



# Patrick James "Chip" Cassidy III

FEB 1, 1947 - OCT 28, 2019



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# Patrick James "Chip" Cassidy III

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**C**hip Cassidy told stories — about wine, which was his passion; about war, which was his duty; about his students, who are his legacy.

Cassidy, South Florida's foremost wine expert and scholar, who started the wine education program at Florida International University's Chaplin School of Hospitality, died Monday in home hospice care after a brief battle with esophageal cancer. He was 72.

"He was a wine expert but he was so much more than that," his son, Patrick Cassidy, said.

Patrick "Chip" Cassidy, an FIU professor of 35 years, built a world-class wine education program there while turning Crown Wine & Spirits into one of the largest wine retailers as its chief buyer in Florida.

He did both with the power of his storytelling skills. He lulled hospitality students unwittingly into learning with anecdotes of his travels, 30 times to Europe and to the wine country in Italy, Germany, Spain, Australia and throughout Latin America.

He turned casual wine drinkers into connoisseurs thanks to a library of more than 7,000 wine books, most of which he had read twice. He could spout stories about every one of thousands of wine bottles, particularly at the Crown shop in Coral Gables on South Dixie Highway.

And although he offered little about his year of service in the Vietnam War to anyone but a fellow soldier — he was awarded two Silver Stars for valor and a Purple Heart for an injury — all it took was for a boy to say, "Chip, tell me a war story." Cassidy was soon spinning a yarn.

The Army tried to steer Cassidy into the special forces when they drafted him at 18 as a wrestling star out of Freeport High in Long Island, New York. But Cassidy became a field medic and an Airborne Ranger, parachuting behind enemy lines in Vietnam. His late father wrote him, one of his eight children, a letter a day during his year of service from 1967 to 1968.



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Mortar fire knocked out part of his platoon during an ambush, and when Cassidy came to, he scrambled to save 10 of his fellow soldiers, all the while with shrapnel in his hand. That earned him the first of two Silver Stars. Another time, an explosion while his platoon was crossing a rice paddy spooked a herd of water buffalo, one of which turned and trampled him, breaking several of his ribs.

Out of the Army, Cassidy started at Long Island's Nassau Community College, but his real schooling came when making deliveries for a local liquor store, after which he'd spend hours chatting with the owner about German wines. It inspired him to take a 10-session course at Harold Grossman's School of Wines in Manhattan.

He remembered the first great wine he'd ever tasted was as a teen. While visiting the home of a wealthy high school friend, he talked the father into uncorking a 1959 Chateau Lafite Rothschild.

"I've been drinking like a king ever since," he told the Miami Herald in an interview in 1992.

He talked his way into a job as a wine steward at Palm Beach's The Breakers when he came to Florida in 1972. And a year later he answered a newspaper ad to become an assistant to the wine buyer at Sunset Corners in west Miami-Dade. Nine months later, he was the chief wine buyer there — a job he held for 12 years as he turned Sunset Corners into the place where you could find rare imported wines.

And he did it all with his ability to charm people, his son remembers.

"He would always whisper in my ear after I had an interaction with someone and say things like, 'Always ask people about themselves.' Or 'That was a missed opportunity to get to know about a person,'" Patrick Cassidy said.

Meanwhile, he went back to school with the support of his wife, Chris, a nurse, and graduated in 1975.

Wine became his passion. He started teaching at FIU and a year later became the chief wine buyer at Crown — then just called Crown Liquors — and shifted its focus from liquor to wine. With Crown's support, he traveled all over the world to get to know different wine growing regions and bringing those wines to South Florida.



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He negotiated to spend two weeks in any country, every year, on the company's dime.

And he shared that passion with South Florida, hosting wine tastings behind the store and monthly at his home, which he called The Clubhouse, for close friends, some of South Florida's biggest wine connoisseurs.

He brought those connections to FIU.

He knew wine had to be an important part of FIU's hospitality curriculum and recruited Southern Wine & Spirits to sponsor FIU's million-dollar Beverage Management Center at the North Campus.

It included a Wine Sensory Lab, with storage for thousands of bottles of wine, a lecture hall and a tasting room with finely calibrated air-conditioning filters so the most minute flavors in a spirit could be perceived.

"There isn't another room like this in the world," he said at the time.

