

NEIGHBORS

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To people who didn't know them, their lives are sometimes obscured by the details: the professional titles or time of death; the organizations they belonged to or lists of family members they left behind. So instead of rendering just the cold, hard facts, we focused on the stories, comments or qualities that made them human.

They are merely six of the 148,865 who depart this world in every single 24 hours on this space-born planet. But they lived in our community and were here on New Year's Day 2008. Now they're gone.



BRUCE GORA

PORTRAIT OF THE ARCHITECT AS A MUSICIAN

Even if you didn't know architect Bruce Gora, you've probably seen one of the many buildings he designed in Fort Myers. There's the parking garage in downtown he fought to paint a "salsa" color, to the shock of many old timers in the 1990s; or The Alliance for the Arts, the Fort Myers Beach Library and Temple Beth-El.

"Almost anywhere you go in this town, you can give directions by saying, turn at the Bruce Gora building," said longtime friend Hal Arkin, a real-estate agent.

Mr. Gora was also an accomplished photographer. But of his rich faculty of talents — friends often describe him as a "renaissance man" — jazz trumpet and harmonica may have been especially close to his heart.

"We had to rein him in a little bit when he came in Monday morning bleary eyed after playing a full week-end of musical gigs," said Dan McGahey, who was Mr. Gora's partner, in the Gora/McGahey architectural firm, for 22 years. "Music was really a love as much as architecture."

Mr. Gora died in December at 58, after a battle with cancer. He was especially remembered for music by former bandmate Dr. Larry Hobbs, the medical director at Southwest Florida Regional Medical Center.

"He was chairman of the Horizon Council, Chairman of Alliance for the Arts and all these different leadership accolades," said Dr. Hobbs, who met Mr. Gora at the University of Florida in 1974. Mr. Hobbs was a pre-med freshman and Mr. Gora was a fifth-year architecture student. "He always did a lot for the community, but I always knew him as a musician — and a great athlete. He was a great snow skier as

well."

Back in college, Mr. Gora was a frequent trumpet soloist for the University of Florida jazz band. Mr. Gora had also hired Dr. Hobbs to play bass guitar in a dance group outside school. In 1985, after both their career paths landed them in Fort Myers, they became two of three core members in a popular local Blues and R&B band called The Juice. It lasted for 15 years. Mr. Gora designed the cover art for The Juice's album "Plugged In," a close up of an orange with electrical cords plugged into it.

"He was a fantastic jazz musician — a fantastic one," Dr. Hobbs said. "He could play with anyone, anytime, anywhere."

Dr. Hobbs said that Mr. Gora was also a huge Florida Gators fan. If they won a game, he would incorporate the Gator's fight song into one of his Saturday night trumpet solos.

"Every moment that I played with Bruce Gora was the best moment I played with Bruce Gora," said Dr. Hobbs. "He never stopped amazing me since I started playing with him in 1972."

Mr. McGahey said that in architecture, Mr. Gora was ambitious, striving to create the very best building with each project. His ambitions were similar in music.

Mr. Gora grew up in Fort Lauderdale, where he played trumpet in bands when he was a teenager with friend Jaco Pastorius, arguably one of the best bass players in the world. He also has two brothers, one an attorney in Fort Lauderdale and the other a saxophonist who lives in Boca Raton. His wife Carolyn, an art teacher at Cypress Lake Middle School, and two daughters, Natalie Schultz and Julie, live in Fort Myers.

Mr. McGahey said watching Mr. Gora play music "was inspirational. He would completely lose himself in the music. That was when he was happiest, I think. That, and in the struggle and turmoil of architectural design."



LECLAIR BISSELL

A PIONEER IN THE SCIENCE OF ADDICTION AND CHAMPION OF ANIMALS, DEMOCRATS, WOMEN AND MORE

Dr. LeClair Bissell was "part of the fabric" of Sanibel Island for many years, friends say. She was known for her dedication to helping wounded animals with the Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife, commonly called C.R.O.W.

She is also internationally regarded for her pioneering work in alcoholism addiction treatment (she overcame the disease herself and produced groundbreaking books on the topic).

Barbara King was a social worker at the Roosevelt Hospital in New York City, where Dr. Bissell founded the Smithers Treatment and Training Center for alcohol addiction, in the early 1970s.

"It was a pioneering effort because there wasn't an inpatient alcohol treatment center in New York City at that time," said Ms. King, who has been a longtime friend and neighbor of Dr. Bissell in North Carolina. "(Alcoholism) was not widely recognized as being a disease. That's old hat now, but at the time she started the treatment program, it was a big boost."

