

Resolution of Council

20 November 2023

Item 3.1

Vale Helena Carr

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

I wish to inform Council of the sudden passing of Helena Carr, an accomplished businesswoman and wife of former NSW Premier and Australian Foreign Minister Bob Carr, on 25 October 2023.

Helena was born in Perak, Malaysia. She was the youngest of six children from a multicultural family, her father, Lourdes was Indian and her mother, Regina was Chinese.

In 1965, at the age of 17, a fiercely independent Helena convinced her parents to allow her to come to Sydney to study at Our Lady of Mercy College, Parramatta. She then went on to major in economics at the University of Sydney, where she was a resident at Sancta Sophia College. This is where, as a fellow student and resident, I first met Helena and knew her as an intelligent and warm young woman.

In 1971 while on holiday in Tahiti, Helena met her future husband, Bob Carr, who noticed her sitting by the pool reading a book by JK Galbraith, while he was on a stop over from the United States. They married in February 1973. They often described their 50-year journey together as a partnership in both public and private life, which reflects the strength of their love and commitment to one another.

Helena was an accomplished and successful businesswoman. She joined Leigh Mardon in 1976, first as a market research officer and then as a product manager. She left in 1981 to join Amatil before returning to Leigh Mardon, as a business development manager and then a division manager, where she was responsible for a staff of 1,000. Later she recalled that some of her staff were "quite frightened of me". But the only people who really needed to be afraid, she added, were "those who didn't perform". By the mid-1980s, she was the Managing Director of Leigh Mardon.

Later, with business partner Max Turner, Helena bought Merritt Madden Printing and Advanced Graphics, a commercial printer producing prospectuses, annual reports, and trade magazines. In October 2004, she and Turner sold the business.

When her husband, Bob became Leader of the Opposition in 1988, I got to know Helena again, meeting both at official functions and regularly running into each other at Bill and Tony's on Stanley Street, where Helena and Bob, and my husband, Peter and I regularly had coffee and breakfast before we started our day. At this time, I came to know her again as a very intelligent and interesting person to talk to, a bright and warm personality, who was always there in support of her partner, Bob.

Helena famously avoided the spotlight. She was described by Edmund Capon, former director of the Art Gallery of NSW and friend as "a tower of strength" but also a tower of "discretion". Others described her as "the business brains of the [Carr family] operation" and Bob said she "resist[ed] very strongly any idea of [my] premature departure".

The public commitment to stand by Bob was made easier by her commitment to her own career. The most important decision she ever made was to avoid that dangerous intersection where her business life might have met his politics.

She told the Sydney Morning Herald in 1988: "A partner's interests must coincide with yours, but his occupation need not do so." Independent, self-confident, and financially secure, she was not reliant on Carr, or jealous of his limelight, but instead a steadfast partner and supporter.

Helena died suddenly after losing consciousness as a result of a brain aneurism while in Vienna, Austria, with her husband of 50 years at her side.

Together with many others, I will remember Helena for her charisma and charm, her ability to connect with people from all walks of life, and as someone who genuinely cared, and who was always ready to listen and offer support.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE AO

Lord Mayor

Moved by the Chair (the Lord Mayor) –

It is resolved that:

- (A) all persons attending this meeting of Council observe one minute's silence to commemorate the life of Helena Carr and her enduring legacy as an independent, intelligent, interesting and warm person, successful businesswoman and steadfast partner and supporter of former NSW Premier, Bob Carr;
- (B) Council express its condolences to Helena Carr's husband, Bob Carr and family; and
- (C) the Lord Mayor convey Council's condolences to Bob Carr and his family.

Carried unanimously.

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Note – the Lord Mayor acknowledged the presence of former NSW Premier Bob Carr, who was viewing the Council meeting via the webcast.

Note – all Councillors, staff and member of the public present stood in silence for one minute as a mark of respect to Helena Carr.