

## **Helen J. DeVos Obit**

Helen J. DeVos, wife of Amway co-founder Rich DeVos and a philanthropic leader in Grand Rapids, Michigan and Central Florida, died October 18, 2017 of complications from a stroke following a recent diagnosis of acute myeloid leukemia. She was 90.

Helen devoted her life to being a loving wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother and friend; an advocate for the education and health of young people; a servant in her church and community; and a supporter of the arts.

She will be greatly missed by her husband, Rich; children and spouses Dick and Betsy, Dan and Pamella, Cheri, and Doug and Maria; grandchildren and their spouses Rick and Melissa, Elissa and Nate, Andrea and Michael, Ryan, Cassandra and Heath, Sydney and Andrew, Cole, Hannah, Katie, Ben, Jessa, Addie, Dalton, Micaela and Jordan, Monreau and Olivia; and great-grandchildren Clara, Sloane, Remington, Richard, Wilhelmina, and Taggart.

Born Helen J. Van Wesep on Feb. 24, 1927, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Helen graduated from Frankfort High School in Frankfort, Michigan, and earned a degree from Calvin College. She married Rich DeVos on Feb. 7, 1953.

From the first days of their marriage, Helen made sure they tithed their income and throughout the years had a major voice in the many generous contributions made by the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation.

Her Christian faith and values were instilled in her as a girl growing up in rural northern Michigan. She expressed her interest in children and education as a school teacher. The Helen DeVos Children's Hospital is named in recognition of her lifelong advocacy for the health and wellness of families.

Helen had a strong passion in K-12 Christian education in America. She and her husband supported Grand Rapids Christian schools, including the Richard and Helen DeVos Center for Arts and Worship, as well as Rehoboth and Zuni Christian Schools in New Mexico that have been providing opportunities for Native American children for over 100 years. They also were generous supporters to higher education institutions including The King's College, DeVos Communications Center at Calvin College, Grand Valley State University, Northwood University, Michigan State University – College of Human Medicine, the Helen DeVos College of Education at Lee University in Cleveland, Tennessee, and Hope College.

Helen also was a champion of the arts and known for her support of the Grand Rapids Symphony. Helen was a board member and officer from 1971 to 1990, when she was appointed as an honorary member. She and Rich were the founding sponsors of the DeVos Quartet, and they provided the funding to help the Grand Rapids Symphony make its first commercial recording of works commissioned by the symphony. She also was the founding sponsor of the Artist-in-Residence program. In 1991 and again in 2007, she was honored with a *BRAVO! Lifetime Achievement Award* for her many years of support of the Grand Rapids Symphony.

In addition, she was a board member and life member of St. Cecilia Music Society. Helen and Rich were recipients of the *Grand Rapids Arts Council Award*.

Helen also was a board member of the League of American Orchestras in New York City, vice chairman of the executive board, and chairman of the nominating committee. The league recognized her with a special honor in 2007.

In addition to being a major philanthropist with Rich, Helen also gave generously of her time. For several years, she was honorary chairwoman of the local U.S. Marine Corps Toys for Tots Campaign. She also was the secretary and member of the executive committee of Holland Home.

Helen was a member of LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, where she served as president of the Service Guild and member of the Youth Education and Children's Worship committee. She was a former member of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida.

Following are some of the awards presented to her: Heritage Foundation *Clare Boothe Luce Award*, The Philanthropy Roundtable *William E. Simon Prize for Philanthropic Leadership*, League of American Orchestras' *Gold Baton Award*, Palm Beach Atlantic University *Women of Distinction Award*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute *Trustees' Award for Distinguished Service* and *Charles H. Hoeflich Lifetime Achievement Award*, American Red Cross *Circle of Humanitarians Award*, Salvation Army *William Booth Award*, Gerald R. Ford Boy Scouts Council *Distinguished Citizens Award* and Northwood University's *Distinguished Women's Award*. She also holds an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from The Kings College, an honorary Doctor of Arts from Grand Valley State University and an honorary Doctor in Humanities from Northern Michigan University.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that memorial contributions be made to Calvin College – Van Wesep Scholarship Fund, Grand Rapids Symphony Orchestra, Helen DeVos Children's Hospital, LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church or The King's College.

A public visitation will be held on Monday, October 23, from 2-8 p.m. in the Ambassador Ballroom at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel, 187 Monroe Ave. NW, Grand Rapids, Michigan. On Tuesday, October 24 from 2-3:30 p.m. there will be a private funeral service, which will be simulcast for the public in the International Ballroom of the JW Marriott, 235 Louis Campau St. NW, Grand Rapids, Michigan. (Seating available on a first come, first served basis.) Immediately following there will be a Celebration of Life Reception, open to the public, from 3:30-6:30 p.m. in the Ambassador Ballroom at the Amway Grand Plaza. For more information please go to [www.HelenDeVos.com](http://www.HelenDeVos.com).