

BETTY WRIGHT SMITH, 1923-2013

Toledo teacher linked to area's early leaders

BLADE STAFF

Betty Wright Smith, a retired Toledo teacher of children with disabilities who grew up on the grounds of the family-run greenhouse complex — in the shadow of what became the University of Toledo — died March 26 in Laurels of Northworth, Worthington, Ohio. She was 90.

She broke a hip in early March and did not recover after surgery, her son Jeff said. After a fire in 2005 at her Sylvania



**Wright
Smith**

Township home, she moved to the Columbus area and an assisted living facility near family.

Mrs. Smith retired in the mid-1980s, closing her career at McKesson School in East Toledo. She previously taught at Feilbach School in South Toledo. Most of her students had physical disabilities.

"She was really very maternal, and I think she got a lot of satisfaction out of being able to help these kids," her son said. "It was a special cause for her all along."

She was born Jan. 7, 1923, to Bessie and Edward Wright. Her father and his brother, Arthur, started the Wright Bros. Greenhouse in the early years of the 20th century, a massive complex on West Bancroft that became one of the largest tomato growing operations in the area. Their father had been a Lucas County commissioner. The property was deeded to the family as a land grant by President Andrew Jackson, Mrs. Smith told The Blade's Millie Benson in 1996.

"As a child, I liked to roller-skate indoors, down the long, paved greenhouse aisles, between the rows of

tomatoes," Mrs. Smith said in 1996. She also watched from the family front porch as the West Bancroft UT campus was constructed, trucks raising great clouds of dust as they rumbled by.

"She was proud of her family and that heritage and proud of all the relationships they had with others in the Toledo area — the Tiedtkes and the old guard," her son Gary said.

She was a graduate of DeVilbiss High School and received a bachelor's degree from UT. She taught briefly in Pontiac, Mich. She returned to the profession about 1970 and received a master's degree in special education from UT.

She was a volunteer docent at the Manor House at Wildwood Preserve Metropark and was a Meals on Wheels volunteer. She made and dressed porcelain dolls.

With the Toledo Vagabonds, a travel group founded by her aunt Leonore Mills, she toured the world.

"She was a quintessential lady," son Jeff said, "just a class act."

She and her husband, Lloyd, married Feb. 3, 1945. He died March 23, 1983.

Surviving are her daughters, Diana "Dee" Thudium and Debra Smith; sons, Jeff and Gary Smith; seven grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

A remembrance will be from 1-4 p.m. May 5 in the Wildwood Preserve Metropark farmhouse. Arrangements are by Rutherford Funeral Home at Powell in Powell, Ohio.

The family suggests tributes to the Ability Center of Greater Toledo; Metroparks of the Toledo Area for Wildwood Preserve; the UT college of education, or Christ Presbyterian Church, where she was a member.

— Mark Zaborney