

## Philanthropist Mary Louise Rasmuson dies

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One of the original members of the Women's Army Corps in World War II and a prominent Alaska philanthropist, Mary Louise Milligan Rasmuson, widow of the late banker Elmer E. Rasmuson, died Monday at her home in Anchorage. She was 101.

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Rasmuson joined the WACs in 1942, in the first class of 400 women accepted for the auxiliary service. She directed the WAC Training Center in Des Moines, Iowa, during the war and was deputy director of the corps during the Korean War era. In 1957, President Eisenhower appointed her as the commandant of corps. She served in that position for six years, having been reappointed by President Kennedy in 1961.

Among several medals she received during her military service was the Legion of Merit with two oak-leaf clusters.

That same year, Col. Milligan married Elmer Rasmuson, chairman of the National Bank of Alaska and civilian aide in Alaska to the secretary of defense. She resigned her commission and, in 1962, moved to Anchorage, where she became involved with the board of Rasmuson Foundation, helping to direct grants to nonprofit groups in Alaska that today total more than \$200 million.

Her charitable interests ranged from health care, the homeless and Alaska Native culture to scouting.

But her longtime interest in and support of the Anchorage Museum may be her most enduring contribution to civic life in Anchorage. Starting in 1968, she led the effort to create the Anchorage Museum of History and Art. The institution began as a repository for memorabilia and local art. Today it houses the Alaska's largest collection of paintings and sculptures by leading Alaska artists, a trove of Native Alaskan pieces from the Smithsonian Institution, and The Imaginarium, a science and technology wing. In 2009, she helped cut the ribbon on the newly expanded museum, now formally named the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center.

Rasmuson was born in East Pittsburgh, Pa., on April 11, 1911. She received a bachelor's degree in education from the Margaret Morrison Carnegie College, Carnegie Mellon University's women's college, and a master's

in school administration from the University of Pittsburgh. She was an assistant principal in the Forest Hills School District, near Pittsburgh, before joining the WACs. Her oral history of the corps in World War II and the Korean War was recorded by the Library of Congress for the Veterans History Project.

Contributions by the Rasmusons extended well beyond Alaska. Facilities with their name include the Elmer and Mary Louise Rasmuson Center for Rheumatic Disease at the Benaroya Research Institute of Virginia Mason Hospital in Seattle and the Elmer and Mary Louise Rasmuson Theater at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. In 2000, they received the Medal for Distinguished Philanthropy from the American Association of Museums.



**More photos**  
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Mary Louise Rasmuson, who died Monday at age 101, spoke at the opening of the Anchorage Museum expansion in 2009.

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She was one of the first two women awarded an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the Carnegie Institute of Technology. In 2009 she was inducted into the inaugural class of the Alaska Women's Hall of Fame. In 2012 she received the University of Alaska Anchorage Meritorious Service award and the Inaugural Alaska Veterans Organization for Women Achievement Award. She was named a Distinguished Daughter of Pennsylvania for her military service in 1960.

A lifelong Catholic, she made gifts to build Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Anchorage and was a benefactor of Holy Rosary Academy.

She was a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and several other military organizations, the American Association of University Women, Zonta, Rotary Wives, Pioneers of Alaska, Anchorage Women's Club, League of Women Voters, Anchorage Republican Women's Club, Alaska Native Sisterhood and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, among other groups.

She served on the boards of the Alaska Crippled Children's Association, state and national American Cancer Society, Anchorage Fine Arts Commission and Anchorage March of Dimes. She regularly attended board meetings of the Rasmuson Foundation until her late 90s and retained a lively interest in its operations until her final days. Diane Kaplan, president of Rasmuson Foundation, said that two weeks before her death, Rasmuson had met with the new University of Alaska Anchorage Rasmuson Chair in Economics and with a group of women veterans who are starting a social service organization and engaged in animated discussions with both.

Rasmuson is survived by three stepchildren: Ed Rasmuson and wife Cathryn of Anchorage, Lile Gibbons and husband John of Old Greenwich, Conn.; and Judy Rasmuson of Florida; nephew Malcolm Milligan and wife Joyce; grandchildren Jay Gibbons, Jenny Forti, Amanda Baer, Adam Gibbons, David Rasmuson, Natasha von Irnhof and Laura Emerson; and 12 great-grandchildren.

The Rasmuson Foundation says all members of the community are invited to attend a funeral mass Sept. 10 at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. Additional details will be forthcoming.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that memorial gifts be made to Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, 625 C St., Anchorage 99501.

The foundation has posted a video tribute to her at [http://youtu.be/\\_5x\\_4YeoVGg](http://youtu.be/_5x_4YeoVGg).