



Connie Bakken

October 15, 1923 - December 27, 2021

Bakken, Constance Lorayn of New Brighton, MN, passed away at age 98 on December 27, 2021, with beloved family and caregivers by her side. Connie was preceded in death by her parents, Gertrude and Harold Olson, sister Elaine Hermundslie (Palmer), former husband Earl Bakken, and granddaughter Whitney Watson. She is survived by her four children: Wendy (Warren) Watson, Jeff Bakken (Linda Shaw), Brad (Mary) Bakken and Pam (Jeff) Petersmeyer, eleven grandchildren and five great grandchildren. Connie loved her family deeply, treasuring holidays and family dinners, often in restaurants, especially Jax Cafe. In summer, the lake was her favorite place. Connie always enjoyed time at the cabin with family and friends. The adults were relaxed and the children swam and played together on the beach. They often ate dinner together, frequently at the Waterfront Restaurant. Each spring she looked forward to getting back to the cabin. Connie grew up in Northeast Minneapolis and Columbia Heights. She had one older sister, Elaine, with whom she was always close. Her primary school, Van Cleve, is where she first became interested in justice, a core value that guided her throughout her life. As a child, Connie loved to fish and play with toy cars. Soon she was memorizing the names and makes of cars. In adulthood, she raced her 1972 Pantera at the Brainerd International Raceway. She loved baseball - playing it, watching it, and listening to the Millers' games on the radio. As an adult, she took up snowmobiling and golfing. She referred to herself as a hale and hearty Norwegian, 100%, and she enjoyed making and eating lefse at Christmas

time. During high school, Connie had a large group of girlfriends who enjoyed iconic places in Minneapolis such as the Milwaukee Depot and Heights Theater. The streetcar on Johnson Street gave them a degree of independence and freedom. During the Armistice Day blizzard, Connie was one of the lucky ones to catch the last running streetcar home from her clarinet lesson downtown. Connie graduated from Columbia Heights High School in 1942. In the fall she enrolled in the medical technology program at the University of Minnesota, graduating in 1946. Connie married her high school sweetheart, Earl Bakken, in 1948. While Earl and his partner, Palmer Hermundslie, were launching the medical device company Medtronic, she worked as a medical technologist at Abbott Northwestern Hospital. She then became a stay-at-home mom raising the couple's four children. When Connie's children were grown, and following her divorce, she made the brave decision to buy a bank and study banking. Few women were in banking, so she was admired for her fearlessness. She purchased the Citizens Independent Bank (CIB) in St. Louis Park in 1980. Over a three-year period, she simultaneously attended classes at the Graduate School of Banking, University of Wisconsin, Madison, and the Minnesota School of Banking, St. Olaf College. She graduated with high honors from the School for Bank Administration in 1983. Then, to hone her public speaking skills, she joined a Dale Carnegie group. At the bank, Connie soon created a warm, supportive environment for her employees, often carrying a pot of gourmet coffee around the office, a gesture meant to convey her approachability. Her staff loved her for her kindness and sense of humor, and for her efforts to provide upward mobility and pay equity for employees. Two of her assistants, Kathy Schmitz and Mary Gale remained on staff for 40 years, keeping her finances in order and organizing her schedule. Connie supported her customers by offering day trips, group travel experiences, seminars, and complimentary luncheons. The bank grew quickly under her direction, with initial holdings of \$44 million in 1980, to a multi-bank system holding over \$300 million and with additional offices in Robbinsdale, Hopkins, and Plymouth. Connie's son, Brad, took over

as president of the bank in 1998. Connie remained on the board until she was 95. Connie's work as a banker naturally drew attention in the community. In 1990, Governor Perpich declared May 23 as Connie Bakken Day. She was recognized among the Top 25 Women Business Owners in the Twin Cities, 1998-2002. She received other awards including: Northwestern Financial Review, 1990 (Distinguished Women in Banking), Twin West Chamber of Commerce, 1990 (Karen Gibbs Woman of Achievement), North Hennepin Business and Professional Women, 1990 & 1991 (Employer of the Year), WCCO Radio Good Neighbor Award (1993), Women in Business, 1995 (Career Achievement Award), Minnesota Suburban NAACP, 1995 (Community Service Award, Movers & Shakers), The Medical Technology Society (2002), and the MN Women's Business Owners Hall of Fame, 2013. Connie started a state-wide organization for women bankers, which had 28 members at its peak. Connie was proud to serve her community. She volunteered for the Twin West Chamber of Commerce, Hopkins Rotary, Southwest Exchange Club, Methodist Hospital's Foundation Board, the National Board of Lutheran Youth Encounter and its Foundation Board, Hamline University's Board, and the Board for Presbyterian Homes. In 2005 Connie was recognized for contributing to and raising funds for a new locker room in Williams Arena (The Barn) for the MN Gophers Women's Basketball Program. Connie belonged to First Lutheran Church, Columbia Heights, from childhood. She served on the church's endowment committee for several years. The Bakken family is deeply grateful to Brittany Porter and Sarah McKenzie, Connie's nurses and faithful caregivers. They tended her with patience, love, and grace during her final years. A reception to honor Connie's life will take place on Monday, April 18, from 5:00-8:00 p.m., First Lutheran Church of Columbia Heights, 1555 40th Ave. NE. Service and interment are private. Memorials preferred to First Lutheran Church or the Alzheimer's Association.

Previous Events

Reception

APR 18. 5:00 PM (CT)

Northeast Chapel
2901 Johnson Street N.E.
Minneapolis, MN 55418
(612) 781-6828
info@washburn-mcreavy.com

Tribute Wall

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“*Connie went to high school with my father. My parents were good friends of Connie and Earl thru College and Church. Connie was at every event on our families lives. She got my mom and dad involved with Medtronic's back at the beginning. I am saddened by the passing of Connie. She was so involved in many different projects. To the Bakken children and grandchildren, You are in our thoughts and prayers.*

*Rebecca Edstrom Fannon
Maple Grove, MN*

rebecca edstrom Fannon - January 04, 2022 at 08:52 PM