

An appreciation Betty Tardy Forrest on behalf of the Board of the West Michigan Jazz Society

I first met Betty Forrest nearly seven years ago when she attended a lecture and concert on Jazz and Civil Rights that I presented at Grand Valley State University, in honor of Black History Month. My wife



Caught looking at the zoo

and I had joined the West Michigan Jazz Society soon after we arrived from Australia in 2003, but this was the first time I had actually spoken to Betty. She told me in her usual forthright manner that she had enjoyed the presentation, that she thought it was a bit strange that a white Australian man should be on



Betty with Musician of the Year 2007, Tom Hagen

stage lecturing to Americans about jazz and civil rights, and that even though I played the flute and saxophone in a manner that was way too 'modern' for her tastes, she wanted me to consider joining the WMJS Board. I went along to a Board meeting a couple of weeks later, enjoyed the experience, and was honored



Tim Froncek was in the hospital when he was supposed to be getting his Musician of the Year party, so we caught up with him at the picnic in Caledonia.

to be elected to the Board of the West Michigan Jazz Society.

Ever since that night I have enjoyed working closely with Betty and our Board colleagues on continuing to promote the



Pete Proli and Dona Raymer present Betty with a commemorative quilt consisting of pictures of the first ten years of Jazz at the Zoo.

performance of top quality live jazz in West Michigan. Although we have had various wonderful Board Presidents over the years (a position that I now have the honor of holding), it was Betty who was always our tireless and fearless leader. She so effectively steered

no WMJS scholarships for student musicians, and no 'Jazz Notes' journal, replete with Betty's superbly written album and jazz book reviews.

That all this has occurred is a tribute to Betty's vision and determina-



Jimmy and Betty Forrest

the fortunes of the WMJS for 25 years, through all sorts of challenging financial and membership climates, that today with well over 500 members it stands as one of the leading jazz societies in the country. In doing all this, Betty earned the respect and love of numerous Board Members, hundreds of the finest jazz musicians in the region, and many thousands of jazz fans.

Under Betty Forrest's leadership, the WMJS has made an enormous impact on the cultural life of West Michigan for a quarter of a century. Just imagine what the jazz scene in our region would be like if the WMJS did not exist, if there was no Jazz at the Zoo series in the summer, no Jazz Gumbos in the winter, no Jazz Holiday Party, no Musician of the Year event,



Jack Morrison, then President, emceeding with a little help from his friends.

had the pleasure of serving with her on the WMJS Board over the years, has helped ensure the continued visibility and viability of perhaps the greatest of all American art forms. She has also been a great colleague to many of us, who will miss her sparkling wit, her energy and commitment, and her friendship. It is up to all of us now, the members and Board of the WMJS, to carry on Betty's great work with the same sort of energy and dedication she displayed for a quarter century, both to ensure the continuing viability of jazz in West Michigan, and to honor a life well lived.

Craig Benjamin, President, Board of the West Michigan Jazz Society



Bob MacKercher and Betty, from around the time the Jazz Society formed.

tion. After the death of her husband, the great tenor saxophonist Jimmy Forrest, Betty was inspired to honor his memory by promoting the music they both loved, and to support the musicians (both professional and student) who play it. Betty Forrest, and all those who have

Betty conferring with Ray Gill. Ray passed away on Sat., Oct. 29 of this year.

Betty Forrest with daughter Melvne, left, and daughter-in-law Deb, right.

