



## Dennis Leroy Yoder

June 11, 1934 - July 12, 2021

Celebrating the Blessing of Dennis Leroy Yoder!

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.”

2 Timothy 4:7

Dennis L. Yoder, dedicated devotee of his family and Lord, transitioned to heaven while surrounded by family members at his home on Monday, July 12, 2021, after a recent diagnosis of stomach cancer. Affectionately known as Mr. Sarasota’s Ice Cream Man (1982-2020), Dennis was a successful realtor with Coldwell Banker (2001- present), and longtime life insurance salesman for Brotherhood Life-Mutual Security Life, Protective Life, and AUL (1962-1995).

Dennis was born in Midland, Michigan on June 11, 1934 to Chester and Agnes Yoder and was the oldest of four children. He graduated from Midland High School. He attended Goshen College where he began a lifetime friendship with five men and their wives in what became known as the ‘Goshen Gang of the Fifties.’ He further attended Central Michigan University and worked at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor in 1-W volunteer service during the Korean Conflict, motivated by his Christian beliefs. His experience in Ann Arbor set up a lifetime allegiance to Wolverine sports and the Big Ten Conference. Softball was his sport, playing into his 60’s with the highlight being when he and his father, Chet, were team members in the 1991 World Series of Softball. The Detroit Tigers were his lifetime major league team, and attendance at the 1968 and 2006 World Series were celebrated events.

Dennis and Nancy were married on February 9, 1957, and lived first in Ann Arbor, Michigan, followed by their early family years in Midland, Michigan, where their two children, Dawn (1960) and Jeff (1963) were born. Dennis lived larger than life. He taught us all how to enjoy and prioritize play while setting a high standard of working hard at his career(s) most any time of the day or night. Years of weekend cottage lake life first on Wixom Lake and next on Walloon Lake encouraged their full-time residency in Petoskey,

MI from 1972- 1980. Non-stop outdoor lake fun surrounded their days with regular weekend company enjoying boating, golfing, ball, water, and snow skiing, and weekend snowmobile safaris. In 1980, Dennis was inspired to seek a warmer climate and he and Nancy moved first to Clearwater and then Sarasota, where he continued in life insurance. The love of northern Michigan lake life continued with cottages bought and sold over the next 42 years, beginning with the shack on Walloon Lake in 1979 and Round Lake beginning in 1997. Dawn's four children were raised from birth to college, sharing summers with Pa and Nana on the lake enjoying the magic of northern MI and extended family living. With Jeff's interest in Colorado, they purchased a condo in Breckenridge and enjoyed winter skiing there from 1990-1997.

Dennis' 30 plus year career in life insurance won him numerous awards that afforded him and Nancy the opportunity to travel the world from the perks of his success. His skill at selling what he believed to be a helpful product earned him a coveted spot in the Million Dollar Round Table for many years. The independence of being self-employed served him well.

In 2001, he earned his Florida Real Estate license and has been a successful realtor with Coldwell Banker ever since. He was number one in Lakewood Ranch for a period and in the top 10 of his Siesta Key office numerous times. Clients trusted Dennis while looking for properties both in Lakewood Ranch, Sarasota, and Siesta Key. One time, he followed a biking Amish man around a neighborhood, thinking he may be looking for properties. He pulled up alongside and asked him and indeed he was. He sold him a place for cash within a few days. That was Denny the realtor. Even at age 87, he was continuing with active sales and was a part of the largest multi-agent sale he'd ever experienced just this past June.

