Lead Gifts

Fitzgeralds donate stellar fish book collection

Although he was a successful businessman and banker, Gerald F. Fitzgerald’s didn’t focus simply on numbers. “My father was always a very avid reader,” says his son, James. “He was a very dynamic businessman who also had significant intellectual pursuits, a love of learning and a love of reading … He read close to a book a day most of his life, devouring books on all different subjects.”

Today, Florida Gulf Coast University students have the opportunity to see a sampling of those volumes as a result of a gift by the Fitzgeralds to the University. The Gerald F. and Marjorie G. Fitzgerald Fish Book Collection, valued at close to $833,000, contains dozens of volumes, some dating back to the 1500s.

There’s the five-volume “The Natural History of British Fishes,” from the early 1800s, which includes 120 hand-colored copper plate engravings; “La Nature et Diversité des Poissons” (“The Nature and Diversity of Fish”) published in 1555, with 190 woodcuts attributed to artist Pierre Gaudet; and more contemporary works, such as “Fishes, Crayfishes, and Crabs: Louis Renard’s Natural History of the Rarest Curiosities of the Seas of the Indies,” published in 1995.

There are books about fishes of the Antarctic, Japan, the tropics and Ceylon, written in English, French, German, Russian and Latin.

“The Fitzgerald fish book collection affords FGCU an historical reference that is invaluable for faculty and students in marine and environmental sciences,” says Donna Price Henry, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. “It is a collection of books that provides an anatomical and descriptive survey of a broad variety of fish species.”

Harry L. Stern, a Chicago appraiser of antiquarian books, says the collection is so valuable because of its condition. “The exceptionally fine condition of nearly all of these works is a key factor in determining their worth because of the excellent hand coloring of many of the plates,” he says. “Institutional copies of these works are frequently missing plates or have other faults.”

Becky Dolan, University librarian and assistant director of collection management, says receiving the collection was thrilling. “When we opened the boxes, I remembered why I’d become a librarian,” she says. “These books are magnificent.”

Gerald Fitzgerald, a World War II veteran, earned his bachelor’s degree at Northwestern University, where he met Marjorie, to whom he was married for 61 years. He and a friend formed a public relations firm that eventually became a division of J. Walter Thompson. He went on to become a successful banker. He died Oct. 30 at 85.

Quality management focus of new endowment

Quality doesn’t just happen. Whatever the business, a quality product depends on intent, planning and expertise.

Teaching tomorrow’s aerospace and defense industry leaders how to achieve this is the goal of a program that will operate at Florida Gulf Coast University thanks to a gift from the Aviation, Space and Defense Division of the American Society for Quality.

Leaders of the organization established the ASQ – Aviation, Space & Defense Quality Endowed Fund with a gift of $100,000 to FGCU. It is the first such endowment by an American Society for Quality division.

The University will apply to the state for matching funds, increasing the gift’s value to $150,000.

The endowment will establish the Program for Quality Management in the Lutgert College of Business, which will engage faculty, students and the community in the development of education programs, forums and professional development opportunities in the study of integrated quality management and effective value-stream management.

The endowment arose from the realization that college graduates need an understanding of quality principles. By creating an endowment, the Aviation, Space and Defense Quality Division can help to ensure a focus on quality.

“There were many advantages for selecting FGCU,” said Michael Dreikorn, education chair of the division. “FGCU was very willing and eager to work with the division. Since FGCU is a relatively young University, it is still growing and open to new ideas.”

Programs bolster youngsters’ reading, language skills

Being able to read and communicate are the principle building blocks for a successful education which, in turn, is the basis for a successful and satisfying life.

Extensive research has determined that children who enter kindergarten with solid reading and language skills are more likely to succeed and stay in school.

Helping children achieve that goal is the objective of the Early Literacy and Learning Model and Wings on Words initiative. The Naples Children and Education Foundation supports these programs that provide educational enrichment to more than 1,000 Collier County preschoolers ages 3 to 6 years who might be at risk because of poverty or language barriers.

The programs funded by NCEF enable schools to equip classrooms with engaging materials and libraries for children. The funding also supports literacy coaches who work with teachers in pre-K classrooms to develop lesson plans and student activities.

Funded by NCEF’s $310,000 gift, Florida Gulf Coast University administers the program in sites such as Guadalupe Center, Redlands Christian Migrant Association and numerous Head Start classrooms.

Assessment tests show the program helps teachers become more effective in teaching these vital skills and that 95 percent of the children who participate improve their English vocabulary skills.

“The Early Literacy and Learning Model and Wings on Words are critically important programs,” says Steve Maguire, vice president for Advancement. “The support of the Naples Children and Education Foundation for these programs means that more than 1,000 preschoolers will receive the help and nurturing they need to be successful in school and in life.”