

Mary Lou Cousley leaves behind legacy of service to Alton, world around her

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - Mary Lou Cousley had a motto she carried close to her heart: “This is our world and we might as well make it the best we can. We are only here for a short time.”

Mary Lou Cousley, 76, who died unexpectedly last Friday of heart complications, leaves behind a legacy of working for the betterment of parks and people in the Alton area.

“Her projects were anything toward the betterment of people, parks or the town,” her son, Mark Cousley, said.

Mary Lou was married to Steve Cousley, once one of the Telegraph’s owners and editor.

Her son said Mary Lou was active in Alton Memorial Hospital Foundation's Duck Pluckers Ball, Hayner Library Board, Alton Children's Theatre, Alton Community Service League, Junior League of Greater Alton and Alton Marketplace, along with a host of other activities. Mary Lou once coached tennis at Lewis and Clark Community College. She was an excellent tennis player and golfer. As she grew older, golf became her passion outside her family.

Mark said Mary Lou's favorite project was the beautification of Riverview Park and Sunken Garden across the street from the Cousley's long-time home. She was also a long-time owner of Dormann's, a gift store in Downtown Alton.

"It was one of her sources of pride to see one of the one of the ambulances paid for by events she helped start," Mark said. "From all the hundreds of posts and comments we have had since she died, it is humbling and yet fulfilling for just how she affected so many people in different ways."

Mark said his mother was great to talk and confide in, no matter the issue. He said sometimes he didn't like her advice, but looking at it now, she was almost always right.

Mary Lou and Steve's other child - Jean - is a well-known artist/painter and has left her own permanent impact on Alton with some of her wall paintings and other works of art. Mary Lou and Steve have three grandchildren.

Charlotte Stetson was a long-time friend of Mary Lou and Steve Cousley.

She said about Mary Lou's death: "We enjoyed family things with Mary Lou and Steve. She was always a leader and she led the way on a lot of causes and charities in the area. The one thing I will remember most is how she was always involved in Alton Memorial's Duck Pluckers' event. She was a wonderful person and will be greatly missed."

Godfrey Mayor Mike McCormick first became more acquainted with Mary Lou when she was the LCCC women's tennis coach.

"She was an amazing woman," he said. "When I first moved to the area, I got to know her through tennis. She and her husband, Steve, have been two of my dearest friends since. They both took me under their wings and always made me feel welcome and included me in things. One of their granddaughters even calls me Uncle Mike, which means a lot."

Mark Cousley said what he learned most from his mom was something simple: "To not sweat the small stuff. That is what she always said."