Another significant part of Dennis' life involved ice cream. In 1982, Dennis' entrepreneurial spirit was in high gear as he brought the initial homemade waffle cones to the state of Florida. He first sold the mix to Busch Gardens, Sea World, and premiered baking them at the Florida State Fair. Later in 1984, he decided he'd make his own ice cream to go with the flavorful cones and birthed the first Big Olaf, which was on Avenida Messina Avenue, Siesta Key. Before long, they moved to the current Big Olaf location of almost 40 years on Ocean Boulevard. The second store began on St. Armand's Circle, and it too continues in operation. Both the Siesta Key and St. Armand's stores are the only Sarasota ice cream stores with a legacy of 39 years. They opened stores in Bradenton, Gulf Gate, Main Street Plaza, and in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan. They sold each store in 1990 and Dennis continued in a consultant role with the production center, helping them stay true to the recipes that Dennis created. Later, they were asked to open a Big Olaf in downtown Lakewood Ranch

and they did while Dennis kept his promise to Nancy to get out of running another store within two years. The last venture into ice cream found Dennis opening Siesta Creamery on October 11, 2019, on South Siesta Key. He wanted to use his old recipes and make full butterfat ice cream one more time even at age 85. There was no stopping him.

Meanwhile, he had been selling real estate full time and finally saw the wisdom of selling Siesta Creamery to a dear employee who continues its budding success today. Dennis' favorite ice cream flavors are chocolate almond and chocolate peanut butter. He was very proud of having created both Kahlua Crunch, Amaretto Almond, and Maple Walnut as favorites for Nancy.

His Christian faith and local Church were important parts of Dennis' life. He enjoyed his weekly men's breakfasts, Sunday School class, and over the years served as building committee chair, Sunday School Superintendent, and board member. He helped lead Bahia Vista Builders to raise money for the church.

What he loved and admired most about his wife of 64 years, Nancy, was her devotion to the scriptures and her commitment to learning. He often liked to observe her as she read her Bible while drinking coffee. He appreciated the closeness of the entire family and our commitment to get together regularly for fellowship. He came early each week to our family dinners to play cards with whoever wasn't putting the food together. He liked getting to know the new in-laws and babies. Dennis felt like he was the most blessed guy in the world.

Dennis is survived by Nancy, his wife of 64 years; son, Jeff Yoder of Salida, Colorado; daughter, Dawn Yoder Graber, and her husband, Doug Graber of Sarasota, Florida and their four adult children, spouses, and grandchildren. Dennis' grandchildren and families include Andy Graber (Lisa), with great-granddaughters Briella and Adelyn of Sarasota; Bradley Graber (Brenna) with great-grandchildren Caleb, Margot, and a new baby expected in November of Goshen, Indiana; Chelsey Hernandez (Alan) and great-grandchildren Myla, Kiké, and Nalani of Sarasota; Stuart (Shina) of Abbotsford, British Columbia; and sister, Sharon (Sharry) Mosher of Midland, Michigan. He was preceded in death by his parents, Agnes Yoder (Steckley) and Chet Yoder of Midland, Michigan and brother, Clair Yoder (Midland) and sister, Kathy Lewis (Murfreesboro, Tennessee).

There will be a Celebration of Life service for Dennis Leroy Yoder, at Sarasota Community Church on Saturday, July 24 at 11 am. The service will be preceded with two viewing opportunities at Sarasota Community Church for community members to come by and share their stories of Dennis and offer your loving support to his family.

The viewings will be Friday, July 23 from 6:00 - 8:00 pm and on Saturday, July 24

preceding the Celebration of Life service beginning at 9:30 am. Out-of-town friends and family can follow this live stream option at <https://sarasotacommunity.online.church/> to join us Saturday for the Celebration of Life service. Either way we hope you can join us in person or online to celebrate our family's beloved Pa. It is good to laugh, reminisce, cry, and pray together celebrating the blessing of Dennis for the last 87 years and to pray for strength and courage for our new future ahead.

All arrangements for Pa will be in Sarasota, Florida.

Funeral arrangements are being made through Maloney Funeral Home.

Viewings and Celebration of Life service, lunch and sharing will take place at Sarasota Community Church.

The final resting place will be at Bethel Mennonite Church cemetery.

Dennis was a charter member with his 5 lifetime Goshen College friends of the creation of the "Goshen Gang of the Fifties" scholarship fund for both college athletes and nursing students. In lieu of flowers, the family asks that if you are so moved, to donate to this fund in his memory to Goshen College, 1700 S. Main St., Goshen, Indiana 46526.

