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## **Geneva loses friend in French partner city**

### **Flags set at half-staff to honor death of Brigitte Garner**

By Brenda Schory

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Jony and Brigitte Garner in their garden in Croissy-sur-Seine, France in 2018. Brigitte and Jony Garner facilitated the 15-year partnership with Geneva through the Geneva International Cultural Exchange Committee. Brigitte died March 14 of cancer. (Photo provided by Cynthia Albright)

[GENEVA](#) – The city’s flags are at half-staff in honor of the death of Brigitte Garner, the city’s friend in its 15-year [partnership](#) with Croissy-sur-Seine in France.

Mayor Kevin Burns also asked for a [moment of silence](#) at Monday night’s City Council meeting to honor Garner.

“Brigitte and her husband, Jony, were trailblazers – as it were – in terms of developing their relationship with their community of Croissy and our community of Geneva,” Burns said.

Cynthia Albright, who serves on the Geneva International Cultural Exchange Committee, spoke about the support Garner provided to Genevans who visited their partner city.

“Our friend Brigitte died March 14 after a valiant struggle with cancer,” Albright said. “This evening, we honor the memory of Brigitte Garner. Many of you met Jony on his several visits here. Brigitte came once to Geneva and was just smitten by how lovely our town is and its people. ... She just fell in love with our town.”

Brigitte was 78, Albright said.

The Geneva International Cultural Exchange Committee began in 2006, but the Garners in Croissy-sur-Seine already had their cultural exchange organization, Croissy Sans Frontieres – translated as Croissy Without Borders, Albright said.

“They already had partnerships with a town in Germany and a town in England. And they were seeking a town partnership in America with somebody like us,” Albright said. “They were wanting to focus on a town that would be nearby some major collection of impressionist artwork.”

A little smaller than Geneva, Croissy-sur-Seine is a suburb of Paris. It is famous as the area where Impressionists traveled to paint – such as Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Maurice Utrillo, Albright said.

Both Geneva and Croissy are on a river, they have similar demographics and historic homes. As Croissy is a suburb of Paris, Geneva is a suburb of Chicago, which is 40 miles from an Impressionist art collection at the Art Institute.

Croissy’s late mayor Karin de Marco was president of the organization on that side and helped facilitate the partnership.

The committee established a tradition of alternating years of sending Genevans to Croissy and their residents to Geneva, she said.

What many remember most about Garner was her gracious hospitality, as Geneva travelers to Croissy would stay at her house, Albright said.

“To have this international relationship – I’d like to think ... on both sides that we are all the same, basically. We care about each other. We all have our human needs and foibles,” Albright said. “And knowing that Brigitte died, we already understand what the city of Geneva did for this special friend who passed away 5,000 miles away.”

Albright said Garner’s son wrote a tribute to his mother, that “There was never a day without a guest in their home.”

“We are deeply touched about this kind gesture this evening of a moment of silence,” Albright said to the City Council. “On behalf of Jony, I would express his heartfelt gratitude this evening of a moment of silence. Geneva has truly lost a friend. Brigitte, we bid you fond adieu.”

More information about the committee is available at [www.geneva.il.us](http://www.geneva.il.us).

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