

Former Grand Forks woman of the Year, longtime teacher advocate dead at 84

By Stephen J. Lee
Herald Staff Writer

Sadie Fitts, a Grand Forks Woman of the Year and longtime advocate and teacher of disabled children, has died.

Fitts, 84, of 3210 Fifth Ave. N., died Thursday, Feb. 27, 1997, at United Hospital.

Sadie Stella Jolliffe was born Aug. 10, 1912 in Perth, N.D., the daughter of Robert and Evalena (Taylor) Jolliffe. She was raised and educated in Rolla, N.D. There she ran a nursery for preschool children and then was director of nursery schools on the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation.

She married Roy Fitts March 13, 1943 in Rolla, and they soon moved to Grand Forks. He died Sept. 27, 1955.

Fitts was a leader in helping children in a variety of ways in the community, say those who knew her, perhaps doing as much as any single individual to improve the care of handicapped children.

"She was very gracious and involved in a lot of volunteer organizations," said Elmer Lian, Grand Forks, who worked with her with disabled children. "She worked with handicapped children for many years. They were the focus of her life for 15, 20 years."

Fitts helped found the Valley Day Care for Retarded Children in Grand Forks in 1964 and was its director until 1976. The center, which became Agassiz Enterprises, pro-



Fitts

vided activities and a schedule for children with retardation, she said. "We were having discipline problems at home with him. Sadie had just started this program, and we got Shane into it. It was just the best thing. I don't know if I could have gone through it without her help." It was what Shane needed, too, to be with other children, she said. He's 37 now and just moved into his own apartment, with 24-hour care. "He was in her program for as long as she was there. She was such a marvelous woman," Stromsodt said.

Fitts took her work to the national stage, too. She was a board member of the Valley Association of Retarded Citizens, which became ARC. In 1965, she attended the National Conference of Day Care Services and lunched with U.S. Sen. Quentin Burdick.

"Working with retarded children requires patience, endurance and a good sense of humor," Fitts told the Herald 30 years ago. "They are beautiful children, they love music and to sing songs and are avid TV

watchers. They have excellent memories and for this reason it is very important what is put into their minds as they will remember it."

Earlier, she had established the first preschool nursery at UND and was program director at the YWCA for 12 years.

For nine years until she retired in the early 1980s, she was house mother of the Alpha Phi sorority at UND.

She was active in Federated Church and was a member of the Retired Teachers' Association and the United Hospital Auxiliary.

Fitts also was a charter member of "Toastmistresses" in Grand Forks and president of the Business and Professional Women's Club.

In 1967, she was named Grand Forks Woman of the Year, an annual citywide honor sponsored by Beta Sigma Phi sorority.

Fitts is survived by several nieces and nephews.

She was preceded in death by brothers, Lloyd, Warren, and Merle; and sisters, Dona, Helen and Evelyn.

Services: 3 p.m. Saturday at Federated Church.

Visitation: 5 to 7 p.m. today at Norman Funeral Home, Columbia Road, and one hour prior to services at the church.

Burial: Memorial Park Cemetery, Grand Forks.