



Dr. Susan M. Widmayer

June 28, 1943 - December 20, 2025

Dr. Susan M. Widmayer, the epitome of a life well-lived, passed away on December 20, 2025, after an eight-year battle with ovarian cancer, but not before changing the lives of tens of thousands of women and children in need.

Born June 28, 1943, to Ellen and Lawrence Widmayer in Hartford, Connecticut, Susan grew up in Potomac, Maryland before moving to Florida.

Susan is survived by her loving family: wife, Dr. Linda M. Peterson of Venice, Florida; sister, Dr. Martha Widmayer of Port Charlotte, Florida; brother-in-law, Dr. John McDonald of Vero Beach, Florida; Nephews, John L. McDonald of Altamont Springs, Florida and Patrick McDonald (Cindy) of Port Charlotte, Florida; Great-Nephew, John C. McDonald, Great-Niece, Grace McDonald; God-daughters Juliane Polito Garcia of Elk Grove, California and Christina Polito Rader of Sacramento, California.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Ellen and Larry and her sister Mary Beth Widmayer McDonald, all from Vero Beach, Florida.

Because she never wanted the spotlight on herself, she quietly married the love of her life, Dr. Linda Peterson in December 2018. They have been together for nearly 40 years, sharing Florida homes in Plantation, Weston, Venice, and Tidy Island and traveling the world for fun, education, and leisure.

In both her personal life and her professional life, Susan's generosity of time, money and spirit was unmatched. There were no strangers in her life, just people she was about to meet and lives she was about to enhance. She donated generously to causes that were important to her, rarely spending money on herself but always diligently caring for those who needed support.

She graduated from Trinity College in 1968. She moved to Miami in 1971 to work at the Center for Theoretical Physics at the University of Miami. During her time there she edited four books on theoretical physics among her other duties.

She earned her Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology in 1979 from the University of Miami. After her doctoral work, she was made an Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at the university's School of Medicine.

Susan was the founder of the Children's Diagnostic & Treatment Center (CDTC) in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida in 1983 and served as its Executive Director until her retirement in 2013. The center grew to be the preeminent resource providing extensive follow-up medical care, comprehensive case management, and early intervention services to medically fragile infants, children, and adolescents with disabilities in Broward County. The Center was the only non-university site in the nation for pediatric HIV/AIDS clinical trials funded by the National Institutes of Health.

Susan is renowned for making substantial contributions toward the understanding of child health and development, conducting, and publishing extensive studies. In 1985, she, on behalf of CDTC, was awarded a Ford Foundation Fair Start Grant, which established the Center as a grant-based community provider for children's health care services and a nationally recognized non-academic institution. She mobilized local, state, and federal funds to establish the Comprehensive Pediatric AIDS Project at the Center in

1991.

During her 30-year tenure leading the center, they serviced more than 250,000 clients and received awards too numerous to name for their commitment to the community and the advanced research and services they provided.

On February 28, 2013, Susan was honored in the US House of Representatives by Florida Congressman Ted Deutch saying, “When no one else would care for the tens of thousands of children with impoverished parents, Dr. Widmayer answered the call.”

Susan’s thirst for knowledge and her belief in education was not limited to the workplace. Her father Larry’s WWII experiences spurred Susan’s lifelong passion for information about the war. She absorbed every book and documentary she could get her hands on. Speaking of books, Susan singlehandedly kept the book publishing industry alive shopping at new and used bookstores alike on a weekly basis. That was always after she visited the public library.

Susan was not a lover of technology, but that did not stop her from starting every day on her iPad ingesting all the news from the previous day from her many online newspaper and magazine subscriptions.

Susan did not love baseball, but she loved Linda, who loves baseball, so Susan, while pretending not to watch ball games on TV, sat quietly learning all the player names, statistics, and the lingo of the game; interjecting what she learned when friends and family least expected it.

While Susan will be greatly missed, her legacy of love, compassion, and

service will live forever in the hearts of those whose lives she touched.

A funeral mass will be held in Venice on Friday, January 30, 2026, at 11:00 am at Epiphany Cathedral in the Chapel at the Parish Center, 310 Sarasota St., Venice FL.

A reception will follow at the Towers Condo Community Room at 1150 Tarpon Center Dr., Venice FL.

In lieu of flowers, if you wish to honor Susan, please consider a donation to Children's Diagnostic & Treatment Center, 1401 S. Federal Highway, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33316.

Previous Events

Funeral Mass

JAN 30. 11:00 AM (ET)

Epiphany Cathedral Catholic Church
310 Sarasota Street
Venice, FL 34285
(941) 484-3505

Tribute Wall

JJ

“ So very sorry. There are people who make this a better world and who ought to live forever; Susan was one such. Her work for children and their families inspired, her concern for others warmed, her sense of fun, her humanity and humility lifted everyone around her, even those of us who only knew her briefly and through others. Linda, my hope is that you and those who love and miss her so, find comfort in memories of her, of shared insights through great conversations and fun adventures, joyful, funny, even quiet times; hold such memories close, visit them often. Be well.

Judy Jones - February 02 at 10:45 AM

KH

“ Beautiful service honoring Susan! So glad I made the trip! Linda, be blessed. Im grateful for you both.
Kathy Hollywood dabkgh@yahoo.com

Kathy Hollywood - January 30 at 02:25 PM

CZ

“ My name is Carol Zuniga and I'm so speechless. I'm sending my prayers and condolences to her and the rest of the CDTC family. I must say this about her she was so personable with every single person she came in contact with. She made you feel like family, she made it her business to know all of the employees by first name and was so genuinely grateful and nice to everyone. I would like to share a story about her kindness. Unfortunately I had a house fire and for 6 months I had trouble finding a contractor to rebuild, but she was so gracious to link me up with a reputable contractor who assisted with my home. In no time I was able to find normalcy in such a tragic situation. She will be missed in such away unimaginable. Thank you for leading by example. Love you!

Carol Zuniga - January 06 at 02:56 PM

EX

Dr. Wydmayer, you will be greatly missed when I felt as though the world was coming to an end. Cdtc found me and embraced me showing me that there were people who cared. Dr. Wydmayer would see you in the hall and know exactly who you were. She would share stories about how CDTC started in a closet. She has touched the lives of many women and children especially mine and has changed my life in so many ways. Even after retiring i would receive holiday cards in the mail. I couldn't thank you enough for putting together such an amazing safe haven for the women and children that CDTC helps in so many ways. You will be missed dearly. Love Exzavia

Exzavia - January 06 at 10:39 PM

KF

Dr Widmayer- such an amazing woman! Her genuine love and compassion for others was an inspiration for myself and so many. She never failed to ask about my son and my mom whenever she crossed my path. Always there to encourage or share a hug when needed. Thank you Dr Widmayer for your guidance and dedication throughout the many years. Although you will be greatly missed, you will remain in our hearts forever. ❤️

Kris Fitzpatrick - January 16 at 09:28 PM