



## Karen Mae Newstrom

September 18, 1937 - February 11, 2025

Karen Mae (Westlund) Newstrom, age 87, of North Oaks, died Tuesday, February 11, 2025.

Born September 18, 1937 in St. Paul, Minnesota, Karen was welcomed into the world by her parents Mabel and Walter Westlund and two adoring sisters, Janice and Ruth.

Growing up in St Paul's Como neighborhood surrounded by family, friends and the occasional escaped zoo animal, Karen's childhood was happy. She and her family were active members of Central Baptist Church where she made many of her lifelong friends.

Karen graduated from Minnehaha Academy, attended Bethel College and earned a degree in Elementary Education from the University of Minnesota.

While at Minnehaha she met John (Jack) Newstrom. They reconnected in college and it was then that Karen recognized that Jack was a guy who would always be kind to her. The relationship bloomed despite the vast height difference, and they were married on June 17, 1961. Soon after, they moved to Houston, where Karen taught 3rd grade, Jack worked at NASA and their first daughter, Julianna, was born. Texas was a fun adventure for a few years but their hearts were in Minnesota with family and friends. Once back home,

they bought a house in Falcon Heights and welcomed their second daughter, Megan.

It was in that first house that Karen's passion for hospitality would blossom. She delighted in welcoming people for coffee, dinners and holiday parties, but it didn't stop there as the door was always open for anyone who needed a place to stay. Whether relatives or exchange students, foreign guests or friends, or the occasional traveler who had missed their connecting flight, no one would be turned away.

It was also during these early years that Karen began teaching in the Mounds View School District. She was offered the opportunity to work in the newly created Special Education program at Valentine Hills Elementary School. It was a perfect fit for her and she loved her job, she loved her students and she loved her colleagues. Karen retired after 32 years, but was happy to substitute teach when the need arose.

In addition to her teaching and entertaining, Karen's seemingly endless supply of energy fueled days packed with coffee dates, church, two bridge clubs, birthday club, choir practice, tutoring, yoga, shopping trips, concerts, dinner with friends, a second job for fun and wardrobe discounts and, eventually, grandchildren.

For Karen, sitting still was a foreign concept, and travel was an adventure she could share with Jack. While he enthusiastically explored historical sites and museums, she was equally enthusiastic about exploring all manner of markets and boutiques. They explored Europe several times, from Scandinavian excursions to visit beloved family and friends to their adopted hometown of Martin, Slovakia, where they volunteered to teach Vacation Bible School and made lasting friendships along the way. A "girls trip" with college friends was an annual occurrence and throughout the years there were trips to family cabins on Big Sandy, the annual gathering of the North Shore group at Split Rock Cabins, and cross-country skiing getaways in the Boundary Waters.

Those who knew Karen knew she was funny! She had a great sense of humor and was known for playing lighthearted pranks. No one was safe when it came to her shenanigans - not her parents or friends, her teachers or summer camp counselors, colleagues or students. She even took it upon herself to teach the next generation of aspiring pranksters the finer points of properly TPing a house. She loved to laugh and play games with her grandchildren which included many epic games of hide and seek at her house. She was known to wrap herself up in a sheet and sing "opera" for her students and, when the situation called for it, she would cackle like a witch.

In 2006 Jack died, leaving a big hole in Karen's heart. She had the love and care of friends, family and adoring grandchildren to help carry her through her grief but she was still lonely in the years following. Enter fellow Minnehaha graduate, Ron Opel, like a knight in shining armor. With Ron by her side she was ready to face the world again and they married December 28, 2010 at St Andrew's Lutheran Church.

Karen and Ron had many happy years together. They took an unforgettable trip to the Nordic countries that included a cruise up the Norwegian coast on the Hurtigruten, made a trip to Slovakia, and traveled around the US visiting friends. Fortunately for Karen, it seemed that Ron's time in the Marines gave him the stamina and mental fortitude to keep up with her and her rigorous social calendar. He was a gracious and capable co-host so the entertaining continued, most notably the big, extended family Christmas Eve party. When not hosting they were regulars for dinner at Chianti Grill and the Lowell Inn for Sunday brunch. Together they also enjoyed musical events, evenings watching British mystery series, and time with their grandkids (and granddogs).

As Karen's memory began to fail and her health declined, Ron was her rock and her constant companion. In her final months, Karen was tenderly cared for by Ron and the staff at The Arbor in Waverly Gardens.

Thank you for the visits, the help, the prayers and huge thank you to those special folks who've been there supporting her through this journey over the last couple years.

Karen's generous, friendly and vivacious character will be missed by her family, friends and community. As she would say: Kiss, kiss!

Karen was preceded in death by her husband, Jack, her parents and sisters. She is survived by her husband, Ron; daughters, Julianna Newstrom and Megan (husband Andrew) Newstrom Gaillard; grandchildren, Anna and Kristina Quanbeck and John-Charles, Henry, and William Gaillard and many beloved cousins, nieces, nephews and dear friends.

Visitation to take place Thursday, March 13th from 5-7 PM at Washburn-McReavy Shoreview, 515 Highway 96 West, Shoreview.

A memorial service will be held Friday, March 14th at 11:00 AM (additional visitation 10-11AM) at St Andrew's Lutheran Church, 900 Stillwater Road, Mahtomedi.

Livestream of the service available at 10:45am prior to the service:

<https://control.resi.io/webplayer/video.html?id=ea98a04e-f2ba-46f5-a03c-8fa1b2c7e003>

# Previous Events

## Visitation

MAR 13. 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM (CT)

Shoreview Chapel  
515 Highway 96 West  
Shoreview, MN 55126

## Visitation

MAR 14. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (CT)

St. Andrew Lutheran Church (Mahtomedi)  
900 Stillwater Road  
Mahtomedi, MN 55115

## Memorial Service

MAR 14. 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (CT)

St. Andrew Lutheran Church (Mahtomedi)  
900 Stillwater Road  
Mahtomedi, MN 55115

## Reception

MAR 14. 12:00 PM - 1:30 PM (CT)

St. Andrew Lutheran Church (Mahtomedi)  
900 Stillwater Road  
Mahtomedi, MN 55115

# Tribute Wall



“ Washburn-McReavy Funeral Chapels created a Memorial Service for Karen Newstrom in memory of Karen Mae Newstrom



Washburn-McReavy - March 12, 2025 at 11:38 AM

PF

“ Penny And Ken, And All Of Toms Family purchased the Arrive in Style for the family of Karen Mae Newstrom.



Penny And Ken, And All Of Toms Family - March 11, 2025 at 10:46 PM

PF

“ Penny And Ken, And All Of Toms Family planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Karen Mae Newstrom.

Penny And Ken, And All Of Toms Family - March 11, 2025 at 10:46 PM

JR

“ Karen lit up a room with her vivacious personality and beautiful smile! She was a hospitality queen with an open house for everyone. Her culinary skills were outstanding and enjoyed by all. A true and loyal friend to everyone she met and will be dearly missed by her many friends. Our Bridge club, turned gourmet dinners, will never be the same without her spunky presence. R.i.P. dear friend.  
Jean Reissner

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**Jean Reissner** - March 07, 2025 at 08:14 PM

LG

“ Love, Josie and Teddy Gaillard purchased the Sweetest Sunrise Bouquet for the family of Karen Mae Newstrom.



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**Love, Josie and Teddy Gaillard** - March 04, 2025 at 03:13 PM

TM

“ The Niska Bongiovanni Group at Merrill purchased the Enchanted Cottage for the family of Karen Mae Newstrom.



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**The Niska Bongiovanni Group at Merrill** - March 04, 2025 at 12:48 PM