

'First Lady' Hilda Mae Snoops Dies

*Schaefer's Friend
Was Official Hostess*

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Hilda Mae Snoops, 74, the special friend and companion of Maryland Comptroller William Donald Schaefer who shared the governor's mansion in Annapolis with him during his years as the state's chief executive, died yesterday at Howard County General Hospital. She had suffered several strokes.

Snoops was Maryland's official hostess and unofficial first lady when Schaefer was governor from 1987 to 1995, but the couple had been friends all their lives. They grew up together in the same neighborhood of West Baltimore, where their parents were friends. She was at his side literally and figuratively for much of a 40-year political career that included service on the Baltimore City Council,



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William Donald Schaefer and Hilda Mae Snoops were friends all their lives.

15 years as mayor of Baltimore and eight years as governor.

When Schaefer settled a bet by diving into the seal pool at the National Aquarium in Baltimore, it was Snoops who handed him a rubber ducky. When he departed

the city dressed as an admiral, it was Snoops who unveiled a sign labeling him "Baltimore's Gift to Maryland." A thoroughbred horse was named for her, as was one of

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Hilda Mae Snoops, Longtime Companion of Former Governor, Dies at 74

SNOOPS, From B1

the cranes used to unload freighters at the Dundalk docks. When William Donald Schaefer first took the oath of office as governor of Maryland, Hilda Mae Snoops held the Bible on which his hand rested.

"Hilda Mae is my family I guess, in a way. Not in a way—she is my family," said Schaefer, a lifelong bachelor, on leaving office as governor. In a statement, he described Snoops, a divorcee, as his "special and closest friend, my confidant and my colleague. . . . She was always there for me—during the good times and especially during times of adversity. I will always take great comfort in our special relationship."

Snoops, by nature a private person, was not regularly seen in public with Schaefer until the 1970s, when he was mayor of Baltimore. They attended movies together and went out for steamed crabs. Her marriage to Charles A. Snoops ended in divorce in 1962. For years, there was talk in political circles and speculation in the media that the couple might marry. Aides and close

friends of Schaefer said they were afraid to ask direct questions about his relationship with Snoops, and questions from the media drew hesitant and evasive answers.

"We're not normal. Hilda Mae and I have never been normal," Schaefer once said, not without pride. Beside him, Snoops nodded her assent. He sometimes called her "Old Girl," "Hilda Lou" or "My Lady Friend." She called him "Donnie," the only person permitted to do so.

As Maryland's official hostess, Snoops opened the governor's mansion to the masses. She received money from the Maryland legislature to redecorate, replacing worn carpets and rotted woodwork. She held a series of open houses, including Christmas parties for profoundly retarded patients from the state hospitals. With privately raised money, she installed a \$169,000, three-tiered Victorian fountain in the garden, and she redid the mansion's private quarters to make them comfortable for a lifelong bachelor and creature of habit. The screens out back were painted in landscapes, like the front-stoop

screen doors of a Baltimore row house. Architectural purists criticized her for replacing historical remodeling that had been done on some of the public rooms. The kitchen staff had to be retrained. It was necessary "to teach the cooks how to cook regular," Schaefer once observed. "Pork and mashed potatoes and sauerkraut. They really didn't know what sauerkraut was, these French guys. They weren't French, but they were raised French."

In Annapolis, Snoops was known as a low-key and gracious hostess who nevertheless had strong ideas and definite likes and dislikes, and she had a temper. "The basic axiom . . . if you work in state government, is that whatever makes Hilda Mae unhappy, makes the governor unhappy. And you don't want the governor unhappy," observed a former chef on the Maryland state yacht, who claimed to have lost his position for serving strawberry shortcake as a dessert on an occasion when Snoops wanted devil's-food cake. The governor's aides denied this was the reason for his



dismissal.

Snoops, a former Baltimore nurse, became a program analyst in 1979 for the federal Health Care Financing Administration's division of overpayment in Baltimore. She retired a month before Schaefer became governor.

Snoops and Schaefer had planned

to retire to adjoining town houses in Anne Arundel County when his gubernatorial term ended, resuming an arrangement of arm's-length coziness that they had long enjoyed at the beach, where they had side-by-side trailers.

Then Snoops's health, fragile for years, took a turn for the worse. She

suffered a stroke that left her partially paralyzed on her left side, and moved instead to a nursing home and later to an assisted-living building at Harmony Hall in Columbia. Schaefer visited her at least three times a week right up until she died.

Survivors include three children and six grandchildren.

Former Governor William Donald Schaefer visited Hilda Mae Snoops three times a week right up until she died. Hilda Mae is my family, Schaefer, a lifelong bachelor, said on leaving office as governor.

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