Barbara Ericksen, 'true public servant'

BY BILL HIRSCHMAN
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Although ill with cancer, Broward County civic activist Barbara Ericksen did not go to Rome last week to die.

With her doctor's blessing, she flew to watch the pope beatify Mother Teresa. She even brought money for Christmas shopping.

And after taking Communion with the quarter-million faithful in St. Peter's Square and watching the Pope walk a few hundred feet away, Ms. Ericksen waited outside her hotel "just glowing," said her friend Maria McGinty.

Hours later, a complication from the illness she had battled since April overtook her. She was taken to a tree-shaded clinic overlooking the Vatican. She and McGinty, who sang together at St. Sebastian's Catholic Church, raised their voices in *Amazing Grace* and Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*.

And then Wednesday, at about 3 a.m. Florida time, she died.

"She was just so thrilled that she made it there," McGinty said. "And I think maybe she was looking for a miracle."

Ericksen

Her death tore a hole in the fabric of Broward's volunteer community.

For six years, the energetic and upbeat Ms. Ericksen, 50, was executive director of Kids Voting Broward, imbuing thousands of Broward school children with the importance of voting in a democracy, hoping to create "well-educated, well-informed, lifelong voters."

She also had been president of the Association for Women in Communications' Atlantic Florida Chapter since 1995, served on Broward's Fair Campaign Practices Committee and sang first alto with the Florida Philharmonic Chorus. She helped lead youth organizations, anti-drug groups and economic development boards.

"Barbara was a treasure to the community," said Gene Cain, acting chairman of Kids Voting Broward. "She was a true public servant."

She organized classes on how elections work, held straw polls among students about social issues such as prayer in school, and supervised a dozen mock elections. During the 2000 presidential election alone, 80,000 students voted.

Her appointment in 1997 ratcheted up the agency's efforts. Among her creations was the Think-A-Thon fund-raiser where students got pledges from sponsors in exchange for hours of intensive studying.

Ms. Ericksen had undergone treatment at Jackson Medical Center for six months for aggressive cancer.

"But she said, 'I'm not going to let this thing overtake me,' " McGinty said. "She worked and continued to work."

She left for Rome a week ago Friday with about two dozen church members — but only after stopping in on the fifth annual Think-A-Thon.

"Her work ethic was unbelievable," marveled Coco Burns of the Broward Education Foundation. "She did the fund-raising all by herself, always working late hours, getting on her computer at home at 5 a.m. and being at the office at 7 p.m."

Each holiday season, she found a family her church choir could help with food and donations, said Peter Manfredi, the church's music director.

Ms. Ericksen was born in Michigan and raised in Louisville, Ky., before moving to Broward in 1982. She worked as community relations director for The Starting Place, executive director of the Sunrise Chamber of Commerce and marketing/communication director of the United Way of Broward County before joining Kids Voting.

She is survived by her mother, Grace, of Fort Lauderdale; and two sisters, Carol Licata of Virginia and Linda Ericksen of Arizona. A memorial service will be at 6 p.m. Thursday at St. Sebastian's Catholic Church, 2000 SE 245th Ave. In lieu of flowers, contributions can be made to Kids Voting Broward or the church.

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