



# Rudolph Cannella Spoto

OCT 5, 1930 - MAR 26, 2011



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# Rudolph Cannella Spoto

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**R**udy Spoto, first county administrator of Hillsborough, dies at 80  
 By Dan Sullivan, Times Staff Writer In Print: Monday, March 28, 2011 -----  
 ----- TAMPA - Every year on April Fools' Day, Jack Espinosa liked to get together with his good friend Rudy Spoto for what the two called their "religious holiday." The annual celebration began that day in 1977 when Mr. Spoto resigned his job as Hillsborough County administrator. The get-togethers, in which the county's first administrator and his former aide shared drinks and talk of old-time politics, was a tongue-in-cheek toast to their past political life. "We went through so much to get things done," Espinosa said. "He was probably the best government administrator I have ever seen." As the first county administrator, Mr. Spoto bore the brunt of competing political agendas, all while building the system of government the county still knows. He died early Saturday after years of failing health. He was 80. The youngest son of Italian immigrants, Mr. Spoto grew up in Tampa, helping his five brothers and one sister run their father's clothing store, Spoto's Men's Shop in Ybor City. He attended Jefferson High School with Espinosa, who would become his aide and later business partner at the consulting firm Rudy Spoto Inc. Mr. Spoto served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War and later attended Florida State University, where he earned a master's degree in psychology. In the early 1960s, he was the assistant director of social services for the Hillsborough Board of Public Assistance. When President Lyndon Johnson declared a war on poverty in 1964, Mr. Spoto became director of the welfare department, which gave aid to residents in dire straits. "He cared about the human condition of the world and wanted to better the world," said his daughter, Lisa Spoto. "He would do anything to help somebody out." His daughter remembers stuffing envelopes and waving signs as a young girl in political campaigns her father, a Democrat, supported. "He really believed the people he supported were going to do



## Obituary

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a good job," she said. Mr. Spoto was appointed as the county's first administrator in March 1973 after a heated debate about who should fill the new position overseeing the county's operations and employees. His tenure was marked by controversy and criticism. At the same time he battled opposition from some County Commission members, supporters brought pressure when they felt he was not doing as they wanted. He suffered through scandal, firing an assistant amid a federal investigation of a jobs program. After four years, he grew tired of politics and resigned. Mr. Spoto left jaded, but his legacy is seen in the county system. Espinosa noted that before Mr. Spoto, the county fire department was volunteer. Water and sewage departments didn't exist. "Thousands of people owe him their jobs that are still around," Espinosa said. "He put a lot of people in low poverty to work." Mr. Spoto and his wife, Nadine, were married for 59 years. They retired to Redington Shores in the late 1980s. He kept an ear to the happenings in Hillsborough, but largely stayed out of politics. "He was a fighter who would never back down from what he felt was right and just, even if it was to his detriment," his daughter said. .biography Rudolph Spoto Born: Oct. 5, 1930 Died: March 26, 2011 Survivors: Wife Nadine S. Spoto; daughters Michelle Spoto Klein and Lisa G. Spoto; sister Josephine Martino; brothers Nelson Spoto and Steve Spoto; and three grandchildren. Services: The family will hold a private service. In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to St Anne of Grace Episcopal Church 6650 113th Street North Seminole Fl 33772



## Tribute Wall

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DB

**Debra Duncan- Brown** posted:

Dear Folkes, I was so sorry to read about Rudy ...but what a nice article and tribute. I just wanted to let you know you're in my thoughts and prayers and if there is anything I can do please let me know. Love, Deb

April 11 at 11:10 AM

ST

**Sharon Todd** posted:

Nadine I am so sorry for your loss. I have many great memories of You and rudy. Please express my condolences to Lisa and Michele You Nora and I are all widows Sharon

March 31 at 8:52 AM

JS

**Joan And Joe Spoto** posted:

Nadine,Joe and I send our sympathy and prayers to you, Michelle and Lisa. Joe has been reminiscing about Rudy all day. He has many, many fond memories.Our love to all of you.Joan and Joe Spoto

March 28 at 3:49 PM



# Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring Rudolph by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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