



Frederick Ellis Fisher

MAR 15, 1931 - SEP 25, 2023



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Frederick Ellis Fisher passed away at his home in St. Petersburg on September 25 at age 92.

Born March 15, 1931, in Joliet, Ill., he began working at age eight, for Otto's Drive-In across from his home for 25 cents an hour plus tips. The family home was foreclosed upon when he was 12, and he and his mother moved to Chicago. He continued to work at various jobs, from plucking chickens to switchboard operator to making beds in a small hotel. He also assembled sewer rods and closet (toilet) cleaners to help meet financial needs. Leaving high school at 17, he moved to Colorado Springs a year later and found work unloading boxcars and driving a lumber truck. With a mentor's advice, he returned to Joliet and, for the next four years, worked in the general insurance, real estate, bookkeeping and income tax businesses. During the early 1950s, he planned and constructed a two-bedroom home with carport and two-car garage in Lockport, Ill., even installing the plumbing, wiring, carpentry and more -- perhaps foretelling one of his future endeavors.

Drafted in 1954, he completed basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., and was assigned to Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indianapolis to learn shorthand. His 38 classmates had all attended college, and the experience totally changed his life. After graduating number one in his class, he was assigned to USAREUR Headquarters in Heidelberg, Germany, working for four-star General Anthony McAuliffe -- well-known for his answer "Nuts" when asked to surrender at the Battle of the Bulge. He earned his GED while in Europe and traveled extensively. Discharged in 1956, he began college and, in April 1956, married Sandra Ann Swenson, whom he had met while on leave prior to his assignment in Germany. To supplement the G.I. Bill, he prepared tax returns for a CPA, kept books for small businesses and graded papers for professors. He graduated with honors in three years from the University of Florida at age 28, with a wife and two children.



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He began his accounting career in Tampa with Darby, Darby, Odom & Company, CPAs, and passed the CPA exam in 1959, with the highest first-time passing grade in Florida. He became a partner one year later, but left to form Fisher, Morrison & Company in 1966.

In 1968, client Arthur Rutenberg asked him to meet with Bob Winnerman, a homebuilder in New Jersey, who had a vision to create the first national homebuilding company. A year later, he became one of the four founders and Chief Financial Officer of U.S. Home Corporation. During his 11-year tenure, the company expanded from coast to coast, building more than 20,000 homes yearly to become the nation's largest homebuilder. One local project that doubled the size of Clearwater was Countryside and Countryside Mall.

He retired in 1980 at age 49 and spent 18 months on his trawler in the Caribbean and the Abaco Islands. Thereafter, and for the next 42 years, he committed his day-to-day work as a volunteer, setting an example for others and helping individuals and charitable endeavors in need so he could share his knowledge, time and treasure.

He was chairman of the University of Florida's 1985 Capital Campaign – the first by a Florida university. Just prior to a request by UF's President Criser and Dean Lanzillotti for a \$3 million gift, his best friend Phil Giovinco brought him the opportunity to acquire a company in financial distress. One year later, his profit was \$6.8 million, and he gifted it to UF to name the Fisher School of Accounting – then, the largest gift in UF's history. That first campaign raised \$390 million and changed the gifting culture in Florida to include public universities.

On two other occasions, he took control of financially troubled businesses, returned them to profitability and gifted his own profits to charities. One of the two businesses was brought to him by a special friend, Ray Murray, who became his partner. He also endowed UF's first Business MBA Scholarship and the Fisher Eminent Scholar Chair in Accounting. He was a major donor to the Gerson Accounting Hall, Tracy Caulkins Swimming Scholarship, as creator of the Commemorative Gallery, and the Dr. Ted Copeland Scholarship Fund, along with co-convincing President Bob Bryan to secure the services of Coach Steve Spurrier. He was an original Bull Gator and honored with a Doctorate of Humane Letters,



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Distinguished Alumnus and Professor Accounting Awards. A proud Gator, he was grateful for his good fortune to have attended UF.

He also was very proud of having been involved in seven other charitable endeavors. In 1966, Don McFarland, a local attorney and friend, called with the idea that a small kids' sports program, abandoned by the City of Clearwater, would be good for the new civic club's involvement. This became Clearwater for Youth (CFY), serving thousands of kids over the years in a variety of year-round sports. In the late 60s, a call from Don Seaton, a local motel owner and friend, brought together families to create the Clearwater Swim Club, which 50 years later is Clearwater Aquatic Team (CAT). In 1974, he envisioned creating a home for CFY and CAT and, for five years, he invested his time as the founder, fundraiser and principal benefactor of the Long Center. The unique recreation and education facility became the permanent home for CFY and CAT. In 2003, the Long Center was gifted to the City of Clearwater, and the Center's \$8 million (and growing) endowment fund subsidizes operating expenses and various community organizations. The Center also created a permanent home for ARC of Tampa Bay.

In 1968, he became one of the founders of St. Paul's School and was able to negotiate and develop acreage on Belleair Road, with about 17 acres for a permanent home for the school, along with \$100,000 toward construction costs.

