



Communities of
COASTAL GEORGIA FOUNDATION

AN OPEN HOME AND AN OPEN HEART

by Valerie A. Hepburn, PhD, President & CEO, Communities of Coastal Georgia Foundation



Martha Brumley Ellis with Shelia McCloud, at Harris Neck in McIntosh County, for the December meeting of the Communities of Coastal Georgia Foundation.

It's all in the genes. With her family lineage, Martha Brumley Ellis had little choice – she was going to be a community leader and a giver. She is a child of Coastal Georgia. Her early years were spent in Camden County, where her father was general manager of Gilman Paper Company and chaired the Camden County School Board. Her mother was a founding member of the St. Marys Women's Club.

The elder Brumleys had three children – George, Martha and Frank. Hard work and a positive, giving attitude were ingrained in the Brumley children, all of whom worked each summer. They were high achievers – and each

have been philanthropists, very generous ones who have made their marks in their respective communities. Martha's eldest brother, George Jr., remains a legend in the Atlanta area and in health care circles around the country. After earning his medical degree and teaching at Duke University Medical School for nearly two decades, he moved back to Georgia to chair Emory University's Department of Pediatrics. With his wife, Jean, they established The Zeist Foundation to advance issues in underserved communities, particularly those supporting youth, education, arts and culture, and health.

In July 2003, Mrs. Jean and Dr. George Brumley, along with three of their children, their

spouses and four grandchildren, were killed in a tragic airplane crash during a family vacation in Kenya. Jean and George Brumley's exceptional philanthropy and goodness continues through the work of The Zeist Foundation, which has been led with distinction for the past twelve years by their surviving twin daughters and Martha's nieces, Marie and Nancy, and their families. The Zeist Foundation, based in Atlanta, is recognized as one of the Southeast's most innovative and impactful family foundations. Though its primary focus has been the metro area, the Foundation still has close ties to the Coastal region, helping support programming at the Boys and Girls Club of Southeast Georgia, the College of Coastal Georgia

and the Communities of Coastal Georgia Foundation.

Martha's youngest brother, Frank, settled in Charleston, SC. A successful businessman and developer, Frank is a significant civic leader and philanthropist for his coastal community, having served on the boards of the local land trust and



Janet Brown, Anna Stroud and Martha Ellis at the Ellis home for a meeting of the St. Simons Cotillion

the community foundation. He is a past president of the Historic Charleston Foundation. Like his sister, Martha, he is a UGA graduate and an avid alumnae supporter.

After college, the coast called her back and Martha moved to St. Simons Island. Martha married Joe Harvey, president of the Harvey Grocery Business, a company that was started by Joe's family as a small grocery store in Nashville, Georgia and grew to become a powerhouse retail chain in the Southeast. To all who knew him, Joe was a larger-than-life figure – and he and Martha hosted many a cause-oriented party and charity event at their home on Sea Island. While Martha is a Presbyterian and active member of her St. Simons church, Joe Harvey was a Methodist and his charitable pas-

sion was Epworth by the Sea. At the time of his passing in 2005, Joe Harvey's memorial gifts were directed to this idyllic and beautiful retreat he loved so much.

After losing her dear older brother and beloved husband in such close proximity, Martha would have deserved the right to turn

inward. But, neither a Brumley nor a Harvey could do that. Martha was one of the first supporters of the Communities of Coastal Georgia Foundation, serving as a founding board member for the maximum of three terms from 2005-2014. Along with a group of friends, she helped start a local women's giving circle, Golden Isles ACT, which remains a quiet, powerful force in targeted local philanthropy. Her home remains "the" party-for-a-purpose house on Sea Island. From cotillions to engagements, Martha is generous with her hospitality and warmth. Her children – Brumley Smith in Columbus, Libba Rule in Charlotte, NC, and Warner Smith in Dublin – continue the family tradition of service through their respective work with youth, non-profits and faith-based organiza-

tions. Martha's nine grandchildren are sure to follow suit.

In 2007, Martha found a new life partner in Lamar Ellis, whom she had met through a University of Georgia function. An Atlanta resident, Lamar had been recently widowed. Though they did not know each other at the time, Martha and Lamar had been at UGA at the same time. Martha convinced Lamar to make Sea Island their home and he quickly adapted to the lifestyle and their shared focus on service – and fun!

Though the years, it has been Martha's favorite charity and cause, the State Botanical Gardens, in Athens, that has brought her the greatest joy. Martha has served on the board since 2001, and has been a part of every major planning and development effort since then, helping take the Gardens from a sleepy little patch of flowers off Milledge Avenue to a nationally recognized research and recreation venue. Over the past few years, Martha has devoted considerable energy to the development of the Children's Garden, which will soon emerge from the planning stage. Martha's role is described by the development staff as "above and beyond always." Once the new Children's Garden is in place, her gifts - both personal and financial – mean that Martha's name will grace one of the garden's signature features. Through Martha, her siblings and their descendants, the Brumley spirit of compassion, service and generosity will continue to benefit Georgians and the Southeast for generations to come.



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