

OBITUARIES

Memorial service today for Barbara Bonoff, 77

BONOFF, Barbara (Wasserman)

August 25, 2003. Beloved wife of the late Burton "Buster" Bonoff. Residence: Phoenix, Az. and West Warwick. Dear mother of Larry Bonoff, Warwick and Betsy Menders, West Warwick. Devoted grandmother of Melissa Menders. Memorial service 12:30 p.m. Wednesday at Temple Beth-El, 70 Orchard Ave., Providence. Relatives and friends are invited. In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to The Program in Women's Oncology @ Women & Infants Hospital or Women & Infants Hospital, 4th Fl., 101 Dudley St., Providence, R.I., 02903. Shiva to be private. The family was assisted with the arrangements by the SUGARMAN-SINAI MEMORIAL CHAPEL.

Barbara Bonoff, 77, of North Central Avenue, Phoenix Ariz., and Shady Hill Drive, West Warwick, who with her late husband founded the former Warwick Music Theatre that brought Vegas headliners and Broadway hits to Rhode Island for decades, died Monday at Women & Infants Hospital, Providence.

She was the wife of the late Burton "Buster" Bonoff, who died in 2000. The Bonoffs had been married for 53 years.



Together, the Bonoffs created an entertainment legacy as they booked acts such as Frank Sinatra, Bob Hope, Liberace, Nat "King" Cole, Steve and Eydie Gorme, Ginger Rogers, Jayne Mansfield, and Perry Como.

That legacy began on June 24, 1955, when the Bonoffs opened the first Warwick Musical Theatre — tent in a field — and staged *Annie Get Your Gun* with Judy Tyler of the *Howdy Doody Show*.

As Mrs. Bonoff noted in 2000, the early days "were a rough road. We were losing money, losing money, losing money."

But the Bonoffs persisted, bringing in a steady roster for summer stock, and gradually gained some purchase on the entertainment market.

Things "really took off," according to Mrs. Bonoff, when the theater went to a "star" policy, to Las Vegas kinds of acts including Perry Como and Jack Benny.

Mrs. Bonoff ran the theater's box office, business office and public relations, and assisted with bookings and other managerial aspects. Her couture was often noted in newspaper

accounts

The Bonoffs became friends with many of the performers, including Jack Benny and George Burns. Mrs. Bonoff described Burns as "funny and charming. Except for the cigars. I used to tell him, 'I love everything about you except those cigars.'"

They also became close with Liberace, who they called "Lee." Liberace headlined the Warwick Tent for years.

The Bonoffs erected a permanent structure in 1967, and later established a similar venue in Phoenix, Ariz.

Born on Nov. 27, 1925, in New Haven, Conn., a daughter of the late Samuel and Rose (Berman) Wasserman, she had been a resident of West Warwick for many years, maintaining a winter residence in Phoenix.

She was a 1947 graduate of Beaver College, Jenkintown, Pa., where she earned a bachelor's degree in home economics.

She was the president and treasurer of Buster Bonoff Productions Inc., of Arizona, and the treasurer and member of the board of directors of Warwick Musical Theatre Inc., Warwick.

She was heavily involved with a number of civic activities, including the American Heart Association, the Women's Board of Barrows Women, the Neurological Institute in Phoenix, the American Cancer Society, Phoenix Crisis Nursery, Arizona Heart Institute, and the March of Dimes.

She leaves a son, Larry Bonoff of Warwick; a daughter, Betsy Menders of West Warwick; and a granddaughter.

A memorial service will be held today at 12:30 p.m. in Temple Beth-El, 70 Orchard Ave., Providence.