

Connemara founder Williams dies

By Shari Frazier, Staff writer, The Allen American

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More than 3,000 daffodils provide bittersweet beauty at the entrance of Connemara Meadow in honor its founder, Frances Montgomery Williams, who died Sunday afternoon. Williams died surrounded by members of her family at her home overlooking Connemara Meadow. She had suffered complications from a brain tumor.

"The daffodil tribute is so in concert with the way she was," said her daughter, Amy Williams Monier. "It's so simple, intelligent, and temporary, which is her in a nutshell. It's a demonstration of her essence."

Williams was a member of the Dallas Women's Club, the League of Woman Voters, the Founders Garden Club, and a founder of the Park Cities Association of Children with Learning Disabilities. She is best known to Collin County residents, however, as the founder of the Connemara Conservancy.

In 1976, Williams established the Connemara Conservatory with land left to her by her father. He originally purchased the land in 1946, and as a young child Williams fell in love with the property and the outdoors, Monier said.

Shortly after a portion of her land was engulfed by developments and what she called the "suburban sprawl," Williams decided to preserve the remaining property.

"She felt there was a whole generation of children who didn't know what it's like to enjoy the open spaces, so she was in favor of preserving the natural landscape," Monier said.

Son Philip Williams said his mother wanted to save the remaining open space because she feared it would all be lost to developments and the growth of local cities. When she established Connemara, it was the first open space dedicated to preservation on Rowlett Creek, which has become the premiere green space in North Texas, he said.

What was a fairly simple gift of open space officials on the county and city levels expanded, he said. Williams' dedication of Connemara led the Collin County Commissioners' Court to form the Collin County Open Space Board, Philip Williams said.

Since the board's inception, it has helped preserve about 85 miles of territory along Rowlett Creek. Board members have worked on several projects to protect the open spaces of Collin County since the board was created in 1999.

Williams continued to work for the preservation of natural spaces after protecting her 82-acre prairie land in Collin County, Monier said. She worked with property owners in more than 30 counties to save other open areas. Williams' desire to protect the open

spaces came from a battle over her own property, Monier said. After that property was protected, she wanted to help other preserve natural open spaces on their property.

"She was a heroine of the unsung cause," Monier said. "She had the ability to look forward to see the needs before we even realized those needs aren't being met. She was a visionary who wanted no public recognition."

Williams was born June 18, 1924. She was the daughter of Philip O'Brien and Frances Hench Montgomery of Dallas.

She graduated from Hockaday School in Dallas and earned a bachelor's of arts degree at Vassar College. Williams continued her education at Harvard Business School, receiving her master's of business administration.

In 1950 she married Bryan Williams of Marshall.

Williams is survived by her husband, brother Philip O'Brien Montgomery Jr., and six children, Harrison Williams of Houston, Philip Williams of Dallas, Lincoln Williams of Dallas, Bryan Nicholas Williams of North Carolina, Amy Williams Monier of Dallas, Margaret Williams of Boston; and eight grandchildren, Bryan Charles Monier, Nicholas Monier, Florence Monier, Mefford Williams, Margaret Williams, Philip Williams, Frances Louise Williams, and Amelia Williams.

Contributions to the Connemara Conservancy should be sent to 6625 Ridgeview Circle, Dallas TX 75240.

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