



## Karen Olivia Benningfield

July 24, 1926 - March 11, 2017

Karen Olivia (Maegerlein) Benningfield, July 24, 1936, Chicago, IL to Olivia May (Grey) and Melverne L. Maegerlein, died Saturday, March 11, 2017, at Zusman Hospice after a courageous year-and-a-half battle with uterine cancer. Karen spent her formative years in Chicago, Detroit and Pittsburgh. Graduated 5th in her class from Mt Lebanon High School, Mt. Lebanon, PA in 1954. Graduated with B.A. degree Phi Beta Kappa from The University of Pittsburgh in 1958. Attended Harvard Divinity School (58-59) one of the first of a class of female Rockefeller Fellowship graduate students. Worked in the Los Angeles area as a professional journalist from 1960-68. Married journalism colleague Sam R. Benningfield Jr., on Dec. 29, 1962 at Mt. Lebanon Presbyterian Church. They moved back to Ohio from California in 1968, where Karen served as copy editor and higher education reporter for the Youngstown Vindicator while Sam pursued a successful career in advertising. After working at the Mansfield News Journal as head of The Ashland Bureau, Karen accepted a position as the first Public Relations Director for Mayor M. E. Sensenbrenner in 1971, relocating to Columbus. She subsequently worked in communications for the United Way of Franklin County, as editor of The Ohio State University Center for Vocational and Technical Education, as Public Relations and Development Director for the Ohio Easter Seal Society and for the Ohio Lung Assn. In 1972, she teamed up with the late Jimmy Crum, former sports anchor at WCMH TV, and launched the Classic Celebrity Waiters Luncheon, building the event from a \$12,000 startup to netting over

\$100,000 to benefit Recreation Unlimited, Inc. She and Sam operated Mid American Communications successfully from 1983-1991, serving many nonprofit agencies. Karen was the first professional Development Director for The King Arts Complex, where she and Sam created the inaugural gala, featuring Roberta Flack at the inaugural fund raiser, brought in the Rev. Jesse Jackson for the OCSEA (Ohio Civil Service Employees Assn) statewide conference, ran the national convention for the United Commercial Travelers featuring the first Junior Golf Tournament in Philadelphia, produced a national film for Special Olympics, USA, at Notre Dame, published the Athletic Club of Columbus member magazine, created the first fund raising benefit ever held in the Statehouse Rotunda. Coordinated the statewide "Ohio Crippled Children's Day" at the Ohio State Fair featuring Governor Jim Rhodes, George and Janet Voinovich and benefiting Ronald McDonald House. In 1992, Karen accepted a position as the first President of the Richland County Community Foundation in Mansfield, commuting from Columbus. After 2 years she joined the development staff of the University of Cincinnati Foundation, serving as regional campaign director for New York City and Southern California, and as Regional Director of Major Gifts. In 2002 she joined the development staff at Capital University in Columbus, as Director of Major Gifts. Karen accepted a position as Director of Philanthropy at the Nature Conservancy, Ohio Chapter, in 2007, managing a staff of 8 and a \$4 million annual budget. During her tenure, serving under 3 different directors in 2 years, she helped implement a statewide Major Gift program and increased Board engagement. In 2009, the late Dr. Donald L. Burton, founder and executive director of the Ohio Wildlife Center, persuaded Karen to join the small nonprofit as its first Development Director. Karen implemented with the volunteer Board President John Meyer, an aggressive Board recruitment strategy, adding over a dozen new members over the next six years. She instituted a year round fundraising program that helped OWC increase its annual budget from \$500,000 to nearly \$800,000. Karen served under 3 different chief operating officers and retired in Sept. 2015 while in treatment for uterine cancer. She continued to serve as a

fundraising consultant for Ohio Domestic Violence Network and the new Scioto Audubon Butterfly Garden project until mid 2016. She was a founding member of the Central Ohio Chapter of the National Society for Fundraising Executives (now AFP, Association of Fundraising Professionals) and the Central Ohio Planned Giving Council. In addition to the millions of dollars she helped raise to benefit a myriad of nonprofits, Karen was a respected professional, mentor, loyal and trusted friend. A true “people person”, she was a consummate “relationship builder”, engaging and being energized by interaction with others. Karen never met a stranger and was described by a colleague as having the ability to “talk to a brick wall and get a response!” She had a persuasive style that never failed to draw other people in, from CEO’s and mid-level managers to “worker bees”, which is how she often described herself. She is preceded in death by her grandparents, Marcus and Jenny Maegerlein and William and Velma Griffith Gray; parents Melverne and Olivia Maegerlein; only sister, Marcia Lee Donner-Showalter (1998) and her husband of 53 years, Sam Benningfield in May 2016. She is survived by her nephew, Christopher M (Margaret) Donner of Chicago, cousins Jane Robbins of Buckeye Lake, Jean & Keith Countryman of Salem, OH, Marilyn (Jim) Dilliam of Melbourne, FL and devoted friends Jane Kirchhoff Stolzenburg, Bryane Roberts and Hellen Boester, as well as a host of beloved departed animal friends. Special thanks for end of life care to Dr. Mary Jo Welker, OSU family practice physician. Karen loved people and touched many hearts and lives during her days on earth. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Ohio Domestic Violence Network (1855 E. Dublin Granville Road, Suite 301, Columbus, OH 43229) or Friends of Metro Parks- Benningfield Butterfly Garden (attn: Christie Vargo) 1069 W. Main Street, Westerville, OH 43081. A memorial service will be held on Tuesday, March 21st at 1:00 p.m. at Rutherford-Corbin Funeral Home, 515 N. High Street, Worthington, OH 43085. Family and friends will receive guests 30 minutes prior to the service.

# Previous Events

## Calling Hours

MAR 21. 12:30 PM - 1:00 PM (ET)

Rutherford-Corbin Funeral Home  
515 High Street  
Worthington, OH 43085  
(614) 885-4006  
info@rutherfordfuneralhome.com  
<https://www.rutherfordfuneralhomes.com/>

## Memorial Service

MAR 21. 1:00 PM (ET)

Rutherford-Corbin Funeral Home  
515 High Street  
Worthington, OH 43085  
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info@rutherfordfuneralhome.com  
<https://www.rutherfordfuneralhomes.com/>

# Tribute Wall



“ *Karen Olivia Benningfield*

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January 28, 2023 at 10:24 AM



“ *Enchanted Cottage was purchased for the family of Karen Olivia Benningfield.*



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March 17, 2017 at 11:58 AM