# Cemetery

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## Bethel Mennonite Cemetery

2985 Bethel Lane  
Sarasota, FL, 34240

# Events

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**JUL Visitation** 06:00PM - 08:00PM

**23**

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Sarasota Community Church  
4041 Bahia Vista Street Sarasota, Sarasota, FL, US,  
34232

**JUL Visitation** 09:30AM - 11:00AM

**24**

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Sarasota Community Church  
4041 Bahia Vista Street Sarasota, Sarasota, FL, US,  
34232

**JUL Celebration of Life** 11:00AM

**24**

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Sarasota Community Church  
4041 Bahia Vista Street Sarasota, Sarasota, FL, US,  
34232

# Comments

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“ Gene and Carol Kent purchased the Beautiful in Blue for the family of Dennis Leroy Yoder.



**Gene and Carol Kent** - July 22, 2021 at 01:05 PM

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“ Glenn H. Weaver is following this tribute.

**Glenn Weaver** - July 21, 2021 at 02:45 PM

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“ Serene Retreat was purchased for the family of Dennis Leroy Yoder.



July 20, 2021 at 03:16 PM

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“ Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Dennis Leroy Yoder.



July 20, 2021 at 11:11 AM

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“ Family of Clair Yoder purchased the Basket Full of Wishes for the family of Dennis Leroy Yoder.



Family of Clair Yoder - July 18, 2021 at 10:18 PM

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“ Sue Oomen lit a candle in memory of Dennis Leroy Yoder



Sue Oomen - July 18, 2021 at 08:06 PM

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“ It has been our privilege to have had a sixty year relationship with the Dennis Yoder family. When we reminisce back over those years we remember Dennis' warmth and caring for others, his generosity and willingness to share his resources. We have wonderful memories of time together including many all day snowmobile trips in Northern Michigan when Dennis and Nancy would share their lovely lake homes and provide generous hospitality. Dennis also leaves behind a legacy rich in faith, loyalty, friendship and love.

In Proverbs we read, " By wisdom a home is built and with understanding it is established. Through knowledge it's rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures." That describes Dennis and Nancy's home wherever the location happened to be and there were many locations throughout those sixty years. Wherever he lived Dennis brought joy and happiness to those that knew him. Now those memories will be forever reflected in our hearts.

Jim & Eleanor Miller  
Goshen, IN

Jim & Eleanor Miller - July 17, 2021 at 12:48 PM

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“ Memories to Treasure was purchased for the family of Dennis Leroy Yoder.



July 16, 2021 at 11:19 PM

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“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



**Dawn Graber** - July 15, 2021 at 11:34 PM

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“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



**Dawn Graber** - July 15, 2021 at 11:32 PM

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**Dawn Graber** - July 15, 2021 at 11:29 PM

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Dawn Graber - July 15, 2021 at 11:26 PM

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Dawn Graber - July 15, 2021 at 11:22 PM

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Dawn Graber - July 15, 2021 at 11:16 PM

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Dawn Graber - July 15, 2021 at 11:14 PM

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Dawn Graber - July 15, 2021 at 11:13 PM

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Dawn Graber - July 15, 2021 at 11:12 PM

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Dawn Graber - July 15, 2021 at 11:11 PM

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Dawn Graber - July 15, 2021 at 11:10 PM

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“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



Dawn Graber - July 15, 2021 at 11:04 PM

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“ 1 file added to the tribute wall

Dawn Graber - July 15, 2021 at 11:03 PM

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“ 1 file added to the album Family Pictures with 'Pa"



Dawn Graber - July 15, 2021 at 10:51 PM

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“ 1 file added to the album Family Pictures with 'Pa"



Dawn Graber - July 15, 2021 at 10:49 PM

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“ 1 file added to the album Family Pictures with 'Pa"



**Dawn Graber** - July 15, 2021 at 10:48 PM



“ Such a nice picture. He looks so much like his dad!

**Lois yoder miller** - July 16, 2021 at 03:58 PM