

Barbara L. Ruland, activist who played a role in the redevelopment of the old Memorial Stadium site, dies

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Barbara L. Ruland, a community activist who played a role in the redevelopment of the old Memorial Stadium site in Baltimore, died June 1 at Gilchrist Hospice Care in Towson of a hemorrhage. The Roland Park resident was 78.

"She was a hometown patriot," said former City Council member and President Mary Pat Clarke. "She wanted to make sure some good came from the redevelopment of the Memorial Stadium site and when the fight was over, it became a residential neighborhood and hundreds of moderate-income people have benefited and live in a beautiful place," Ms. Clarke said.

Maggie McIntosh, a former member of the House of Delegates, was a longtime friend and supporter. "Barbara was a fixture in local community Democratic politics in North Baltimore," Ms. McIntosh said. "She was vocal and had a lot of power to her. You knew she was someone who could move an issue."

Eleanor Montgomery, a retired public interest lawyer and neighborhood activist was another friend and ally. "Barbara was an incredibly wonderful person and the redevelopment of the stadium site would not be what it is today without her," Ms. Montgomery said. "She was hugely instrumental in that outcome."

Barbara Lee Beltz, daughter of William T. Beltz II, a Baltimore City Police officer, and Nora Mast Beltz, a homemaker, was born in Baltimore and raised in Belair-Edison.

A graduate of the old Eastern High School, she worked for the state drug administration and as a paralegal before pursuing careers that reflected her political beliefs.

"Her activism started as a teenager when she sent her pastor a letter protesting her church's unwillingness to accept an African American couple into the congregation," said her husband of 33 years, Richard Bruning, a retired District of Columbia Superior Court clerk.



Barbara L. Ruland, pictured in 1989, was an avid reader. She enjoyed collecting records and CDs and dancing. (Staff)

"I woke up one day at 37 and didn't want to be married anymore," she told the old Sun Magazine in 1989. "I had spent my whole life pleasing others, and I didn't know anything about myself. That's when I began going to therapy," Ms. Ruland said. Even though she had participated in marches against the Vietnam War, tutored school kids and joined the NAACP, it was her therapist's counseling that changed her life.

She organized a carpool that took demonstrators to the Peach Bottom nuclear power plant on the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania. In 1984, she went on a six-week study trip to Nicaragua and returned frequently, in what she called "her obsession." "That first trip changed my life forever," she told The Sun. "It's hard to describe, but when I came back to the land of plenty, I had such an awareness that I had to do more. Politics were an important part of my life, and I wanted my work to integrate more fully with my personal beliefs and my politics."

In 1985, she spent five weeks in Cuba as a member of an American study group that was visited by Premier Fidel Castro. Ms. Ruland organized a concert featuring folk musician Pete Seeger that raised funds for Nicaragua, and celebrated her 40th birthday. Another fundraiser she helped put together allowed her to purchase a fetal heart monitor and deliver it to the Bertha Calderon Hospital in Managua, Nicaragua.

She was arrested in 1985 for participating in a protest at Rep. Helen D. Bentley's office about her support for aid to Nicaraguan rebels, known as contras. Another arrest took place while protesting apartheid at the South African Embassy in Washington.

Ms. Ruland was hired in 1986 by Baltimore Neighborhoods Inc., and her first challenge was organizing Black tenants facing evictions in Catonsville's historic Winter's Lane neighborhood, many of whose homes lacked heat. After a three-year court battle, the evictions were halted and the homes purchased and rehabilitated by the St. Ambrose Housing Aid Center.

In 1989 she went to work for the South East Community Organization. Later she held positions with Harbel Community Organization Inc., Diakon Lutheran Services and the Mental Health Association of Maryland.

"Barbara had no college degree and never met any education requirements. She held jobs that normally would have required a master's degree," her husband said.

When living in Ednor Gardens, Ms. Ruland was vice president of the Ednor Gardens-Lakeside Community Association, and represented the community on the Stadium Task Force.

In the late 1990s, proposals about redeveloping the old Memorial Stadium site on East 33rd Street, at times became contentious, and in the end, the proposal by the Govans Ecumenical Development Corp. of Baltimore was approved and the former home of the Orioles and Colts was demolished. "Working for years alongside three other neighborhood associations in that

group, they successfully fought to ensure that affordable senior citizen housing, recreational space and the YMCA were built on the former Memorial Stadium site,” her husband said.

“Barbara made sure all the communities were on the same page and that they had a voice and that voice is what happened,” Ms. Montgomery said. “None of this would have happened without her. She just had incredible organizing skills and she was persistent and made sure the powers that be had to listen, plus it was a really good plan; otherwise it could have been a horrible thing,” she said.

She was an avid reader, and enjoyed collecting records and CDs and dancing. “Reading was her passion. She’d even take a book to a funeral in case there was a slow moment,” her husband said. “She liked collecting earrings and bracelets, and had her own distinct style of dressing.”

She was a member of the Homewood Friends Meeting at 3107 N. Charles St., where a memorial service will be held at 2 p.m. Sept. 14.

In addition to her husband, she is survived by two brothers, William T. Beltz III, of Shelbyville, Delaware, and Bruce Phillip Beltz, of Boston; a sister, Bonita Beltz Torres, of Arcadia; a niece; and a nephew.