasing new toys, books and other items, as well as to subsidize tuition for families in need.
- Spaghetti dinners for 25 to 30 families at a dinner sponsored by the St. Joseph Youth Group.
- The Stark County Hunger Taskforce's backpack program and sponsoring seven kids to attend Sports Ministry Camp.

Donations in her memory also were made to the Stark Community Foundation Women's Fund, Compassionate Friends Chapter 1408, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and St. Joseph Church, where Gossage was a member.

"We were so excited about the overwhelming support and love and we wanted to make sure it went back to the city and residents," Church said.



A big, kind heart

King joked that her mom would have made a great Walmart greeter.

"She loved to talk to everybody," King said. "It didn't matter who you were or what you did. She just had such a big heart."

Growing up on Kimmens Road SW on the back nine of their grandfather's golf course, The Elms in Tuscarawas Township, their mother welcomed the neighbor kids into their home.

"We have a lot of childhood memories," King said. "It didn't matter what was going on. She would drop anything for us."

Three years and three days apart, Gossage often shared her birthday celebrations with her younger sister Judi Black Verzulli.

Black Verzulli said the pair were complete opposites.

"I was loud and rambunctious. She was quite 'the good child,' she recalled.

She would try her best to make her older sister mad at her, but Gossage had the patience of Job, Black Verzulli said.

Gossage always was looking for the good in a person — even if they were a stranger.

"She just wore her soul on the outside of her body," Black Verzulli said through tears and giggles. "Everyone knew who she was. What she had to offer was nothing but love and acceptance. She never talked about anyone. She didn't see the bad in people. She only saw the good in people. She always had a friendly word to say and there was a glitter in her eye. She was just a happy person and I miss her."

Black Verzulli said her sister's kind heart came from the example their father set.

"He worked two jobs," she said. "When he built The Elms, we didn't see him much, but when we did it was quality time. He always taught by example and that's how my sister turned out."

Growing a legacy

Church had hoped to start a foundation in her mother's honor, but soon found they would need a greater amount of seed money. She took on the project herself, which was funded by donations and gifts from family.

The family plans to continue to fund the memorial fund.

Church said her employer Salesforce, a California-based software company, matches dollar for dollar donations she makes.

The founder and CEO of the company encourages employees to volunteer and allows them up to one week of paid time to volunteer.

Church plans to return to Massillon this summer and volunteer at the soup kitchen, which serves more than 200 meals each week.

"(Mom) really taught us a lot about giving back," Church said.

Black Verzulli, a Florida resident, said she and others plan to continue to fund the memorial.

"I love these little things they were able to do for the people that we lived with in the hometown that we lived in," she said. "The Y and St. Joe's and the soup kitchen. This would mean more to her because it is actually people she knew and worked with and lived with. That's what is so endearing. Every dollar means so much."

A cherry blossom tree, a bench and a plaque has been placed at Reservoir Park near the children's playground in Gossage's honor.

The plaque features a quote by Roy T. Bennet — "Be the reason someone smiles. Be the reason someone feels loved and believe in the goodness in people."

That was a message Gossage lived and shared with those around her, Black Verzulli said.

Church said her mother's parents, Howard and Alice Black, met at the Rezzy and her mother had fond memories of playing at the park as a kid.

"This is a happy ending and it makes us feel better and keep her name alive," she said.

To learn more about Gossage, the memorial fund and her journey, visit <https://keepingupwithbetty.weebly.com/>.

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