Beat: Vips

Muppets co-creator Jane Henson dead at 78

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USPA News - Jane Henson, who worked with her legendary husband Jim in creating, designing and marketing the world-famous Muppets, died Tuesday at her home in Connecticut after a long battle with cancer, her family said. She was 78 years old.

"It is with great sadness that we mourn the passing of Jane Nebel Henson," said a brief statement from the Jim Henson Company, which is owned by the couple`s five children. It said Jane died at her home in Connecticut after a long battle with cancer and added that a memorial mass is planned for next week, but gave no other details. Jane met her future husband in a puppetry class at the University of Maryland in the early 1950s and quickly became an integral creative and business partner in what would eventually become the warm and fuzzy Muppets, which became playmates and teachers to millions of children around the world. While Jane was a fine arts education major in 1954, Jim was offered a spot on the local NBC affiliate in Washington, D.C. He asked Jane to join him as a co-performer and creator, as they both shared a unique approach to puppetry that her family described as "joyful and sophisticated." The 5-minute black-and-white television show "Sam and Friends", airing in D.C. before popular shows such as "The Tonight Show Starring Steve Allen," soon began to attract an enthusiastic audience. "It wasn`t long before the Muppets were making special guest appearances on the top variety shows of the time," her family said. The couple`s first guest appearance on national television was on the Tonight Show, after which the Muppets became more well-known across the country. Jane graduated in 1955 but continued working with Jim as a performer, puppet designer and builder, and business partner. They married in Maryland in 1959 and the couple went on to have five children over the next decade. Jane continued to actively participate and associate with The Jim Henson Company as it became a global family entertainment business. She collaborated with her husband on numerous projects that included the traveling museum exhibit "The Art of The Muppets" and arena stage shows such as "The Muppet Show on Tour" and "Sesame Street Live." The couple legally separated in 1986, but Jim and Jane continued to share their love of, and vision for, the Muppets until he died in May 1990. "Jane Nebel Henson, always modest about her own contribution to the creation and success of the Muppets, would often speak to the public about Jim Henson`s body of work and how `Jim wanted to leave the world a better place,`" her family said. Arthur Novell, the Trustee of The Jim Henson Legacy, remarked: "Most would agree they both did."

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