



LOCAL OBITUARIES

Jay Kislak, patriarch of real estate company, historian and philanthropist, dies at 96

BY HOWARD COHEN
hcohen@miamiherald.com

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Real estate magnate Jay Kislak didn't do small.

For his 95th birthday a year ago, Kislak, the Miami Lakes chairman of The Kislak Organization real estate company, celebrated with hundreds of people on the aircraft carrier Intrepid in New York. He had flown off that carrier while he served as a Naval aviator during World War II.

“It holds about 300 people and today it is a museum in New York Harbor,” he said in an accompanying Miami Herald story.

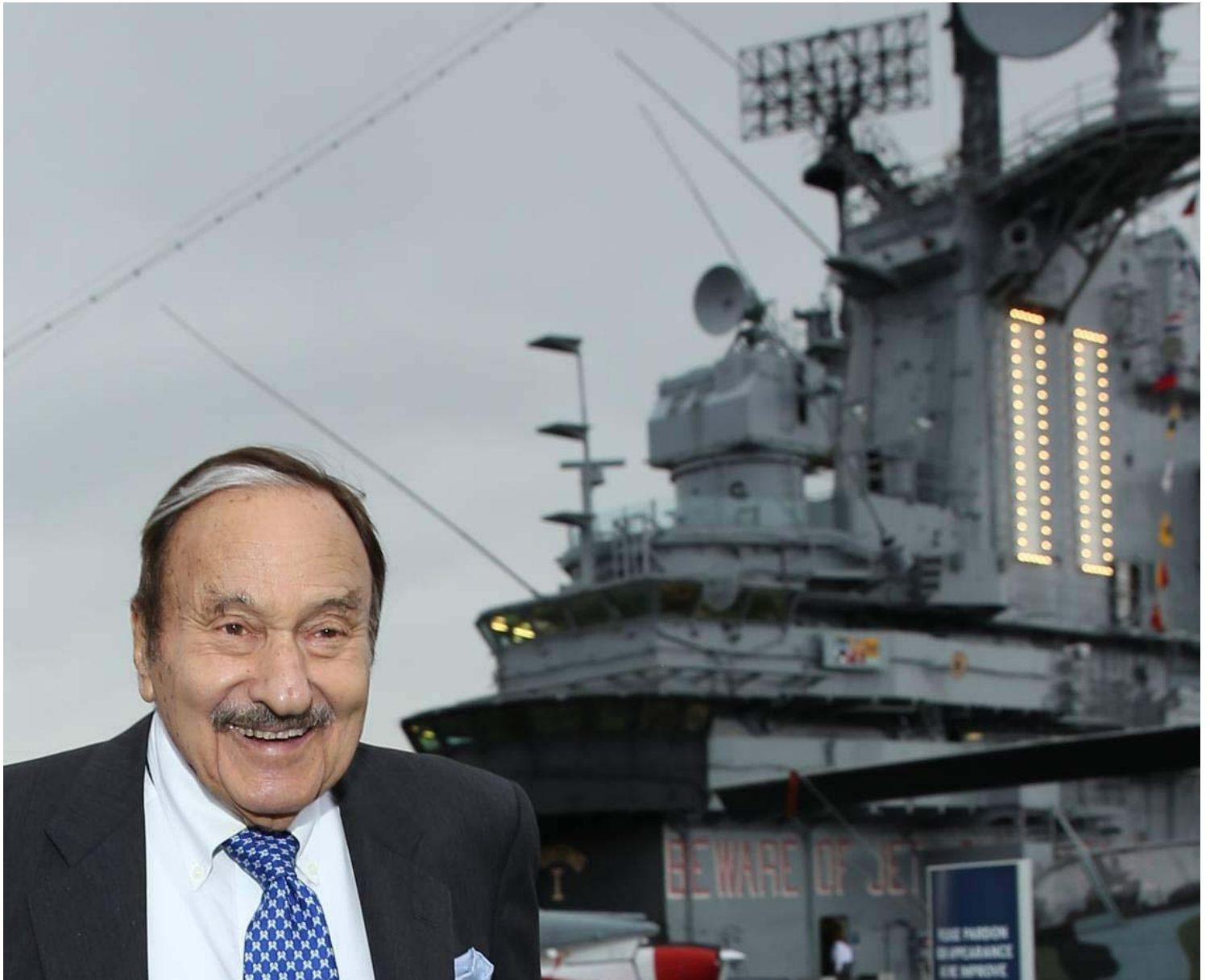
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Jay Kislak celebrated his 95th birthday in June 2017 on the aircraft carrier Intrepid in New York that he had flown off while he served as a Naval aviator during World War II.

Courtesy Kislak Family

Kislak, who died Wednesday at his Miami home at 96, knew from museums and of preserving history — and of family.

“My father had 95 great years. I don’t know anybody else who would rent an aircraft carrier for his 95th birthday and fill it with 300 people,” said his son Jon Kislak. “That’s the way he lived life. That’s the way we should all live life.”

In 2004, Kislak donated more than 3,000 items from the Jay I. Kislak Foundation he had founded with his wife, Jean, to the Library of Congress, the Miami Herald reported. The gift included more than 2,300 books, maps, manuscripts and other historic materials valued at about \$30 million.

