

MAXINE AMELIA THURSTON-FISCHER, 74

Social activist became executive in Urban League's Miami chapter

BY HOWARD COHEN
hcohen@miamiherald.com

Maxine Amelia Thurston-Fischer, who dedicated her life to social work and to the Miami community where she served in leadership roles with the Urban League and, later, as president and CEO of her own company, died Sunday of gall bladder cancer.

She was 74.

Thurston-Fischer caught the attention of T. Willard Fair with her flair for fashion and style when both were in their 20s and he was fresh in his new role as an executive with Miami's Urban League.

"There are three people in my life that I think can take credit for all of my successes and failures — my mama, my brother, and Maxine," Fair said. "She was an extraordinary human being, to say the least. She had an uncanny ability to get things done."

Thurston-Fischer was born in Jacksonville in 1939 and became one of first black students at Indiana University, where she earned a bachelor's degree in social welfare in 1960. She continued at Florida State University, where she became the first black student to graduate from the school with a master's degree in social work four years later, her friend Marilyn Hoder-Salmon said.

"She was very wise in an intuitive, compassionate way, and was forward-thinking on projects that were important issues in our community," said Hoder-Salmon, a retired English professor at

Florida International University.

Hoder-Salmon met Thurston-Fischer a couple of years after she began to work at the Urban League.

"Maxine became my very best friend for almost 50 years," she said. "One of my daughters said recently, 'Maxine commanded a room. When she walked in, it was her room.'"

Thurston-Fischer would become an executive vice president with the Urban League of Greater Miami and was an interim executive director of Miami Bridge, a not-for-profit organization that provides emergency shelter, food, and counseling for troubled young people and their families.

"I met Maxine when I was young and just getting started in this mission of trying to save all the black people in Miami and the world at large," said Fair. "She was an extraordinary deputy director for me for 15 years."

During that time, "one thing she taught me is you can do anything you want to do as long as it is the right thing to be done," Fair said.

She founded her firm, The Thurston Group, in 1986 with little capital, an office in the Design District, and business cards. It became a consulting and management firm for research, program evaluation, and organizational development for human-service agencies, and it took on projects, such as youth-violence prevention, youth drug pre-



MANY ROLES: Maxine Thurston-Fischer.

vention, shelter services, and comprehensive child development.

Thurston-Fischer also served on the boards of trustees of Jackson Memorial Hospital, United Way of Miami-Dade, and North Shore Medical Center.

She was an associate professor at Barry University's School of Social Work from 1981 to 2008.

At one point, she left Miami and became an executive director of a health systems agency in the Houston-Galveston area of Texas, but she returned to the Miami she loved and began a life with her husband, Dr. Kenneth Fischer, whom she married in 2003, nine years after they met professionally.

"She is an example of how a person should be treating people — with kindness, consideration, and by being unselfish. That was the most characteristic of Maxine. She made people better," Fischer said.

In addition to her husband, Thurston-Fischer is survived by her brother Maxwell Thurston and nephew Paul Thurston. A service is scheduled for 2 p.m. Thursday at Mount Tabor Missionary Baptist Church, 1701 NW 66th St., Miami. She will be buried Saturday at Bosque Bello Cemetery in Fernandina Beach.

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