



Obituaries

Robert M. Higdon, fundraiser and longtime Reagan family associate, dies at 58

by [Matt Schudel](#) June 21 at 5:51 PM [✉Email the author](#)

Robert M. Higdon, a close associate of President Ronald Reagan and first lady Nancy Reagan, who became a leading fundraiser for the Reagan Presidential Library and Foundation and later led foundations associated with former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher and Britain's Prince Charles, died June 19 at his home in Panama City, Fla. He was 58. The death was confirmed by Mr. Higdon's partner, David Deckelbaum. The cause is undetermined and is pending an autopsy by the Florida Medical Examiner's office.

Mr. Higdon was a gregarious, well-connected figure in Washington who was adept at bringing people of different political backgrounds together.

He began his career on Capitol Hill working for Democratic congressmen, then entered the Reagans' orbit while working at a lobbying firm with Carolyn Deaver, the wife of Ronald Reagan's deputy chief of staff, Michael Deaver.

Mr. Higdon became, in effect, an organizer and assistant for the first family before joining the staff of Ronald Reagan Presidential Library Foundation in the mid-1980s. He was particularly close to Nancy Reagan and, after the Reagans left the White House, was often described as a "walker" who accompanied the former first lady to social events.

"He stayed at my mother's house, and she wasn't usually one for house guests," Patti Davis, the Reagans' daughter, said in a telephone interview. "Robert had a great sense of humor. My mother laughed a lot with him."

As director of fundraising for the Reagan Presidential Library Foundation, Mr. Higdon had a key behind-the-scenes role in developing the Reagan library and museum, which opened in Simi Valley, Calif., in 1991.

He then headed the U.S. office of the Margaret Thatcher Foundation, dedicated to furthering the free-market ideals of the former [British prime minister](#).

In 1997, Mr. Higdon was named managing director of the Washington-based Prince of Wales Foundation, a charity associated with Prince Charles. Invariably described as charming and personable, Mr. Higdon raised millions of dollars for the organization, which provides support for some of Prince Charles's primary interests, including architecture, historic preservation and the environment.

One of Mr. Higdon's fundraising tactics was to arrange personal meetings for major donors with Prince Charles and his current wife, Camilla Parker Bowles.

Mr. Higdon's work with both Thatcher and Prince Charles came under criticism in the British media for what was called lavish spending. In 2011, Mr. Higdon reportedly received more than \$600,000 in salary and expense reimbursements from the Prince of Wales Foundation. He stayed at first-class hotels during his frequent international travels, and critics noted that his compensation almost equaled the total amount of money disbursed by the foundation.

Mr. Higdon left the Prince of Wales Foundation in 2011, when his contract was not renewed.

He then established an interior design business in Washington, with high-profile clients including comedian [Joan Rivers](#).

Robert Marion Higdon Jr. was born July 8, 1959, in Panama City, where his father had a car dealership and his mother was a bank manager.

Mr. Higdon attended Yale University before working for U.S. Rep. Don Fuqua (D-Fla.) and Sen. Lawton Chiles (D-Fla.). He later worked as a lobbyist on Capitol Hill.

In Washington, Mr. Higdon was known as a popular party host and guest at A-list social events. He was a frequent source for biographers and journalists, including Vanity Fair writer Bob Colacello, the author of "Ronnie & Nancy: Their Path to the White House — 1911 to 1980."

In an interview, Colacello called Mr. Higdon a "social catalyst" who organized private gatherings that included Nancy Reagan, Thatcher and former Canadian prime minister Brian Mulroney. By the end of the evening, Colacello said, all three were singing to the piano accompaniment of Peter Duchin.

Mr. Higdon moved from Washington to Panama City in 2017.

In addition to Deckelbaum, of Washington, survivors include his father, Robert M. Higdon Sr. of Panama City; and a sister.

Mr. Higdon was a member of the board of trustees of the Ronald Reagan Foundation and Institute and remained close to the Reagan family. He helped plan funerals for the president, who [died in 2004](#), and the first lady, who [died in 2016](#). News accounts noted that Mr. Higdon was in tears at the funeral of Nancy Reagan.

“He had a little dog, a certified therapy dog, that went everywhere with him,” Patti Davis said, “including my mother’s service.”

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Matt Schudel has been an obituary writer at The Washington Post since 2004. He previously worked for publications in Washington, New York, North Carolina and Florida. [🐦 Follow @MattSchudel](#)
