



MARY JO RESTON

Legacy of Passion and Philanthropy By Abby Jimison

Every night, hundreds of people take their seats at Florida Studio Theatre, each bringing their own stories, passions, and generosity. Among them was Mary Jo (Jody) Reston, a devoted patron who gave quietly throughout her life but revealed her extraordinary gift only after her passing.

Jody earned a bachelor's degree in English from the University of Wisconsin and spent 25 years as the publisher and business manager of The Vineyard Gazette in Martha's Vineyard. She was actively involved in community initiatives, advocating for environmental preservation and improving healthcare quality on the island. After her long career in journalism, she retired to Sarasota in 1999 and became a dedicated patron of the arts.

Jody's love for theatre began in 2008 when she became a loyal FST subscriber to the Winter Mainstage and Cabaret seasons, never missing a show. She attended audience favorites such as *Hairspray*, *Always... Patsy Cline*, *Unchained Melodies*, and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Alongside her attendance, she made annual donations ranging from \$200 to \$500, recognizing the importance of the arts in enriching the community.

Jody passed away in February 2024 after a long battle with Alzheimer's disease. Her friends and family fondly remember her as an engaging conversationalist who loved discussing politics and current events. They often recall her laughter, her contagious smile, and her indomitable spirit characterized by kindness, generosity, and fierce independence. Jody had an endless curiosity about the world around her, coupled with a love for travel, playing bridge, dining out, and supporting the theatre and performing arts.

"Mary Jo Reston was a steadfast supporter of Florida Studio Theatre," shared FST's Managing Director, Rebecca Hopkins. "Her financial support during her lifetime was modest, but her loyal presence at our programming was constant. I spoke with her many times over the years, but she never shared her legacy plans with us."



Mary Jo Reston - Photo Courtesy of The Observer

Upon her passing, FST was named a beneficiary of one-sixth of the remainder of Jody's Trust, along with CARE, Doctors Without Borders USA, Asolo Repertory Theatre, Sarasota Opera, and Sarasota Ballet. In total, FST received an astonishing \$1.25 Million from her estate.

In recognition of her unwavering support and belief in the arts, FST will honor her legacy by naming Jody as a Platinum Underwriter for our Winter and Summer seasons in perpetuity, joining other generous legacy donors Ruth Gluck and Anne H.S. Nethercott. By honoring her incredible legacy, FST reaffirms its commitment to the arts and the transformative power they hold in our lives and communities.

Donors like Mary Jo Reston help shape FST's future, with legacy gifts supporting the theatre's operations while serving as a testament to the vital role of the arts in community building.

Legacy Gift
To contribute, contact
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