“This extraordinary gift to the American people is now on permanent display and features one of Jay’s greatest acquisitions — the 1516 Carta Marina Navigatoria, the first printed navigational map of the world by the celebrated German mapmaker Martin Waldseemüller,” his family said in his obituary.

Kislak also helped shore up two local institutions — Kislak Centers at the University of Miami and Miami Dade College Freedom Tower — with the foundation’s donation of thousands of rare books, manuscripts and artifacts.

The donation included a 1486 edition of Ptolemy’s “Cosmographia,” considered one of the most influential works in the history of cartography. A copy was owned by Christopher Columbus.



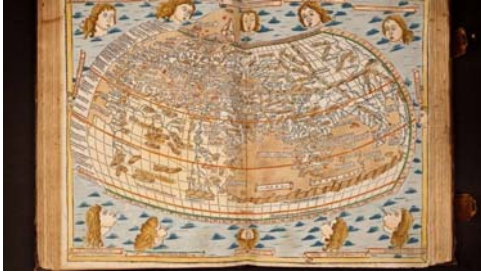
An atlas dated 1486, 'Cosmographia', on display at the Kislak Center at the University of Miami, March 20, 2018. Jay Kislak, an important collector of rare documents, is giving his document collection to the University of Miami.
CHARLES TRAINOR JR. - Miami Herald File

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“These two institutions are part of Miami and I am here in Miami,” Kislak said at the time.

Indeed, Kislak was a part of Miami for generations, since 1953. He first moved to South Florida with his first wife, the late Beverly Kislak, and their three children. His desire was to grow The Kislak Organization from Miami. At one point, the Kislak family controlled two banks, Skylake State Bank and Kislak National Bank, before merging them and selling to Banco Popular.

Even to his 95th year, he still went into the firm’s office in Miami Lakes when he wasn’t spending summers in Maine with his wife of 33 years, Jean Kislak.



Jean and Jay Kislak stand next to the display with a book, dated 1771, by Mark Catesby, 'The Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahamas Islands,' at the Kislak Center at the University of Miami. The Kislaks were attending a dedication ceremony at the center.

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Kislak, a businessman, philanthropist, aviator and history enthusiast, was born June 6, 1922, in Hoboken, New Jersey. He earned his first real estate license while still a high school student at Newark Academy. He earned an economics degree from the Wharton School of Finance at the University of Pennsylvania.

After the war, Kislak returned to New Jersey to join the real estate business his father, Julius Kislak, had founded in 1906.

In 1970, the family merged the Jersey and Miami operations and its primary lines of business included multifamily and commercial real estate ownership, asset management and brokerage, and tax lien certificate investment funds.

“Jay was not only the leader of our organization, but also a leader in the South Florida community and beyond,” said Tom Bartelmo, president and CEO of The Kislak Organization. “He had amazing confidence and a way of helping people accomplish more than they thought possible. I will miss him every day. I already do.”

Bartelmo, a Kislak protégé, worked with his mentor for nearly 24 years. The company employs about 100 people.

As much as Miami has changed since Kislak first arrived at a time when Daniel McCarty was Florida’s governor and Dwight D. Eisenhower was in the White House, one thing remained constant for the businessman.

“The real estate business is still the same,” Kislak told the Miami Herald in 2017. “The mortgage business is a little different because it depends on interest rates and depends on judgment, but in real estate, what counts are the same characteristics: three important things, location, location, location.”

Competition? Kislak welcomed it.

“We always had competition. Miami is a magnet for competition. The most important thing is to work hard and keep your nose clean,” Kislak said in 2017.

“I knew him for decades — a man who didn’t pussyfoot with words, a man with a drive to serve our community, a man who was passionate about telling stories of the past through collecting in the present,” said David Lawrence Jr., the founder and force behind the Children’s Movement of Florida and the Children’s Trust, and former publisher of the Miami Herald.

The Kislak Family Foundation supports programs at Florida State University Real Estate Center and the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine. He also established Kislak Centers at the University of Pennsylvania and at Monmouth University in New Jersey.

His leadership roles included the U.S. Department of State Cultural Property Advisory Committee; the boards of trustees of the National Park Foundation and Eisenhower Fellowships program; the Florida Historical Society and the Historical Association of Southern Florida.

Juan Carlos I, the King of Spain from 1975 to 2014, granted Kislak the prestigious Encomienda of the Order of Merit Civil, Kislak’s family said. He was named a Miami Living Legend by Miami Today newspaper and a national Unsung Hero by Curtiss Mansion. He received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association of Fundraising Professionals on National Philanthropy Day in 2017.

“My grandfather was the most interesting man in the world,” said his granddaughter Libby Kislak.

Kislak’s survivors include his wife Jean Kislak; children Jonathan, Philip and Paula Kislak; stepdaughter Jennifer Rettig; grandchildren Rebecca, Jason, Tamara, Libby and Jane; great-grandchildren Ezra, Simon, Kayla, Julia, Stokes and Aura; and his brother, David Kislak.

THE KISLAK REAL ESTATE INSTITUTE



The Kislak Organization. Pictured (L to R): Jonathan Kislak (third generation), Jason Kislak (fourth generation), Sima Kislak Jelin, Jay I. Kislak (second generation), David Kislak, Paula Kislak and Philip Kislak.

Kislak Organization - Miami Herald File

A celebration of life will be held at 4 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 7, at Temple Beth Am, 5950 N Kendall Dr., Pinecrest.

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