

A Legacy of Joy

Remembering Sweet Adelines International Donor Betty Garnett



In April 2021, Betty Garnett shared several reasons why she loved being a Sweet Adeline in a video for the organization: “The joy of singing close harmony. Overcoming my shyness and learning how to ‘sell’ a song. Being able to synchronize choreography and expression with music. Improving my posture and ability to breathe deeply. The pleasure of traveling all over the U.S. to attend conventions. And, perhaps the most memorable reason is... Establishing lasting friendships with Sweet Adelines wherever I happened to go!”

Betty joined Sweet Adelines in 1960 as a charter member of Monticello Chorus, which later became Skyline Harmony Chorus. In 2010, she celebrated her 50-year-membership with a gift to Sweet Adelines International and set up an estate gift for the organization. Upon Betty’s passing in April 2022, her estate gift began supporting singers of the organization she loved so much, continuing her Sweet Adelines legacy.

Betty’s obituary reads like an adventure story. In 1945, she joined the U.S. Foreign Service and served overseas in India, Argentina, Germany, and Austria. Following her overseas assignments, Betty returned to the United States. She took early retirement from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1972 and returned to her birthplace, Harrisonburg, Virginia, where she did volunteer work and attended James Madison University (JMU). She was later employed at JMU for 21 years. She traveled extensively, learned to play several instruments, did beadwork and art glass, and was an enthusiastic member of the Lewis & Clark Trail organization. With all of that going on, for 62 years Betty was an active member of Sweet Adelines International.

Long-time Skyline Harmony Chorus Director and friend Joan Henderson joined Sweet Adelines in 1997, immediately becoming

riser mates with Betty, a fellow baritone. She remembers Betty as a generous mentor and dynamic performer.

“Watching Betty when I was directing taught me what I was looking for,” says Joan. “She had the most amazing smile, and she performed so naturally. Her body did the right thing, her hands were involved but not obtrusive. She was so involved in the music, and to this day, I have never seen anybody who did it so intuitively without thinking about it at all. She was a natural.”

For Betty, singing and sharing barbershop was a lifelong passion.

“Singing barbershop was an overwhelming passion that kept her alive and young for all those years, with all those people that she sang with and all the folks that she taught,” says Joan. “Her overriding passion for Sweet Adelines was so attractive and so engaging that she could sell Sweet Adelines to anybody! After a performance, I’d see her actively recruiting people in the audience. She was charming and bright, and there was everything to love about Betty. She was the ultimate Sweet Adeline.”



Thanks to Betty’s generosity of spirit, knowledge, and resources, her legacy will continue to resonate through Sweet Adelines International for years to come. To find out more about how to leave a legacy gift, please contact Susan Smith, Chief Philanthropy and Administrative Officer at susan@sweetadelines.com.