

## Life of Maida Abrams Celebrated in November



Maida Stocker Abrams

1938-2002

On November 16, friends, family and colleagues gathered at the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum to celebrate the life of Maida S. Abrams, the late founder of VSA arts of Massachusetts. This moving event was marked by art exhibits, performances and tributes from many of those whose lives Maida touched.

Charles J. Washburn, Executive Director of VSA arts of Massachusetts, hosted the celebration. In his introductory remarks he stated, "We come from many places to celebrate the life of Maida Stocker Abrams, a remarkable woman whose love, vision and gently persuasive way touched each of us in more ways than we can recount. I know that I, for one, am a better person for having known her."

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy brought his remembrances of Maida via a prerecorded video. In it, he said, "Maida was one of the most extraordinary friends I have ever had. Her enthusiasm captivated us all. Once she decided to do something we knew it would be done with great style and boundless energy and extraordinary vision."

Soula Antoniou, President and CEO of VSA arts, spoke of Maida as a mentor and friend and quoted from a eulogy composed by Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith, founder of VSA arts. Ambassador Smith wrote, "She was wonderful to be around. Her enthusiasm was contagious and her passion was inspiring.... No one worked harder than Maida, and the programs here in Massachusetts that support individuals with disabilities are models for the nation.... There are so many, many people whose lives are better because of Maida.... I think of Maida as the patron saint of the disabled. She was a very, very special person. I miss her, and I always will."

Touching on another part of Maida's life, William Robinson, The Maida and George Abrams Curator of Drawings at the *Fogg Art Museum*, spoke of her and her husband George's passion for collecting Dutch master drawings. Showing slides of work from their pre-eminent collection, Robinson praised Maida's "innate aesthetic sensibility and sense of quality. If George was the head and the public face of the collection," he said, "she was its heart." Robinson also cited the Abrams' generosity in "lending their drawings to museums, fostering the learning and research that perpetuate the vitality of the field,

and readily welcoming scholars, students, and even rival collectors to their home." An exhibition of works from the collection will be shown at the Fogg Museum from March 22nd through July 6th.

Performers at the celebration encompassed a wide diversity. Tony DeBloise, a former recipient of the VSA arts Young Soloist Award, played the piano. *Access to Theatre*, an integrated company of young performers, presented a dance. Pah! Deaf Youth Theatre was represented by a video depicting its Legacy Project. And, Lisa Thorson and Company gave a jazz concert.

On their way home, guests were encouraged by Maida's colleagues from VSA arts New England to take home some of the tulip bulbs that were piled on tables in the lobby and plant them in Maida's memory. This strong and beautiful perennial was chosen as a fitting symbol of Maida's creativity and enduring legacy.