In Lee County, Dr. Bissell was actively involved in the Democratic Party, and often voiced her political opinions in the daily paper. She was involved with Zonta; Chihuahua Rescue; Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays; the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Coalition; and Planned Parenthood.

"She never stopped," said friend Ann Heckes, who met Dr. Bissell through the Unitarian Universalist Church in Fort Myers. "There was always a cause. There were always things to be done. There was always a way to make the world better. She was a truly incredible person."

Dr. Bissell grew up an "Army brat," the daughter of Maj. Gen. Clayton Bissell, who commanded all American Air



Dr. Bissell was dedicated to helping wounded animals at C.R.O.W. on Sanibel.

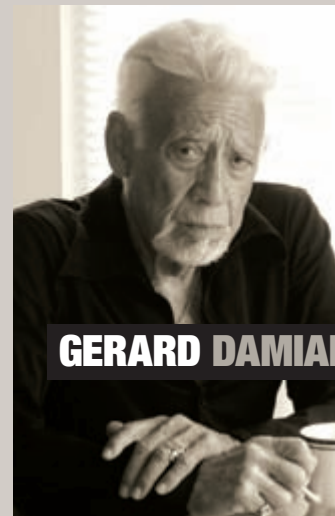
Forces in India, Burma and China in World War II. Men like Gen. George Patton and Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower were also a part of her childhood.

"Ike Eisenhower gave her horseback riding lessons when she was a girl," friend Barbara Joy Cooley of Sanibel said.

Just a few months before Dr. Bissell died of cancer in August at the age of 80, she was rescuing injured birds near her home on Sanibel Island for C.R.O.W. She had worked for the wildlife rehab agency for nearly three decades. After Dr. Bissell and her life partner of 48 years, Nancy Palmer, had moved to the island in the late 1960s, they helped found C.R.O.W.'s Volunteer Emergency Rescue and Transport system.

"It enabled us to reach far beyond what we had been able to service before," said Dr. P.J. Deitschel, the clinic director. "People think of C.R.O.W. as Sanibel but we service all of Lee County."

"One of my last memories of LeClair was she had just gotten out the hospital and we asked her if she could rescue a white pelican, which is a very large bird. And she went in her kayak to pick it up — she had just gotten out the hospital the day before. That was a few months before she died."



GERARD DAMIANO

A FILMMAKER WHO SHOOK AMERICAN'S SEXUAL MORES

When Gerard Damiano released his film "Deep Throat" in 1972, he didn't know it would shake sexual conventions across America and help change the way everyone viewed and talked about sex. The film was famous for its humorous depiction of oral sex and coinage of the popular term, as well as being the first well-known "pornographic" movie with a story line.

Still, it was one of Mr. Damiano's early, less mature works, said his son Gerard Damiano Jr. who lived with his father in Fort Myers for the last five years of his life. Mr. Damiano died of a stroke in October at age 80.

"He's been asked many times, 'Did you set out to change the world when you made 'Deep Throat?'" Mr. Damiano, Jr. said. "And of course he didn't. They were just trying to make the best film they could make with very little money..."

"He would never tell you that 'Deep Throat' was a good film, but it was funny, it was quirky and it was the right place at the right time. It presented sex and sexuality in a way that was funny, so people were able to talk about something that was taboo."

Based on a 1973 *New York Times* interview with Mr. Damiano about "Deep Throat," the term "porno sheik" became popular. Husbands and wives in middle America went to see the film on legitimate dates. Jacqueline Onassis Kennedy went to see it in New York.

The term "Deep Throat" was even the cover name for W. Mark Felt, a former second-in-command at the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and a secret source for *The Washington Post* during the Watergate scandal. (He also died this year).

"It transcended just a porno film and became a part of pop culture," Mr. Damiano Jr. said.

As the country struggled with the line between pornography and art in the 1970s, Mr. Damiano made frequent appearances in court. In each new state his movie appeared in, it seemed, there was another courtroom waiting to debate that fine line.

"My dad used to say, 'If I like it, it's art. If you like it, it's pornography,'" Mr. Damiano said. "The truth is, it's very subjective."

Mr. Damiano "did consider himself an artist, above all," his son said.

He made other films like the early "Changes" (1969-70), a documentary about the sexual revolution; and, possibly his masterpiece, "The Devil in Miss Jones" (1973). It was a film about suicide, purgatory and hell, which was compared thematically to Jean-Paul Sartre's "No Exit."

Gerardo Rocco Damiano was born in 1928 in New York City and grew up during the Great Depression. He