

# In Memory of Cheri Melillo, Hon. AIA

February 4, 1949 - December 26, 2009

With distinction from Northwestern University, Cheri C. Melillo, Hon. AIA, received her BS in Theater in 1971. Her career encompassed acting and 24 years as administrator Butler Rogers Baskett Architects (BRB). While employed at BRB, during her membership in the Society for Design Administration (SDA), Cheri created and was editor-in-chief of the SDA award winning news journal, SkyLines. She also instituted the SDA's Lunch-Time Tours and Administrative Round-Table Program.

During her tenure as the SDA's National Public Relations Chair, she developed the internationally renowned food charity "CANstruction." She served as Volunteer President and Executive Director of CANstruction for 17 years. It was her passion and a true labor of love. She mentored teams of architects, engineers, and students who competed to design and build self-supporting sculptures made with cans of food. The results are displayed to the public as giant pop art sculptures in each city where a competition is held. The public is invited to donate canned food to view the exhibitions. When the structures are dismantled, all of the canned food is donated to local food banks. At the time of her death, more than 140 cities from the U.S. to Australia were participating by holding competitions. Thirteen million pounds of food have already been donated to food banks.

Cheri's vision of introducing students to the design/build professions by bringing CANstruction into school systems is now becoming a reality. Students incorporate art and design, math, geometry, engineering, 3-D rendering, construction, and project management. CANstruction will have the ability to stimulate the next generation of construction professionals, while teaching them the importance of performing community service.

In 2000, Cheri was made an Honorary Member of the AIA for her work in developing, marketing, and promoting CANstruction. In 2009, on behalf of CANstruction, she accepted the Creativity of the Mind Award from "The Odyssey of the Mind," and a Public Service award from the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA). She was an honoree at the 2009 City Harvest Practical Magic Ball in NYC, and in the past has been honored by The Food Bank for NYC and The Society for Marketing Professional Services. This past fall, she was nominated for the New York Post Liberty Award in the Lifetime Achievement category.

Cheri was the "go to" person on a wide range of subjects and she always had an answer to any question — be it about HR or administrative issues, or organizing the easiest way to track professional credits. She developed an effective tracking system for professional development hours and gave it to SDA National to offer as an organization product. If Cheri did not have the answer, she knew whom to ask and she would make sure that the answers were shared with us all.

Cheri always gave 100%. Through her hard work and dedication CANstruction will live on, and every year we will remember her and miss her presence as we work on putting the competition together. We are all the better for having known her — her sense of humor, her incredible energy and knowledge, and her presence. She touched all of our lives in so many positive ways and we will all be the poorer for her absence.

Cheri was born on 02.04.49, in Muskego, WI. She is survived by her husband Bruce E. Melillo, son Brion John van Over, mother Rosalind Couture, and brother Gary Couture. The family has requested that contributions in Cheri's name be made to CANstruction at [www.canstruction.org](http://www.canstruction.org).

Tribute compiled by SDA NY Chapter and submitted by Patricia M. Leyden, CDFA

Patricia is the President of the NY Chapter of the Society for Design Administration and Vice President of Administration at WSP Flack+Kurtz.