

Cecilia Gilbert, 1949-2024

Cecilia Gilbert, the eldest of five children, was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, to Lorine and Ceotrid Gilbert. The family relocated from Arkansas to Wisconsin in the early 1960's. Once in Milwaukee, Cecilia attended Wells Junior High and West Division High School before earning two bachelor's degrees, in Early Childhood Education and Community Education, from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Raised in a devout Christian family, Cecilia's faith expanded, both firmly grounded in her family's faith and inclusive of multiple world views.

Cecilia, embraced as "Milwaukee's Queen," was known for her magnanimous personality and for "getting things done." She began her career in 1976 as an analyst at the Milwaukee Commission on Community Relations, where she conducted diversity training workshops, investigated discrimination complaints, and served as the commission's spokesperson on TV and radio programs. Cecilia continued in a media spokeswoman role in various city positions, most notably at the Department of Public Works (DPW). She worked at the DPW from 2001 to 2017, managing permits and communications and acting as a business liaison. Her responsibilities included coordinating major events like the annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. City-Wide Event, Bastille Days, the City of Milwaukee Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony, RiverSplash, The Great Circus Parade, and the St. Patrick's Day Parade, as well as handling inquiries from journalists on various topics, including snow removal, parking restrictions, and City Hall façade repairs. Even after retiring from the DPW, Cecilia remained active in civic duties and was appointed by Mayor Tom Barrett to the Administrative Review Board of Appeals in 2021.

Cecilia embodied life-long learning and was an avid reader, owning hundreds of books, preferring the tangible feel of a book over digital formats. She enjoyed watching Turner Classic Movies and Public Broadcasting, and was a strong supporter and patron of the arts, frequently attending art shows, live theater productions, and music concerts. Cecilia cherished socializing with friends at her favorite spots, enjoying good meals and cocktails, and engaging in lively discussions about current events and life.

Cecilia's love of community and of the arts were reflected in her civic involvement, serving on various boards including Cathedral Square Friends, the Milwaukee Repertory Theater, the Lakefront Festival of the Arts, the Pabst Mansion, Fresh Coast Jazz, and Visit Milwaukee. At Visit Milwaukee she contributed to the organization's diversity and inclusion efforts, helping to attract conventions such as those hosted by the Nations Council of La Raza, U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and NAACP.

Cecilia lived across the street from Cathedral Square, and much of her socializing and networking took place near the Square. She was a valued member of Cathedral Square Friends and we would like to memorialize her with an honorary street sign in her neighborhood.