



Irene M. Russo (nee Ostrowski)

October 10, 1937 - January 13, 2026

January 13, 2026 of Cheektowaga, NY.

Beloved wife of the late Donald Russo Sr.; loving mother of Lynne (Thomas) Waters, Paul Russo, Michael (Kim) Russo, and Donald (Jean) Russo Jr.; cherished grandmother of Kristin (Ben), Michael, Anthony, Jillian, Grace, Nathaniel, Lauren, and Nick; great-grandmother of Lilah; devoted sister of the late Eugene (Carol) Ostrowski; dearest daughter of the late Frank Ostrowski and Celia Nowak; also survived by many nieces and nephews.

Irene was born and raised in Buffalo, her childhood was spent in both the Polish neighborhood of East Buffalo and on Shirley Avenue in North Buffalo. She attended Villa Maria Academy and later Millard Fillmore Hospital School of Nursing from 1955-1958. Nursing school was where she formed many lifelong friendships with "The Millie-Fillie-O's". Later on, as a mother of four she would earn her Master's Degree from the University of Buffalo.

Irene married Don in June 1960 and started their married life together in North Collins before buying their first home on West Utica Street. They moved to Panama Lane in Cheektowaga in 1964 where Irene resided for the remainder of her years. She managed a very busy household raising 4 children, balancing work and parenting including working at our father's bar called DJ's Tavern in the early 1970's. The family made weekly family trips to North Collins every Sunday for pasta with Grandma Russo, and playing in the nearby creek often joined by our many cousins and other extended family. Although she was brought up in a Polish household, she embraced Don's

Italian family and friends. Irene loved his Italian culture, and they were able to travel to Italy together in Don's retirement. She later returned to Italy with a group that included Don's brother John, and cousins Tom and Linda. She was also very involved in her children's activities including helping coach baseball teams at U-Crest Little League and Girl Scouts. Irene was a strong believer in education and was very proud that all four of her kids attended and completed college and graduate school.

Irene worked in Buffalo-area hospitals as a nurse in the 1960's including Millard Fillmore. Later she was employed at Cheektowaga Central School District as a Nurse where she worked for over 20 years until her retirement. Irene was a loving and generous grandmother to eight grandchildren and in 2025 became a great-grandmother to Lilah. She never missed a family event or celebration and frequently traveled to Rochester and Syracuse. She even traveled by train to Syracuse in November 2025 to spend Thanksgiving with as much family as possible. She also ventured to Providence, Rhode Island in 2025 with her granddaughter Grace to visit the campus of Providence University. Family events often featured loud and competitive card games, especially Pinochle. Every Christmas Eve Irene hosted the entire family on Panama Lane for a joyous celebration of food, games, gifts and memories. Irene was skilled at knitting and made beautiful blankets for each of her grandchildren's college, the most recent blanket was given to Lauren this past Christmas (University of Buffalo). Irene would find the college logos online, trace them by hand and spend many months completing the cherished gift for her grandchildren. She loved to cook, especially the sauce recipe inherited from Don's Italian mother, her 'famous pork chops', and Polish specialties like sausage, pierogi and golumpke. A season ticket holder of the Buffalo Bills for over 60 years, she attended as many games as she could including 3 games in September this season (all victories!). She loved spending time in the winter in Sarasota surrounded by lifelong Buffalo friends and family nearby. Her children and grandchildren loved to visit and play on the cool sands of Siesta Key Beach. She also was an avid reader and enjoyed gathering with close

friends as part of her book club. Irene loved to chronicle the family history and organized a comprehensive Genealogy project that she shared with her children. In 2007 Irene was part of a 'memoir club' and provided each of her children with a binder, immortalizing all the important events of her life that we will treasure and pass down for generations. Irene was a lifelong supporter of the Democratic party, and her coverage of recent current events mainly featured Lester Holt and Jimmy Kimmel. She loved all kinds of music but always held a special place in her heart for 'Old Blue Eyes' Frank Sinatra and Johnny Mathis. She remained a loyal and great friend to many including from Villa Maria high school, Millard Fillmore nursing school, the Cheektowaga Central school district and countless other friends made along the way. Our childhood home on Panama Lane was the great 'magnet' for all our family gatherings, and Irene's welcoming spirit and generous nature made those gatherings special for all of us. Irene will be dearly missed but will forever be in our hearts.

The family will be present to receive relatives and friends on Monday January 19th from 3-7PM at the DANIEL R. SMOLAREK FUNERAL HOME 2510 Union Rd., Cheektowaga (2 blocks south of William St.). A Mass of Christian Burial will be held on Tuesday at 10AM in St Philip the Apostle RC Church, Cheektowaga. Please assemble at church. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in Irene's name to St Jude Children's Research Hospital. Please leave condolences online at www.SmolarekCares.com

Previous Events

Visitation

JAN **19**. 3:00 PM - 7:00 PM (est)

Daniel R. Smolarek Funeral Home - Cheektowaga
2510 Union Road
Cheektowaga, NY 14227

Mass of Christian Burial

JAN **20**. 10:00 AM (est)

St. Philip the Apostle Church
950 Losson Road
Cheektowaga, NY 14227

Please Assemble at Church

Tribute Wall

LC

“ *Mr. and Mrs. Russo were instantly warm, friendly, and good humored with everyone they met. They made the world a better place in their everyday life. I'm so lucky for the time that I was able to spend with each of them. Sending many warm wishes to their loved ones.*

Lydia Conrad - January 19 at 09:41 AM

FF

“ *From The Rondinelli Family purchased the Enchanted Cottage for the family of Irene M. Russo (nee Ostrowski).*



From The Rondinelli Family - January 18 at 09:08 PM

FC

“ *Frank and Deb Conidi purchased the Emerald Garden Basket for the family of Irene M. Russo (nee Ostrowski).*



Frank and Deb Conidi - January 17 at 11:23 AM



“ *Mrs. Russo was always welcoming when you needed the nurse. I was there a few times for health and lots of time to use a clean bathroom.*

Thinking of you Lynne. Your mom was very nice.

Paul Friedrich - January 16 at 07:43 PM

SP

“ *Mrs. Russo will be remembered by me as a sweet lady who always took an interest in what you were doing and genuinely cared about you. My sincere condolences to Lynne, Paul, Michael, DJ and family. May she rest in peace up in heaven.*

Susan Potocki - January 16 at 07:23 PM

CG

“ *Mike and family, thoughts and prayers are with you all, I have fond memories of your mom.*

Cindi Kaczmarczyk Gibson - January 16 at 07:22 PM