

## 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 Goude; 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"The Fitzgerald fish book collection affords FGCU an historical reference that is invaluable for faculty and students in marine and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 Donlan, University librarian and assistant director of collection management, says receiving the collection was thrilling.

"When I 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.

