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Planning Board member, former legislator Jean Cryor dies

Potomac woman was former Gazette publisher

| by Gazette Staff

Jean B. Cryor, a member of the Montgomery County Planning Board, and former three-term state legislator and newspaper publisher, died Tuesday night.

Her death, at age 70 from cancer, was announced in a statement from County Executive Isiah Leggett.

"Her absence will be deeply felt in many ways and in many communities," Leggett said. "We mourn her loss and extend our deepest condolences to her family, her friends, and her colleagues on the Planning Board."

Cryor, of Potomac, was appointed to the Planning Board in June 2007 after she lost a bid for a fourth term representing District 15 in the House of Delegates in 2006.

On the Planning Board, she was known for her quick wit, sharp questioning and interest in a range of topics.

"Jean brought us insight, compassion, humor, and great good judgment to the decisions we make," Planning Board Chairman Royce Hanson said in a statement Tuesday. "It was characteristic of her dedication to the public weal that she insisted that her funeral could not be held on Thursday. She was one of Montgomery's finest citizens, and an enormous loss to both all of us who knew and loved her, and to the greater community her work touched."

The cause of death was cancer, according to a statement from the Planning Board.

Montgomery County Council President Philip M. Andrews said Cryor had a way of making people feel at ease.

"She was very independent, very clear about what she thought and very warm and engaging," said Andrews, (D-Dist. 3) of Gaithersburg.

He said one of her best traits was her ability to tap into what residents wanted to know.

"I was impressed by her independence, her common sense and her interest in hearing what was on peoples' minds," Andrews said.

Cryor was the lone Republican on the county's delegation to the state legislature when she lost her House seat in 2006 to political newcomer Craig Rice, a Democrat from Germantown, by 152 votes.

Before entering politics, she was a former editor and publisher at The Gazette.

"She was responsible for making our paper strong," said James F. Mannarino, The Gazette's president and publisher, who at the time worked for Cryor as an advertising manager.

"She just made The Gazette a household name back in those days."

Cryor is the only Republican to have been elected president of the Women Legislators of Maryland.

Kathleen M. Dumais (D-Dist. 15) of Rockville shared an office in Annapolis with Cryor from 2002 to 2006. She remembered her as a "terrific mentor" who taught her to "listen to both sides and not compromise your heart and your principles."

Cryor pushed hard for school funding and earned an income tax credit for low-income individuals, said state Sen. Robert J. Garagiola.

"When she took the floor, everyone listened — Republican and Democrat," he said.

Cryor participated by phone in a Planning Board hearing as recently as Oct. 22, said Commissioner Amy Presley, who met Cryor when she was a delegate and Presley an activist in Clarksburg.

"From the first moment I met her, I never viewed her as a politician but as a regular person," Presley said.

Even after Cryor was no longer in the State House, she was looking out for the people she had represented, Presley said.

Cryor was born in Lansdowne, Pa., and raised in suburban Philadelphia, where she had been a reporter for the Philadelphia Bulletin.

She was the widow of Dan Cryor, a broadcast news reporter.

She is survived by her three daughters, Allison Cryor DiNardo of Alexandria, Va. Jennifer Cryor Baldwin of North Potomac, and Deirdre Cryor of Denver, and three grandchildren.

Staff Writers Sebastian Montes, Susan Singer-Bart, Melissa A. Chadwick and Melissa Brachfeld contributed to this report.