

OBITUARY: MARTHA CHARLES

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BY JASON MICHAEL

LATHRUP VILLAGE – Martha Charles, a co-founder of Lesbian A-Sisters, died April 6 of heart disease. She was 60.

Born in Crawfordsville, Ind., Charles was just a toddler when her family moved to Michigan. She graduated from Cass Technical High School in 1962 and went on to earn a bachelor's degree in education from Western Michigan University.

Charles taught history to middle and high school students in the Lakeview School District of St. Clair Shores for nearly 30 years.

She had "an absolute dedication to the kids when she taught," recalled Sue Brooks, her partner of 19 years. The two met at a Women Together meeting, a group that Charles was actively involved in for many years.

In January 1996, just months before she planned to retire, Charles suffered a stroke.

"She was a wonderful gardener," Brooks recalled. "We have a raised bed garden that we put in after she had her stroke so she could still garden. Prior to the stroke she was a golfer and she was planning to take all the Ladies Professional Golf Association courses so she could be a teaching professional. She was planning to do that when she retired in June of '96 and she had the stroke in January."

As Charles fought to recover, she discovered that she needed help with what prior to the stroke had been simple tasks. The need led her to form Lesbian A-Sisters, a group dedicated to helping lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women with health issues with daily tasks. The group is still going strong and is now administered by

the Midwest AIDS Prevention Project.

Kind and compassionate, Charles was always up for a good joke.

"She had an incredible laugh and a wicked sense of humor," said Brooks, recalling the time shortly after the two had met that they planned to go to Washington for the first gay rights march. "We had only been together a short time and Rev. Troy Perry [of MCC] was going to do this huge wedding and she signed me up to receive every brides magazine and B.S. there was and it came to the house in droves. That was typical Martha."

But it's for more than her pranks and practical jokes that Brooks will remember her longtime partner. Charles, Brooks said, "was absolutely true to her values and ethics her whole life."