

Shreveport's international bridge champion dies



Maggie Martin, maggiemartin@gannett.com 7:03 p.m. CDT October 31, 2016



(Photo: Times File Photo)

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International bridge champion and icon Betty Kennedy, who sat at bridge tables with film star Omar Sharif and the vice premier of China, died Sunday.

She was 86.

Funeral services for Kennedy are 11 a.m. Friday at First United Methodist Church of Shreveport. The longtime resident of South Highlands in Shreveport died at Grace Home after a fall suffered a few weeks ago, according to her son David Kennedy.

At Bridge Clubhouse, where Kennedy played many a hand of bridge through the years, members stopped Monday to hear a statement by her longtime friend Charles Weed. It was followed by a moment of silence for Kennedy and Carlos Colon, the Caddo Parish Poet Laureate who also died this weekend. Colon was well-known in the community as Haiku Elvis, a nod to the haiku poems he wrote about Elvis.

Although Kennedy was a champion bridge player who traveled the world, she was always loving and supportive of her children and her grandchildren, her son David Kennedy said.

"She supported any activities we were involved in," he said.

Her many friends also found her special.

"She was a good friend of mine. When we put my husband in a nursing home, Betty called me and offered her support, saying, 'What can I do for you. Just talk?'" remembered Cahn. "It meant a lot to me."

Cahn, who has known Kennedy since the 1960s, also said Kennedy always had a great demeanor at the bridge table no matter who she played with.

"She is undoubtedly the most gracious person to sit opposite. She treats everybody the same," said local bridge player Ed Todd, in an earlier story.

Dutch journalist Jan van Cleef once describe Kennedy as "the No. 1 icon" of women's bridge in his Bridge Magazine IMP, according to a story by Lane Crockett, which ran in The Times in 2003.

At that time, she had just returned from Monaco where she won her fifth gold medal, the world championship known as the Venice Cup from the World Bridge Federation and she also held three silver medals

Some other Kennedy notes:

- She started playing bridge on her doctor's recommendation after an illness left her with concentration and memory problems and she arrived on the national bridge scene in 1960. But when she first started playing, she hated it.
- Her partnership with Carol Sanders is considered the longest and most successful partnerships in bridge history, according to the American Contract Bridge League website.
- The ACBL site described her as "glamorous, daring, skillful, aggressive."
- She became the second woman to receive the Louisiana Hall of Fame Award.