

# Lydia Galton remembered as Naples garden advocate, community activist

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Many people in the public light chase titles. Lydia Ryan Galton chased resolution. Described as tireless, passionate, well read and outspoken, with a disarming sense of humor, she worked to:

- get Naples its first official botanical garden;
- guarantee environmental oversight of rural land development in Collier County;
- galvanize the city's League of Women Voters;
- protect the elderly from identity theft.



The Naples activist died Sunday at age 79, barely more than a year after the death of her husband, Jim, the force behind Marvel comics.

Galton was known for her work with the Naples Garden Club, forging its partnership with the then-fledgling Naples Botanical Garden.

Environmentalists knew her for exposing a Rural Land Stewardship Advisory Review Committee attempt to end-run development reviews around the Environmental Advisory Committee and the Collier County Planning Commission, said Sandy Parker, past president of the local League of Women Voters.

"She got results," Parker said.

"A lot of people need titles for people to come to them. People came to Lydia because she was Lydia."

Reg Buxton

Collier County Sheriff Kevin Rambosk knew her as the muscle behind the Identity Theft Task Force his office organized to save people from scams.

"She did almost all of the scheduling of her presentations herself," Rambosk said at a memorial for Galton on Wednesday afternoon at Naples Botanical Garden.

He called her a strong citizen "who did things her own way, and for the betterment of the community."

Opponents learned to fear the approach of her shock of white hair, riveting blue eyes and husky voice as much as friends delighted in her company. She was a fearless Democrat in a county known as Republican and was armed to debate at all times.

"You had to bring your 'A' game if you were going to disagree with Lydia," said Jean Foster, president of Greater Naples Leadership, of which Galton was a member. "But 10 minutes later, she'd turn around and say something wickedly funny."

"I never had an idle conversation with her," said Catherine Ware, who like Galton, served two terms as president of the Naples Garden Club. "She always had a mission, and she always had a plan."

"A lot of people need titles for people to come to them. People came to Lydia because she was Lydia," said Naples City Councilman Reg Buxton, one of almost 100 people who came on short notice to the

event.

Galton's career wasn't in the public arena. After the Bayonne, New Jersey, native graduated from Fordham University in 1961, she worked as researcher for the Encyclopedia of World Art in New York and Rome; as an editor at New American Library; and for publishers T.Y. Crowell, McGraw Hill and Little Brown. She opened her own literary agency in the late 1980s.

She was an activist even early in her adult years, joining Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous 1963 march on Washington, her daughter, Maggie Galton, said at the memorial.

But her mother also knew how to have fun.

"She and my father could take over any dance floor," Maggie Galton added.

Galton's commanding presence was matched by her determination. "Strong-willed," both Maggie Galton and her brother, Edward, chimed in together. "Determined." She was, they said, their model in that.

"I loved that she had an opinion about everything. Lydia was my mentor," said Liz Chehayl, who recalled meeting Galton when Chehayl was a volunteer with no experience in a garden club. Chehayl is now the Brian Holley Curator of Collections at the Botanical Garden.

"She was a lover of all things," added Sondra Quinn, who counted Galton among her best friends. "She was my symphony, opera, ballet and theater buddy."

"Every time we look out into the garden, we'll remember her as one of our most beautiful flowers."

Donna McGinnis

Galton was a certified National Garden Club Flower Show judge and served on regional and national garden club boards. Galton held — and exercised— leadership positions in every organization she joined, earning the honor of Woman of Initiative from the Community Foundation of Collier County and the Women's Initiative Network in 2015.

Friends called her "the Renaissance woman" for her command of fashion and cooking, as well as bridge.

But the strongest memories are of her welcoming personality.

"She never met a stranger," Sandra Buxton said. "She was an interesting person herself, but she was genuinely interested in other people."

Donna McGinnis, president of Naples Botanical Garden, recalled a conversation with Galton, who called her two weeks after her arrival here to insist McGinnis go to a Greater Naples Leadership party as her guest.

"I hadn't been in there 10 minutes when she took me by the sleeve and introduced me to every person in the room. It was immensely helpful to someone so new in town," McGinnis said.

She said the garden was "forever grateful" to have Galton as a supporting force.

"Every time we look out into the garden, we'll remember her as one of our most beautiful flowers."

Galton requested memorial contributions be made in her name to the Naples Botanical Garden, 4820 Bayshore Drive, Naples, FL 34112.