

Betty Steinhauer Ott Zeta Tau Alpha A Lasting Gift

(Excerpt from article by Karen Sumpter Erlenbach)



In 1926, Betty was a charter member of the Beta Delta chapter at Miami University where she majored in Journalism and English, graduating in 1928. She went on to law school at John Marshall. Betty and her husband initially lived in Lyndhurst (he was a mayor there for several years) and as a wife and mother, she participated in the usual community activities.

A sorority sister's husband, Bromley House, suggested she "try her hand at commercials" because she had a great voice. She did! Her first radio spot was for Dolley Madison potato salad – it earned her \$10. She thought she was rich!

"Lunch with Betty Ott" began in 1949 and aired on WCLV for over 40 years. In 1950, the noon-time audience participation show went simulcast on television on then WXEL, now WJW-TV. Her expertise in interviewing earned her talk show great popularity. She interviewed everyone of note who came to town, including Presidents, foreign government officials, movie stars and the wives. She was the first woman to have broadcasted from Alaska, Beirut, Tel-Aviv, below the Atlantic Ocean in a US sub and above the clouds in a private plane belonging to and talking to President Charles De Gaulle. She eventually became Director of Community Affairs at WJW-TV.

She was responsible for and endowed the Talking Garden for the Blind, next to the Rockefeller Greenhouse, which brought praise from the late Helen Keller. During this time, she served as a trustee of the Cleveland Society for the Blind. The garden's plan has been widely copied.

Betty retired from broadcasting in 1987 and received Certificates of Achievements from the American Women in Radio and Television and the Women City Club of Cleveland. She received many, many more awards, too numerous to mention.

It was fitting that upon her death in 1990, we [the Sorority] established a collegiate scholarship in her name... a bridge linking our past with our future! Betty Steinhauer Ott - a lasting gift! Our Cleveland East & West Betty Ott Steinhauer Ott Memorial Scholarship is now a yearly \$2500 award to an Ohio ZTA Collegian.