

## Local Obituaries MAY 18, 2015

# Miami tourism public relations executive Jeanne Westphal dies at 85



**BUILDING BRIDGES:** Jeanne Westphal served as director of tourism for Miami-Dade County from 1983 to 1986 and helped establish the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau. She also held tourism and hospitality position with the Carter Administration in Washington, D.C., and led a number of programs in Miami-Dade to help the young and in-need find jobs within the tourism and hospitality industry. | MIAMI HERALD FILE

BY HOWARD COHEN

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Jeanne Westphal's passport could have been telephone book-sized given her life experiences in the tourism and travel industries.

In addition to her own Jeanne Westphal Associates marketing firm in Miami Beach, for which she won the Marco Polo Award from The Society of American Travel Writers, she was the first woman to hold the assistant secretary of commerce for tourism position in the Jimmy Carter Administration. In that role, she directed and promoted tourism to the United States from offices in Europe, Latin America, Mexico, Canada and Japan from 1977 to 1980.

She even joked in 1983 when she was hired as the director of the Miami-Dade Department of Tourism: "I haven't had a vacation in 10 years. Between my own company and the U.S. Travel Service, I'm *in* the vacation business."

Westphal died on May 15 at age 85. Westphal was her own version of the Miami Is For Me tourism ad slogan. Miami was for *her*.

"It's a terrific city," Westphal said at the time she was hired for the director's position, which led her to help establish the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau. "Every time I turn around, I find something new happening. It's a city of unknown potential. I'm here to stay."

And, for the most part, aside from a stint with the Arizona Office of Tourism, the Brooklyn-born Westphal, who graduated from the New York School of Interior Design, made good on her promise.

"Three and a half years ago, when I took over, tourism was really in the doldrums. We had various tourism entities doing their own thing and everyone was wondering why things weren't moving ahead. Now they are," she said in a 1986 Herald article upon her resignation from the director's position.

She set up the modern tourism industry in Miami-Dade and then went beyond, said Michael Aller, tourism and convention director for Miami Beach.

"She was around at the beginning of what we have created and the framework that we've lived by," Aller said. "We always looked to Jeanne for advice, for counsel. She was a force. She was always right on target."

In 1987, Westphal, along with Stuart Blumberg and Bob Dickinson, founded the Academy of Hospitality and Tourism. She continued to serve on its advisory board for the rest of her life.

The program was established in partnership with Miami-Dade County Public Schools and American Express Philanthropic Foundation in 1987 at Miami Springs Senior High School. The goal then, as now, was to help inner-city students consider the tourism industry as a career path. The program is now in more than 100 schools across the country, including 14 in Miami-Dade.

“She was tenacious,” Blumberg said. “She loved Miami and everything about tourism and everything about her was, ‘*How do I make this destination a success?*’ and ‘*How do I promote?*’” Blumberg, an executive in the hotel industry, and Dickinson, a cruise industry executive, clicked.

“Jeanne and I, we were cut from the old days... the Dark Ages,” Blumberg quipped. “It was successful and to the day she passed she was still involved in the Academy. She would call me and invite me back to functions and used to yell at me for declining. She wouldn’t take ‘no’ for an answer.”

Westphal was also director of The Hospitality Institute, a program of the Miami Dade College International Hospitality Center, from 2008 to 2010. The job training program, located in Overtown, assisted residents in finding jobs in the hospitality and tourism industries. A year later, she served the School Board as a consultant and internship coordinator and helped place 300 high school students with employers.

In 2012, she consulted Florida International University’s Learning Skills for Life Job Training program to place graduates in hospitality jobs in Miami-Dade and Broward. In 2013, she joined the Miami Lighthouse for the Blind & Visually Impaired as a job developer.

“The one thing that impressed me most is that her focus was always on how to give opportunity to someone who didn’t have another option,” said hospitality industry executive DeAnne Connolly Graham. “She was always about job opportunities and giving back to the ... community.”

A memorial service is in the planning stages. Donations in her name can be made to support the Jeanne Westphal Scholarship Fund that provides scholarships to high school graduates who complete the Academy of Hospitality & Tourism program. Checks should be made payable to MECA and mailed to:

Rebecca Ann Fields, National Academy Foundation Facilitator, Department of Career & Technical Education, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 10151 NW 19th Ave., Miami, FL, 33147.