Williams Give Back

Darwin and Fern Williams loved their hometown of Watertown so much that no matter where they landed, they always looked forward to adding a little mileage on their latest vehicle to travel back to visit friends, family and the community. They lived in 12 of the United States but still referred to Watertown as “home”. Coming back and giving back to where it all began was important to them and their latest gift underlines that. A bequest of approximately $675,000 to the Darwin and Fern Williams Memorial Fund at the Watertown Area Community Foundation will continue to give back to the home they loved forever.

The Williams’ love affair with Watertown and as a couple began when they were young. They were Watertown High School sweethearts and husband and wife for 67 years. Darwin passed away in 2011 and Fern just this year.

They were both very sweet to one another, reminisced Jean Jenson and Christina Planteen, the couple’s niece and great niece. When Darwin got diabetes, Fern learned everything she could about healthy eating. She took very good care of Darwin, and he was glad that she did. They smiled. And when they traveled, one of the things Fern liked to do was meet people. Darwin wouldn’t care how long she visited – he just waited patiently.

Both Darwin and Fern came from poor backgrounds. “I’m still a small town girl and I’m glad I was poor,” Fern told the Foundation when she established the fund in 2014. “People don’t realize that people who haven’t had a lot have just as hard of a time spending money as someone who spends a lot and tries to stop.”

Jenson and Planteen confirmed that Fern and Darwin watched every penny in their daily living with groceries and such. Once in a while they would splurge like when it was time to buy a new car. Perhaps it was because they spent a lot of time in their car traveling to interesting places and back home. Fern, who would have been 94 Sept. 20, even named her cars. She took time to select that just-right automobile as well as how else to spend her dollars.

“I’ve had a lot of time to think,” Fern said. “I’m not judging others, but I believe money should be used to help people.”

The couple will continue to do that in many ways. Beyond the Fund, other gifts

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REMINISCING – Jean Jenson and Christina Planteen reminisce over photos of relatives Darwin and Fern Williams, now deceased. The Williams left a bequest of approximately $675,000 to the Watertown Area Community Foundation to support the Darwin and Fern Williams Memorial Fund to benefit children and the elderly. Planteen will be the advisor for the Donor Advised Fund. Fern would have been 94 Sept. 20.
These funds enable the Foundation to invest in the vitality of the Watertown area and respond to the area’s ever-changing and most pressing needs.

Organizations in the Watertown area have funds at the Foundation to support and enhance their organization as well as ensure their sustainability far into the future.

These funds enable the donor to recommend annual grant recipients. Donors can also name successor advisors to continue in this capacity after their lifetimes.

These funds support the donors’ chosen charities for generations to come.

These funds support donors’ passions, interests and concerns in broad ways.

These funds benefit deserving area students. Donors set the focus of the scholarship and application parameters.

Donors with intentions for a future fund. Grow your fund over time or just complete initial paperwork to establish a fund which will be funded at a future date. You may determine the type of fund it will be now or at the time it is funded.

The Watertown Area Community Foundation is made of endowed funds. The principle of an endowed fund is never spent, and it can grow over time to generate an increasing stream of funding to support the donors’ charitable intentions forever. Generally, these funds are established with a gift of $10,000 or more.

- Darwin and Fern Williams made many trips back home to Watertown. Their preferred mode of transportation was on motorcycle. Then in later years, it was their automobile.

- from the Williams include scholarship funds at Arrow Education Foundation and assistance to Joy Ranch. Fern named Planteen the advisor for the Donor Advised Fund designated to benefit children and the elderly. Planteen said she looks forward to the task and takes her job seriously. “I know it’s very important to make sure it’s going to someone or something that really needs it,” she said, acknowledging the couple’s wishes and passions.

- Fern’s passion for home never faltered. Until just a few years ago, Fern would always say she planned on traveling back. Planteen and Jenson said. She would grab her St. Christopher medal and say, “I just take one mile at a time.”

- Through careful and generous thought, Fern established the Darwin and Fern Williams Memorial Fund - a vehicle with no final destination. Rather than one mile at a time, this vehicle will enable the couple to help others one grant at a time for generations to come.

- The Watertown Area Community Foundation Board, Trustee Representatives and staff met at Joy Ranch this month to begin strategic planning for the Foundation’s future. With the help of Christine Roberts from Roberts & more consulting firm, the group discussed opportunities, challenges and goals for the future.