

Marlene (Peda) Zwigard

Born on July 4, 1948 to Celia (Debellonia) and Anthony Peda, Marlene joined her older sister Elaine (Perna) in their childhood home in Orange, NJ . growing up across the street from her grandparents and on the same block as many of her aunts and uncles. Her birthday was no accident, as she embodies the American Dream sought and achieved by so many Italian American families in our area.

After serving in the Army Air Corps during WWII, her father owned Amapere Automotive in East Orange, and instilled in his children the values of honesty and hard work.

At the age of 9, Marlene and the family moved to Belleville, where she graduated from Belleville High School in 1966. After attending the Berkeley School of Business, Marlene began her career as an Administrative Assistant to Dr. Rulon Rawson, Dean of UMDNJ from 1968-1970, and then for Essex County Surrogate Nicholas Amato.

In 1971 she blazed a trail for the next generation of women by starting her own small business, the Wonder World Nursery School in Union Township.

In 1972 Marlene married Vietnam Veteran and United States Marine Robert J. Zwigard, Jr., who graduated on the GI Bill from Farleigh Dickson University. They were blessed with two sons, Robert Anthony and Bradley, and settled in East Hanover. Both sons attended Seton Hall Preparatory School and from 1987-1995, where Marlene served on the board of the Mothers Auxiliary Club and later became President. In recognition for her service to the school, Marlene was bestowed an honorary alumnus diploma.

In the midst of raising a family and expanding her civic involvement, Marlene opened her second school in Randolph, NJ in 1988. Little Village Country Day School was established in a beautifully renovated historical Church built in 1876. Over the next thirty years, Marlene grew Little Village Country Day School into a successful childhood education center for countless local preschool children.

In honor of her efforts, Marlene received the Randolph Township Economic Committee Business Achievement Award and Little Village was named the area's #1 preschool.

Following the tragic loss of her beloved husband to cancer in 2004, Marlene continued to give back, supporting St. Jude's Children's Hospital, Miracle Flights and the Make-a-Wish Foundation.

Today, she is the proud matriarch of a growing family, and her four grandchildren . Madison, Bradley, Morgan and Camryn . are the lights of her life. Nothing gives her more joy than spoiling them, enjoying a homemade Italian dinner with friends and family, and spending her summers down the shore in Long Beach Island.