In 1979, Barry Alpert, a friend, asked him for a donation and to become one of the Founders of Ruth Eckerd Hall. After several years of modest involvement, he was elected chairman. With fundraiser Holly Duncan, they were able to raise millions to retire the construction debt substantially, care for deferred maintenance and provide working capital. This effort was highly rewarded with a beautiful smile from both Jack and Ruth Eckerd.

A Gator friend, Whit Palmer, told him in 1954 about a vacant HCA facility in Citra, Fla. After much negotiation, they contracted to purchase the \$10 million facility for \$1.6 million, quickly raising funds to acquire, expand and operate what is now Phoenix House of Florida – a very successful residential drug treatment and rehabilitation program for both men and women who would otherwise be in prison. Governor Lawton Chiles helped secure a contract with the Department of



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Corrections at a daily rate substantially below the existing rate in Florida prisons, which at that time were almost devoid of rehabilitation.

In about 2018, Jeannie Shapiro, CEO of the Clearwater Free Clinic, introduced him to the Community Dental Clinic (CDC). A few years later, he secured a several million-dollar challenge grant from a Clearwater couple's endowment fund, which will move CDC from the survival stage to a permanent home, with additional operating funds for the clinic's future.

For 15 years, he served on the Board of Directors of Atlanta-based Builders Insurance Group as well as two public companies: as chairman of Checkers Drive Thru Restaurants and as director of United Investors Realty Trust. Over the years, he was a minority owner and director of five commercial banks and two insurance companies – a founder of four of the seven entities. He also served as a director, trustee or chairman of several other state and local organizations, as well as being appointed by Governors Graham and Chiles as chairman of two State of Florida commissions. He believed that “when you recognize accomplishments with a ‘pat on the back,’ we run faster and accomplish more.” He received a “pat on the back” from the cities of Clearwater, Tampa and St. Petersburg, with “keys to the city” and citations (although he failed to find their deposit boxes!). Among his many honors and awards: Mr. Clearwater (1993), Clearwater Bar Liberty Bell, National Society of Arts and Letters, NSFRE Philanthropist of the Year, National Society of Christians and Jews, The Bilgore Award, Humanitarian Awards from Tampa Bay Research Foundation, Clearwater for Youth, Sertoma Club Regional and District, Phoenix House of Florida, the Golda Meir Center – and what an honor to receive that award one year after Elie Weisel! In May 1986, he also received an honorary degree from St. Petersburg College, along with his special friend Joe DiMaggio. He was inducted into the Tampa Bay Business Hall of Fame in 1996, with achieved distinction for a lifetime of public service as a volunteer, unselfish with both time and treasure. He appreciated the title “volunteer” if, for no other reason, he worked without fear of being fired and was unsuccessful in getting dismissed!

His business and community successes, he believes, emanated from a long-ago mentor who advised him to “see bright and creative people with an abundance of



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integrity and make them your best friends – it will change your life.”

He was very proud of having invested many years of time and treasure resolving financial and mortgage problems one-on-one for more than 100 hardworking couples and individuals, and it warmed his heart to witness someone succeeding in his or her business, family or personal endeavors.

He and his wife Aleta supported the missions of the Morton Plant Mease Foundation, Community Foundation of Tampa Bay, The Florida Orchestra, Clearwater Free Clinic, Homeless Empowerment Program, Dunedin Fine Arts, Humane Society of Pinellas County and ARC of Tampa Bay, and American Stage, FreeFall and Stageworks Theaters.

He was predeceased by his parents and two sons: Frederick E. Fisher, Jr., and Mark Frederick Fisher. He is survived by his wife Aleta; his children, all of whom are college graduates: Scott D. Fisher, Jill Cope (Rich), Todd C. Fisher, Paige Fisher Simpson (Garry); and three grandchildren: Peyton Fisher Powers, Haynes Ellis Simpson and Quinn Fisher Simpson.

He believes that good fortune and lady luck have long been on his team, especially 38 years ago, in 1983, when he introduced himself to Aleta after witnessing her assisting a stranger with a problem. She became a friend and later his wife. Whatever successes he has achieved over these years, she has been his advocate and in the midst of each success. There is not an adequate adjective to describe the love, happiness, comfort and joy that Aleta brought to his life.

He wanted it to be known that he personally takes credit for writing this obituary and is grateful for the many opportunities that have filled his very blessed life. He also is entitled to full credit for any errors and omissions.

Donations, if so inclined, may be made to a charity of your choice.

A celebration of life is being planned.



Events

Frederick Ellis Fisher

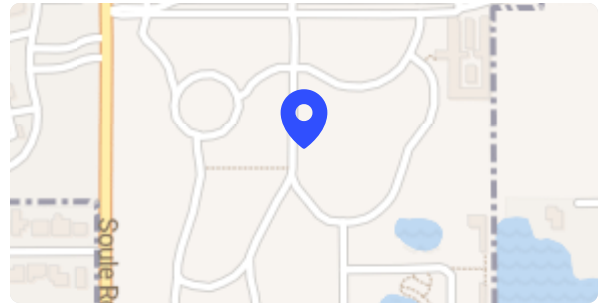
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Cemetery Details



Sylvan Abbey Cemetery

2860 Sunset Point Rd, Clearwater FL 33759





Memories only last if you share them

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



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