

NANCY M. SWENSEN, M.D.



It is with deep sadness that we announce the passing of Nancy M. Swensen, M.D. on November 11, 2024, at the age of 90.

Beloved wife of 65 years to Harold E. Swensen, M.D., they shared an epic romance and partnership that began in her sophomore year of college and endured for 72 years.

Loving mother of Jeffrey H. Swensen (Beth) and Jill J. Swensen (Alexander Wing); cherished grandmother of

Michael, Sadie, and Ben Swensen and Gillan and Harold Wing. Preceded in death by her father and mother, George and Jean (nee Thompson) Muhlheizler.

As a student at Conroy Junior High School in Manchester, Nancy dreamed of becoming a doctor at the age of 12 when she witnessed her father recover from a potentially fatal case of pneumonia with the revolutionary new treatment of the antibiotic Penicillin. At West View High School, she began investigating bacteria cultures in milk at her family's North Side dairy and continued into college, at the age of 16, as a Bacteriology major at the University of Pittsburgh. Nancy was one of only two women in her class of 83 students at the University of Pittsburgh Medical School, from which she graduated in 1959. She practiced Anesthesiology at Magee Women's Hospital from 1962 to 1968 and went on to be one of three founding members of Western Pennsylvania Anesthesia Associates (WPAA), which grew to be the region's largest Anesthesia practice. She served as WPAA's managing partner for 30 years. She was awarded West Penn Hospital's Gold-Headed Cane Award in 1986, given to a member of the hospital staff who exemplified the best qualities of a physician, teacher, and researcher. In 1988, she oversaw the expansion of WPAA's practice to Sewickley Valley Hospital, where she spent the final 10 years of her career. In 1993, she became the first female president of the Pennsylvania Society of Anesthesiology.

Nancy had a tenacious work ethic and did everything 110%: Top grades in school her whole life, committed to finishing medical school before getting married, up at 5:30 am every day to get to the hospital to prep patients before surgery, all while being a caring and constant presence and steward in her family's lives. The day her first child was born, she started anesthesia on a case at 12:30 am, prepared another patient to go into surgery at 8:30 am, went into labor and delivered her son at 2:30 pm. The next day, while still in the maternity ward, the operating room was not able to reach the on-call anesthesiologist, so she put on her scrubs and went down to help on the case without blinking an eye.

Nancy imparted many lessons to the people in her life: Love and feel fully, be direct, do everything to the best of your ability, treat those around you with respect, listen and endeavor to understand, and be kind. One of her favorite quotes was "80% of life is showing up" (Woody Allen). She reminded her children of this more than once.

Nancy loved a range of things in life: her family and friends, art, fashion, beautifully composed spaces, cooking, baking pies, gardening, tennis, competitive bridge, and murder mysteries. She hosted epic Christmas and Super Bowl parties, and plentiful get-togethers to celebrate family, friends, and colleagues. She leaves behind beautiful gardens and way too many orchids.

Nancy was chairwoman of operations and finance in the Swensen household and kept the place running like a Swiss watch. She leaves a balanced checkbook, a fully stocked pantry, and everything in its place. Her family will endeavor to keep things operating smoothly in her absence. Her passion and presence will be greatly missed.

No Visitation. Service and Interment private. In memory of her life and of her love of gardens, please consider a donation in Nancy's name to Phipps Conservatory at [my.conservatory.org/donate/i/tributes](https://www.conservatory.org/donate/i/tributes) or by mail to 1 Schenley Park, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, or by phoning (412) 622-6915, ext. 3701.

View the obituary and leave condolences at <https://www1.funeralwebhost.com/wja/obituary/Nancy-SwensenMD>. Arrangements by **WEDDELL-AJAK FUNERAL HOME**, Aspinwall.

Send condolences post-gazette.com/gb