



Merle Woodard Safford

January 13, 1920 - October 22, 2013

EAST LONGMEADOW-"Don't waste life, my friend, you have something to give". Reach out, you will find your own special gift to say, "Yes, I was here!"- Merle Safford. Born in Pickens County, Alabama Merle Woodard was the middle child of eight girls and one boy. She attended Auburn University on scholarship for two years before traveling to Hartford, CT for a summer job at the Institute of Living, a psychiatric hospital. There she met Dean Safford on a blind date and six weeks later they were engaged. They were married in April 1942. During World War II Dean joined the armed forces and served as an infantryman in the 44th Division, 71st Regiment at the Battle of the Bulge. After the war, they settled in East Longmeadow, MA, building a house on Pleasant Street where they raised three daughters, Ronna (Kowal) of Port Orchard, WA, Deana (Wilson) of Cottdonale, AZ and Melanie (Mercier) of East Longmeadow. While Merle was happiest as a wife, mother, cook and expert seamstress, she was an accomplished business woman, building and running a thriving catering service for 15 years before seizing the opportunity to work in real estate as an independent contractor in the office of Stearns and Westcott (later Stearns and Yarrell). During this time she became the first woman president of the Springfield Board of Realtors, where she was instrumental in establishing a real estate licensing school to advance professionalism and ethics. She and Dean bought and restored several houses and 10 years after entering real estate, she opened her own office which she operated until 1979. During that time she initiated action in the

Congregational Church to establish a non-profit corporation to build Brownstone Gardens, an apartment complex for elderly citizens. Today the result is 162 units of independent living apartments on Pleasant Street and Somers Road in East Longmeadow. She served as director from 1975 until her death. In 1979 they retired and moved to Hyannis on Cape Cod where they bought and operated Harbor Village, a colony of 20 cottages on 25 acres of land overlooking Nantucket Sound in Hyannisport. They were active in the Hyannis Federated Church for nineteen years. Merle was an active garden club member, prize winning horticulturist and floral designer and was honored with a lifetime membership in the State and National Federation of Garden Clubs. Returning to East Longmeadow in 1998, Merle, a devoted historian and genealogist, was appointed to the Historic Commission. In 2003 she was instrumental in the formation of another non-profit corporation, The Norcross Center, Inc. for the restoration of the Norcross House on Maple Street in East Longmeadow. With restoration complete, she devoted three years to the writing of "Faith of our Founders" with the proceeds to advance the work of the Norcross Center as a cultural center for the promotion and preservation of local history and the arts. Merle was chosen for the East Longmeadow Distinguished Citizen Award by the East Longmeadow Lions Club in 2004, Citizen of the Year by the Rotary Club of East Longmeadow in 2005 and named Grand Marshall of the East Longmeadow 4th of July Parade in 2006. She spent her last years at Bluebird Estates in East Longmeadow with Dean, her husband of 71 years. In addition to three daughters and her husband, Merle leaves behind her son-in-laws, Chester Kowal, Steven Wilson and Mark Mercier, a sister Betty Fricke Pfister of Beaufort, SC, her grandchildren, David Bean and his wife Josie of Silverdale, WA, Dana Bean and his wife Judi and Matthew Bean and his wife Heather, all of East Longmeadow, Richelle Mercier and her fiancé Bill Barnes of Daytona Beach, FL and Kristina Mercier of Palmer, MA. Also surviving are her great grandchildren Kyle and Cassidy Bean and Aidan and Dylan Bean of East Longmeadow and many nieces, nephews and friends. A celebration of her life will be held at The First

Congregational Church in East Longmeadow on Sunday, November 10, 2013 at 2:00 pm followed by refreshments at Fellowship Hall. Funeral Arrangements have been entrusted to New England Funeral & Cremation Center, LLC, 25 Mill St., Springfield, MA. In lieu of flowers memorial contributions may be made to The Norcross House, 89 Maple St., East Longmeadow, MA 01028. For expressions of sympathy visit www.nefcc.net

Tribute Wall

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“ Dear Uncle Dean, Ronna, Deana and Melanie,\r\n\r\nMy Sympathy for your tremendous loss. You will all be in my thoughts and prayers.\r\n\r\nI just returned from Australia. To hear the sad news.\r\n\r\nI know she will leave a large void in your lives. Family was always important to her. Which included \r\nnextended family. You always felt Welcome and loved when you were\r\naround her.\r\n\r\nShe touched many lives. She was always very giving.\r\n\r\nI know the family who went before her will all greet her with loving arms.\r\n\r\nPlease accept my condolences.\r\n\r\nLove,\r\n\r\nKay Kirby

Kay Kirby - February 14, 2023 at 10:27 AM

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“ Dear Dean, Ronna, Deana and Melanie\r\n\r\nMy deepest sympathy to all of you on the loss of your wife and mother. I had the pleasure of working with and getting to know Merle back in 2003, when I joined the friends of the East Longmeadow Historical Commission. She has left this town a tangible and lasting legacy of her life's work through the Norcross House and Brownstone Gardens! \r\n\r\nGod Bless,\r\n\r\nLaura

Laura Peavey - February 14, 2023 at 10:27 AM