Plus he secured funding for scholarships to send hospitality students abroad to learn about wine. He brought on Southern Wine & Spirits to start a small, one-day wine and food festival, the Florida Extravaganza — which would go on to become the mammoth South Beach Wine & Food Festival.

He told his students to read, read, read. He gave them access to his library of books, which he bequeathed to the school.

"He'd give me books on Beaujolais and say, 'See? Now you're one of the world's foremost experts on Beaujolais,'" said his former student and confidante, Stephanie Honig, who went on to a career in wine.

Cassidy had planned to start a wine academy at FIU this fall when pain sent him to the doctor in August, when he was diagnosed with Stage 4 esophageal cancer. His health quickly declined.

FIU hastily organized a retirement party Oct. 23, where more than 150 friends from around the country came to honor him. His friends say in his final days, the prospect of living to see them at



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the party was his life force.

“Nobody loved what they did more than Chip,” Southern Glazer’s Wine & Spirits CEO Wayne Chaplin said. “Even though he knew so much about wine, he was always learning more.”

Cassidy was preceded in death by his wife and two brothers, Myles and Kevin. He is survived by his siblings, Maureen, Desmond, Christopher, Robert and Terry. And by his children, Megan and Patrick and two grandchildren, Dane and Cruise.

Funeral arrangements are pending. Cassidy will be buried at South Florida National Cemetery for veterans in Lake Worth.

The hospitality school’s acting dean, Michael Cheng, said his office will be kept as is, with books and photos left just so.

“He has left a void,” Cheng said. “We know we’ll feel his presence in our building forever.”

Written by CARLOS FRÍAS for The Miami Herald 10/28/2019




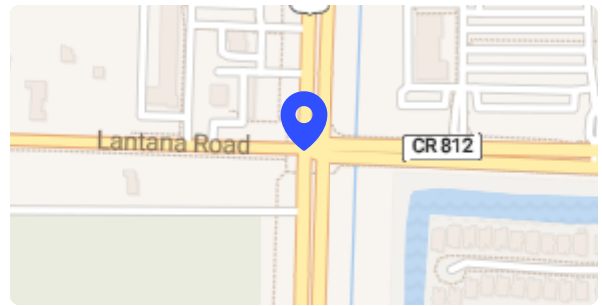
## Events

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### Cemetery Details

 **South FL VA National Cemetery**  
6501 S. State Rd 7, Lake Worth FL





## Tribute Wall

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PB

**Paul Brady** posted:

Chip and I NEVER grew up together in Freeport, LI, NY. He lived 2 blocks away and his parents were having children at the same clip my parents were having them. Chip was a year behind me at Holy Redeemer school and we both had the same demonic nun for 4th grade. She was a nut job and one day she was doing her holy chore of slapping her students around until she picked on the wrong kid. While unleashing her arm at Chip he blocked it and bolted out of the school and ran all the way home in the cold without his jacket. The next day he started public school. During or after high school he delivered "goods" for Horrigan's Liquors on Main St. He told me the story of one delivery where he was held up, had his money and the goods stolen, and was sent to the roof of the building where he found a pizza guy in the same condition. I ran across Chip's name in a WSJ Friday edition about 24 years ago when John and Dorothy Gaitner (?) had a wine column. Chip was one of the wine experts they talked to about which was the best wine for under \$10. That article prompted my phone call to him. Since then I ordered his wine books for myself and for a friend who is big into wines. All payments were made to the Cancer center where his wife, Chris, had her cancer treatments. I was glad to have Chip as a friend because if he wasn't a friend I would have needed to walk on the other side of the street if I saw him. Chip didn't back down from anything or anyone. He may have been one of the Mockeries of Geebaland, a made up name for a made up gang of Freeport High School mafia wanna be's. He was a man's man and obviously a child's dad and wife's husband. As usual I wish I had spoken to him more. Cheers, Chip. You did your parents and family proud. Paul A. Brady

October 13 at 12:18 PM

VD

**Virginia T Delutio** April 1 at 6:59 PM

I came across the card Chip gave me at our 30 class reunion. I was saddened when I read his obituary and also read that his wife Chris passed away too. I have a lot of good memories with Chipper as we called him. As we drank beer and played poker a lot. I'm! Sorry I didn't get to speak with him again but wanted to send my condolences even if it's so late. RIP dear friend Ginny delutio



## **Memories only last if you share them**

Join us in honoring Patrick by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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