

Shirley Klein, Harford philanthropist and businesswoman, dies at 86



Shirley Klein was photographed in her office at the family's Forest Hill supermarket store in 1999. At the time, Mrs. Klein, who died Monday, was leading a community fund-raising drive for Harford County's new hospital in Bel Air. (MATT BUTTON | AEGIS STAFF / Baltimore Sun Media Group)

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SEPTEMBER 13, 2016, 5:05 PM

Shirley S. Klein, a Harford County philanthropist and retired businesswoman, died Monday.

A longtime resident of Forest Hill, Mrs. Klein was the matriarch of the family that established and owns the Klein's **ShopRite** supermarkets throughout Harford County and elsewhere in the Baltimore region.

She was 86 and died at the University of Maryland Upper Chesapeake Medical Center in Bel Air, where she had been a major benefactor, according to Michael Blum, a longtime family friend and spokesperson. Blum said Mrs. Klein's family expects to release a statement later in the week.

For many years, she worked side-by-side with her husband, Ralph Lincoln Klein, first at the single general store in Forest Hill, started by her husband's parents, that grew into one of the Baltimore region's largest independent supermarket companies. Their three sons would eventually join the business, later followed by some of Mrs. Klein's grandchildren. Ralph Klein died in November 2014.

In addition to its supermarkets, the Klein family developed shopping centers in Forest Hill, Aberdeen and Riverside/Belcamp.

Like her husband, Mrs. Klein was active in local philanthropy, as well as in Jewish causes. The couple were active donors to the Upper Chesapeake Health Foundation and established a charitable foundation in their names. They also supported Harford County's Temple Adas Shalom.

Originally from Baltimore, Mrs. Klein was introduced to her future husband, a Harford County native, by a customer of her mother's beauty shop on Saratoga Street, according to family lore. The couple married on Jan. 4, 1953.

It was her personal fund-raising efforts in the late 1990s and early 2000s that greatly aided construction of Upper Chesapeake Medical Center, whose ambulatory care center is named after Mrs. Klein and her husband.

She headed a campaign that exceeded its goal of raising \$10 million for the hospital, which opened in late November 2000. The Klein Family and the James and Virginia Dresher Family, also from Harford County, each donated \$1 million to get the campaign rolling.

"The greatest form of work you can have is to give to others," Mrs. Klein told The Aegis in a 1999 interview at the height of the fund-raising campaign. "It is your sense of self, well being and identity.

"Shirley Klein was the founder and first chairperson of the Upper Chesapeake Health Foundation, and spearheaded the Capital Campaign that enabled this community to have a modern, state-of-the-art comprehensive medical center in Bel Air," Lyle Sheldon, president and CEO of University of Maryland Upper Chesapeake Health, said in an emailed statement.

"Her drive, her vision, the intensity and focus of her commitment, her wisdom and her unfailing sense of humor set an unparalleled standard of leadership for this organization," Sheldon said.

Dr. Roger Schneider, chairman of the hospital's Board of Directors, also noted her "commitment to excellence in health care for Harford County, and her personal involvement in the achievement of that goal, day-in and day-out for over 25 years, enabled her to witness the fruits of her labors during the latter years of her life."

"Rarely in an institution's history can one find an individual whose footprint played as iconic a role as Shirley's did at Upper Chesapeake," Schneider wrote in a statement. "Through the support of Shirley and her entire family in innumerable community causes, Harford County has benefited greatly. She truly was a living treasure for this community."

Mrs. Klein is survived by her sons, Andrew and his wife, Jayne, Michael and his wife, Clara, and Howard and his wife, Susan; and grandchildren Marshall Klein and his wife, Rachel, Sarah Klein and her husband, Dean Abrams, Rachel Klein, Samuel Klein, Jacob Klein, Stephen Klein and his wife, Elizabeth, David Klein and Victoria Klein.

She was the daughter of the late Julius and Fannie Snyderman.

Services will be at noon Wednesday at Sol Levinson & Bros. Inc., in Pikesville, with burial to follow in Baltimore Hebrew Cemetery.

Contributions in Mrs. Klein's memory may be sent to Upper Chesapeake Health Foundation, 520 Upper Chesapeake Drive, Suite 405, Bel Air, MD 21014; Temple Adas Shalom, 8 N. Earlton Road, Havre de Grace, MD 21078; Baltimore Hebrew Torah Restoration Fund, 7401 Park Heights Ave., Baltimore, MD 21208, Jewish National Fund, 2 Reservoir Circle, Baltimore, MD 21208, or a Jewish charity of your choice.

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