

Meet the Gessners:

Long-Time Galveston Bay Foundation Donors Make a Transformational Campaign Gift

In Fall 2018, Barbara and Andy Gessner made an extraordinary \$5 million gift to Galveston Bay Foundation's capital campaign. To honor their generosity, our new headquarters will be named The Gessner Center.

The story of their gift is both heartwarming and inspirational. Andy Gessner, a native Houstonian with a street named after his uncle, spent his summers growing up on Galveston Bay. His mother, a nurse, used her earnings to buy a piece of property on the water in Bayview for \$325 in 1932. Over the decades that followed, the Gessner family's summer getaway became a place of many happy memories.

Andy remembers how much fun it was to be at the Bay with his family and neighborhood friends every summer, spending long days playing on the beach and in the water, fishing, crabbing, and exploring.

Barbara grew up in Ohio, but her mother knew Andy's parents through family church connections, so she occasionally spent time at the Bay too. In fact, it is where she and Andy met!



Andy and Barbara Gessner enjoying their view of the Bay from behind an antique ship's wheel. They've turned the top floor of their home into a special place full of nautical delights.

When Barbara moved to Texas for college, she and Andy began dating – and the rest, as they say, is history. Andy had a successful career with Industrial Air Tool (IAT), while Barbara volunteered at their daughter's school and in the community while supporting Andy in his career. Over the years, the Bay continued to be a special place for their family – including their daughter and two beloved grandchildren – and their desire to preserve and protect the Bay for future generations continued to grow.

Barbara and Andy have seen the Bay change over time, first for the worse and then for the better. When they were children, the water was clear, Andy recalls. "You could scoop out crabs with a net and dig for oysters. I remember people catching 80 trout in a day." But both he and Barbara also remember how terrible it was in the 1960s and 70s when industrial pollution severely damaged the water quality with devastating consequences for wildlife. "You could see oil slicks on the water, and the bottom became mucky," Barbara says. "During those years, we almost never saw pelicans or dolphins."

As they participated in the Bay community, Barbara and Andy learned about Galveston Bay Foundation's programs and were impressed by the positive impact they were having. Believing in the importance of giving back, they began supporting the organization and have remained loyal donors year after year. "Anything that helps the Bay is good," Andy says, "and



Family photos show young Andy Gessner's adventures as a fisherman and boater.

what Galveston Bay Foundation is doing is really good." He and Barbara have seen Galveston Bay Foundation's impact first-hand, as water quality in the Bay continues to improve, wetlands are being restored, and wildlife is flourishing. Today, when they look out their windows at the Bay, they often see pelicans and osprey soaring by. The dolphins have returned, too.

And so, as the Gessners were driving on Route 146 one day this fall and saw a sign announcing Galveston Bay Foundation's new facility, they wanted to know more. Excited by Galveston Bay Foundation's plans, they decided to make an amazing contribution to help advance our organization's efforts to restore and preserve the Bay. "We could see how important it is for Galveston Bay Foundation to be on the Bay, and the site is beautiful and ideally located," Andy says.

Barbara agrees. "Galveston Bay Foundation will be able to use the Gessner Center to educate people why they should care about the Bay and how they can help protect it for future generations. Andy and I agree on the importance of education, especially as it pertains to the environment."

We are deeply grateful for the Gessners' gift, which will help us ensure that their grandchildren and future generations will have the opportunity to enjoy a clean, healthy, thriving Bay – just as they have.