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Janet Weinberg, 63, Dies; Advocate for Gay Causes and the Disabled

By **Richard Sandomir**

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Janet Weinberg, an advocate for people with disabilities who found her calling as a top executive and fund-raiser at social service organizations like the Gay Men's Health Crisis, died on Sept. 1 in the Bronx. She was 63.

Her spouse, Rosalyn H. Richter, an associate justice of the Appellate Division of the New York State Supreme Court, said the cause was a chronic heart condition.

Ms. Weinberg had been an occupational therapist for a decade when she accepted an offer to join the board of the Lesbian & Gay Community Services Center in Manhattan in the mid-1990s. It was a career transition she had been preparing for after building a reputation as a politically savvy activist for people with disabilities and hoping one day to help a population still affected by the AIDS epidemic.

She had never forgotten an incident in 1985, when she was working as an occupational therapist at a nursing home in Rockaway Beach, Queens, and the community erupted in protest against a city proposal to transfer dying AIDS patients there from hospitals.

"They were never allowed to enter the nursing home," she said in a video statement posted by the Gay Men's Health Crisis in 2010, recalling how the city had backed down to local pressure. "The community blocked it. It was all about homophobia and hatred."

As the lesbian and gay center's co-chairwoman and then its director of development, Ms. Weinberg helped lead the \$14 million fund-raising effort that renovated its 19th-century headquarters in Greenwich Village. More important, having been disabled in the 1980s by an illness that required her to use a wheelchair, Ms. Weinberg brought a new and impassioned voice.

"She could talk to a lot of different kinds of elected officials, even those who didn't agree with us," Richard Burns, a longtime former executive director of the center, said in a telephone interview. "And she knew how to use her wheelchair with them — she would body-block them until they heard her message about policy, L.G.B.T. issues, disability access or drug reform."

She was recruited to join the Gay Men's Health Crisis in 2005. There her work in fund-raising — including organizing an AIDS walk in 2008 that drew 45,000 people and raised \$7.4 million — led to her being named chief operating officer four years later.

Ms. Weinberg was adept at raising money at the G.M.H.C. even after the urgency of the AIDS epidemic had passed. She worked on developing programs to help clients obtain their high school equivalency diplomas and manage financial planning and immigration issues.

“She knew what it took for people to prevent being infected, but also what it took for them to live healthier, more fulfilling lives,” Ana Oliveira, who, as the organization's executive director, recruited Ms. Weinberg, said in a telephone interview.



Ms. Weinberg married Rosalyn H. Richter, an associate justice of the Appellate Division of New York State Supreme Court, at the courthouse in Manhattan in 2011, two months after same-sex marriage was legalized in New York State. Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

Still, by 2013 the center was running a deficit, and its chief executive, Dr. Marjorie Hill, had resigned after seven years. Some said the G.M.H.C. and other long-established groups had grown timid and were no longer viewing AIDS with enough alarm.

Ms. Weinberg, who was named the interim chief executive, told The New York Times that the agency remained focused on “high-impact prevention” practices.

She left the center the next year.

Janet Inez Weinberg was born in Manhattan on April 3, 1955, and grew up in Highland Park, N.J. Her father, Herbert, was a stockbroker, and her mother, Esther (Hariton) Weinberg, was a homemaker who died when Janet was 3. Her stepmother, May, later entered her life.

After attending Hofstra University in Hempstead, N.Y., Ms. Weinberg graduated with a degree in occupational therapy from York College in Queens. As a therapist working for VTA Management Services, a rehabilitation company, she dealt largely with children who had learning disabilities, traumatic injuries and neuromuscular diseases.

She became a senior vice president of VTA's parent company in 1998, working there while serving on the board of the lesbian and gay center (which was renamed the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center in 2001).

Ms. Weinberg had intended to retire after her time at the G.M.H.C., but she took a consulting job with Educational Alliance, whose community centers serve 50,000 residents of the Lower East Side and the East Village, and soon became its executive vice president of programs and operations. One of her tasks was to start the long-delayed construction of a building devoted to addiction services and recovery.

"We had that hole in the ground for 10 years, and something had to change," Alan van Cappelle, the alliance's president, said in a telephone interview. "So I said to her, 'Fill the hole and build the center.' She lived it and breathed it." It opened in 2016.

In addition to Justice Richter — whom she wed in 2011, two months after same-sex marriage was legalized in New York State — Ms. Weinberg is survived by a brother, Dr. Kenneth Weinberg.

In the last few years, Ms. Weinberg was part of two projects that commemorated critical parts of L.G.B.T. history.

She helped lobby for the designation of the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, where riots in 1969 helped ignite the gay rights movement, as a national monument. (The designation was granted in 2016.) And she served on the board of the New York City AIDS Memorial, an 18-foot-high steel canopy made of three triangles that was erected at 12th Street and Greenwich Avenue in 2016 to honor the 100,000 New Yorkers who have died of AIDS.

Mr. Burns recalled Ms. Weinberg's strong voice at contentious community board meetings during the memorial's approval process.

"She spoke as someone who had lived through the AIDS epidemic," he said, "as someone who had lost friends."

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