

Judith Barricella age 75, of Shaler Township, on November 14, 2022. Beloved mother of Jesse Paul and Anthony Samuel Barricella. Daughter of the late Frank P. and Hilda Rodgers Barricella . Sister of Carla Barricella and the late Linda Salada. Grandmother of Aaron Mathew Barricella. Aunt of Evan David Salada. Family and friends are invited to attend her Funeral Service at the Allison Park Church, 2326 Duncan Ave., Allison Park, PA 15101 Friday at 1:30 PM . Contributions in her Memory may be made to [endpolio.org](http://endpolio.org). Professional Services trusted to THOMAS M. SMITH FUNERAL

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## **Obituary: Judith 'Judy' Barricella | Champion of rights for people with disabilities**

June 30, 1947 – Nov. 14, 2022



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Judith “Judy” Barricella was a powerhouse advocate for disability rights, achieving much in a lifetime devoted to bringing about justice and change.

Ms. Barricella, who used a wheelchair since the age of 4 as a result of polio, was Allegheny County’s first American with Disabilities Act coordinator and was at the White House in 1990 for the signing of the landmark legislation aimed at improving equality for those with disabilities.

“Judy left such a legacy,” said Kristy Trautmann, executive director of FISA Foundation, an organization that promotes equality for women, girls and people with disabilities. “She had the right balance of persistence and dogged attention, and the right balance of patience and impatience that it takes to work on long-term change.”

Ms. Barricella, of Shaler, died Nov. 14 after a series of health setbacks. She was 75.

Growing up in Etna, Ms. Barricella needed to be resourceful and self-sufficient at an early age.

“I can still remember when Judy got polio,” said her cousin Joe Barricella, of Hampton. “The entire family was scared because polio was moving through America. No one knew the cause and no one had a cure for it. There were no vaccines at the time.”

During a nationwide outbreak of the disease in the early 1950s, more than 3,000 people died, according to the World Health Organization.

A few years later, in 1955, it was announced that University of Pittsburgh researcher Jonas Salk had developed a vaccine that would virtually wipe out the virus that had terrorized parents and devastated children worldwide.

“I remember it like it was yesterday,” said her cousin, who is five years older than Ms. Barricella. “If you could have seen her struggles as a little girl after she got polio and later as an adult — she truly was a real-life hero to accomplish everything that she did and work so hard for the disabled community.”

The cumbersome leg braces she wore as a girl eventually gave way to a wheelchair, her cousin recalled.

“Judy never ever complained and she was never bitter,” he said. “She had such a positive nature and was always upbeat, always smiling. She was determined to lead a full life and she did. It never held her back.”

Ms. Barricella earned degrees from Pitt and the University of South Florida and later continued her studies as a fellow at the Pitt School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences.

Early in her career, she started a speech therapy program at the Association for Retarded Citizens (now Achieva), and in 1980 she was the founding director of the Center for Independent Living, where she served for 10 years, according to a biography compiled by FISA Foundation.

She adopted two sons, her cousin said, and continued her career focused on disability advocacy at several organizations and companies while raising the boys as a single mother.

At the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Ms. Barricella created a program to better meet the needs of individuals with disabilities and became the first director of the Disability Connection, later known as the Aging and Disability Resource Center (Allegheny Link), a one-stop shop for seeking services and accessing benefits, according to FISA.

Before her retirement in 2015, Ms. Barricella became the county's first ADA coordinator and served on numerous committees and boards. She received myriad honors and awards throughout her career.

Her influence in the world of equal rights can hardly be overstated, said Ms. Trautmann.

"She was an extraordinary person. I think most people have very little sense of the disability rights movement," she said. "We know about civil rights, women's rights, and marriage equality, but most people don't grasp how hard people with disabilities had to fight for equal access, and Judy was part of that from the very beginning.

"She was on the White House lawn when the ADA was signed in 1990 (by President George H.W. Bush). She was certainly a giant and a leader and local activist who really pushed for some of the reforms that we have today."

They met when Ms. Barricella headed Disability 2000, a group formed to commemorate the 10-year anniversary of the ADA. It was also established to continue putting ADA guidelines into practice.

"[The ADA] was a major milestone, but there was so much work to be done to realize that dream," Ms. Trautmann said.

Ms. Barricella was a pivotal figure in implementing the law locally, working with disability and civil rights leaders, along with officials and politicians to help improve accessibility at events like the Three Rivers Arts Festival.

"I always come to the festival, every year. I love what they have here, especially the Artists Market," Ms. Barricella told the Post-Gazette in June 2002. "But it just seemed to be getting harder and harder to get around."

Along with her work to expand disability rights in areas such as employment, the arts and basic accessibility, Ms. Barricella coordinated "Voices of our Region," a project that recorded the histories of 57 people with disabilities in the Pittsburgh region. All of the materials produced have been donated to the Senator John Heinz History Center.

“It was really a huge project,” Ms. Trautmann recalled. “They recognized there were many, many people involved in civil rights for people with disabilities whose voices had not been heard.

“They documented who was involved and what it really took to do.”

On a personal level, Ms. Barricella forged many friendships with those in the disabled community, including Tina Calabro, the mother of a son with cerebral palsy.

“Back in the day, there was a place called the Center for Creative Play, and it was a place for families like ours to get together and meet each other and help each other,” said Ms. Calabro, of Highland Park. “And here she was -- a mother with disability raising two sons. From those days in the late ‘90s, we became very close. That’s where Judy and I did a lot of work together in disability advocacy.”

Ms. Calabro also promoted Ms. Barricella’s efforts as a freelance writer who wrote the “Breaking Down Barriers” column for the Post-Gazette from 2002-2014.

At the county, Ms. Barricella was the go-to person for anything related to disability rights, Ms. Calabro said, and her friend also joined with the United Way to coordinate its “21 and Able” project to help support young adults steering through life after high school, when many of their social services were curtailed.

“It was this huge project to really get a handle on that transition from school to adult life, and she was instrumental in that from the very beginning,” Ms. Calabro recalled.

Ms. Barricella should be remembered for her singular devotion to disability rights at a time when universal awareness and accessibility seemed like nothing more than a pipe dream, her friend said.

“When she talked, people listened,” Ms. Calabro said. “Everybody knew her and everybody knew her power. When she did things, it was very visible -- not behind the scenes. She did the things that made real, permanent change.”

Ms. Barricella is survived by sons Jesse Paul and Anthony Samuel Barricella; a sister, Carla Barricella; and a grandson, Aaron Mathew Barricella.

Memorial contributions are suggested to [endpolio.org](http://endpolio.org)

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