

# M. RUSSELL LESLIE, JR., MD

May 12, 1936 - November 23, 2024



Dr. Russ Leslie, also known as "Gruss," was a devoted husband and father, renowned orthopaedic surgeon, and cherished member of the Fox Chapel, PA and Chautauqua, NY communities, passed away peacefully on November 23, 2024, at the age of 88, surrounded by his loving family. He was preceded in death by his beloved wife of 54 years, Virginia Heinz Leslie, affectionately known as

"Ginger" or "Gigi", with whom he shared a lifetime of love and adventure. He often said, " Marriage is a dance of commitment, compromise, and communication". Russ was the son of the late Dr. Merle R. and Anne Blessing Leslie; brother to Eleanor Lucas, Linda VanVlack and the late Carl Leslie. Born and raised in Brentwood, PA, Dr. Leslie overcame polio in his childhood and went on to excel academically at Brentwood High School, where his determination and resilience shone through. Despite the challenges he faced early in life, he not only achieved academic success but also played football and basketball. He spent his formative years in Van Buren Bay, NY, at his family's lakeside house, fostering a love for the water, bonfires, and adventures in their beloved Century speedboat. After a postgraduate year at Mercersburg Academy, Russ graduated at the top of his class from Dartmouth College, where he was a member of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity, Glee club (where he loved to sing) and participated in the rowing club. He then attended the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, completing his orthopaedic residency under Dr. Albert Ferguson. Before his residency, Russ served as a Captain in the U.S. Army Medical Service Corps at Fort McClellan in Alabama. During his medical training, he also completed an internship at San Francisco General Hospital, where he discovered his passion for sailing. While in the military, Russ and Ginger decided they wanted to share their lives together and were married in Pittsburgh in 1964. They spent the next five decades of their lives together creating a wonderful family and a life full of happiness and mischief. Upon completing his residency in Pittsburgh, Dr. Leslie pursued a Hand Fellowship with renowned hand surgeon Dr. Joseph Boyes in Southern California. He returned to Pittsburgh as one of the founding partners of Oakland Orthopaedic Associates, later known as Greater Pittsburgh Orthopaedic Associates (GPOA). A pioneer in microscopic hand surgery, he became a role model and a highly respected figure in the medical community. His expertise touched countless lives, and his dedication extended beyond the operating room. During the seventies and eighties, he served as the team physician for the Pittsburgh Penguins, the Pittsburgh Ballet, and the Pitt Panthers, including the national college football champion team of 1976. Dr. Leslie's contributions to the medical field were felt throughout the Pittsburgh area, as he served with great distinction at local hospitals, including St. Francis, St. Margaret, Shadyside, Presbyterian, Allegheny Valley and Children's Hospitals. Summers were magical for Russ, who, along with Ginger, created a family retreat at the Chautauqua Institution, NY. The home on South Lake Drive became a cherished gathering place. His family enjoyed evenings on the porch and vibrant dock parties filled with laughter. He was an avid sailor, navigating his beloved C Scow fleet across the lake, often leaving family members in his wake. His favorite wooden C Scow was named 'Flip'er. He also took immense pride in his 1968 Chris-Craft Commander, named the "White Cap II", often watching afternoon sailboat races and hosting sunset cocktail cruises. Dr. Leslie had a deep love of golf, both as a player and a teacher, finding joy in sharing his knowledge of the game with others. His passion for golf and lasting friendships was solidified by his memberships at The Fox Chapel Golf Club, PA, Duquesne Club, PA, Rolling Rock Country Club, PA, Moonbrook Country Club, NY and Pine Valley Golf Club, NJ. A consummate storyteller, Dr. Leslie's tales, whether about the operating room, sailing adventures, or family lore, he captivated listeners of all ages and connected generations. Dr. Leslie's philosophy of life reflected his belief in thoughtfulness and intentionality. Nothing he did was ever random; every decision, whether personal or professional, was made with careful consideration. In the last few years, Russ re-united with a childhood friend from Van Buren Bay, NY, Sandy Johnson. They shared happiness, memories, and afternoon coffee with wonderful conversations. She was a loving companion who brought joy to his life. Dr. Leslie is survived by his four children: Scott Leslie (Kelly), Lisa Swiggett (Hank), Craig Leslie and Kristen Gardner (Jeff). He was a proud grandfather to eight grandchildren: Tucker Leslie, Casey Leslie (Tori), Tate Leslie (Jessica), Keaton Leslie (Samantha) and Bailey Preusse (Andrew), Jamie and Blake Swiggett, and Russell Gardner; and four great grandchildren Anderson, Cole, Forrest, and Henry who all brought him immense joy. His legacy is one of love, kindness, and unwavering dedication to his family, community, and excellence in all pursuits. Russ was larger than life, an icon and a perfectionist. A celebration of Dr. Leslie's life will be held at a later announced day in May 2025 at the Fox Chapel Presbyterian Church, PA and July 2025 at Chautauqua Institution, NY. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh (UPMC Children's Hospital Foundation) or Chautauqua Institution Foundation, (Chautauqua Fund) reflecting his commitment to helping others. Dr. Leslie will be remembered as a healer, mentor, sailor, golfer, and cherished friend and father. His quiet strength, deep intellect, and unshakable kindness were the foundation of his extraordinary life. His memory will continue to live on in the hearts of his family and community forever. Arrangements by **JOHN A. FREYVOGEL SONS, INC.**

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