



Dr. John C. Vander Woude, whose skill, faith, and empathy for others made him one of the most trusted and admired medical professionals in South Dakota, died early Tuesday at Sanford Health at the age of 58 after a courageous and recurring battle with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Surrounded by his high school sweetheart and devoted wife of 37 years, Debby, and their three children Sarah, Daniel, and Matthew, John spent his final weeks immersed in an outpouring of love and support from family and countless friends, colleagues, and patients.

Visitation will be from 5 - 7 pm Sunday, with a prayer/reflection service at 6 pm, in the Dakota Room at the Sanford Center, 2301 East 60th St. North in Sioux Falls. A memorial service will be held at 11 am Monday at First Lutheran Church, 327 S. Dakota Ave. in Sioux Falls.

A Sioux Falls native, John graduated from Washington High School where he was a two-time state wrestling champion, an all-state football player, and a stellar student. In 1974, John graduated Summa Cum Laude from Augustana College and entered the University of South Dakota School of Medicine where he ranked at the top of his class. He received his medical degree with distinction from Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis in 1978 and entered into their Surgical Residency program where he practiced and researched for seven years and was honored as the Outstanding Surgical Intern by the Department of Surgery.

Based on his reputation at Washington University, John entered into a highly competitive Cardiovascular Surgery Fellowship at the Texas Heart Institute in Houston, TX. During his fellowship, John won his first bout with cancer. His courageous and hard-fought battle with lymphoma while continuing in his grueling fellowship earned him the moniker "Iron John" among his peers. This formative experience shaped John and left him with a deeper appreciation for life and an enduring desire to serve others. Friends say John lived as if he had been given the chance to make every day count for something good, and they fondly recall his kindness, intellectual curiosity, and dedication to faith, purpose, and principle.

Propelled post-cancer to care for his young family, John returned to Sioux Falls in 1987 to join North Central Heart Institute and, with a small group of surgeons, was an early pioneer in cardiac surgery. Dr. Jim Reynolds recalls the time when a need arose for one of his partners to train in pediatric cardiac surgery. "John stepped up even though it meant moving the family to California. He was always willing to do his share and, if necessary, more. He was a team player who adapted the 'teams way' of doing the various procedures." John

completed his fellowship in pediatric cardiac surgery at the University of California, San Francisco in December 1993.

He later joined what is now Sanford USD Medical Center in 1999 as Director of Cardiothoracic Surgery and, over time, served on Sanford's Board of Trustees and Board of Governors. John, drawing on broad experience in pediatric, cardiac bypass, and vascular surgical techniques, participated in numerous research projects over the years and authored many articles, chapters, and presentations, including one in 1986 that highlighted his own experience as both surgeon and cancer patient. Additionally, John led or participated in numerous medical and surgical missions in countries such as Kenya, China, and Ecuador.

John dedicated his life to family and held a steadfast passion for his surgical trade and patients. Always going the extra mile in providing care, John regularly gave his mobile phone number to patients to provide them extra comfort and assurance. John's legacy lives on in the Sanford Heart Hospital, which he helped pioneer. Attendees recall John's touching words at the opening ceremony in which he choked up thinking about the extensive efforts and pride he held in the dedicated team of Sanford staff, nurses, and physicians. His heartfelt words included, "I get to work every day with incredible people." Further, in the past couple of years, John began to lay the framework for a pediatric cardiovascular surgical program at Sanford. While John was unable to see the full extent of his labor materialize, its reality is near.

In addition to his medical ventures, John treasured and contributed to his community. He relished the opportunity to serve on Augustana College's Board of Trustees and the South Dakota Symphony's Board of Trustees. John was also a member of the Sanford USD School of Medicine Admissions Committee. Most recently, he was appointed to the South Dakota Board of Medical Examiners by Governor Daugaard.

John is widely known for his unassuming style and love of family and friends. Those who knew him will miss being amazed at the scope and depth of John's knowledge in seemingly all subject areas. His lust for learning led him to pursue an M.B.A. in Health Care at the University of St. Thomas, which he completed in 2009. "When John spoke, people listened. He didn't talk to hear himself, but rather to express a well thought out opinion, which was firmly backed with facts and commitment. He never stopped reading or learning." One friend commented, "You couldn't stump the man."

People's lasting memory of John will be how his gentle spirit infected everyone he touched. His large hands often eluded patients and colleagues – these skilled large hands gave "warm, firm, and sincere handshakes." John truly had a gift from God that put people at ease when he spoke to them.

"John was an earthly example of a Godly man, loving father, talented medical professional, and a great human being who touched many lives." In his final weeks while fighting an aggressive cancer, John regularly expressed more concern and empathy for his family, friends, colleagues, and caretakers than for himself, reflecting the passion, humility, and thoughtfulness that ran as themes through his life. "John's kindness was prolific and his constancy was as strong as his arms. He was as strong as they come, and would never give up, even to the pain of the illness that took him away from us. He was a giant of a man in every way."

John was preceded in death by his parents, John and Inga Vander Woude, and a sister-in-law, Nadine Sierakowski.

Survivors, besides his wife Debby and three children Sarah, Daniel, and Matthew include his mother and father-in-law Bethel and Glenn Muetzel, his beloved nurse Kathy Janssen, a brother Cecil (Susie) Vander Woude of Sioux Falls; three sisters, Ione Mitchell-Petzel of Jacksonville, FL, Susan (Loren) Boy of Hartford, and Nancy (Roger) Schumacher of Hartford and their children and grandchildren; brother-in-law Michael Sierakowski, niece and nephew Emily and David Sierakowski, all of Stillwater, MN; and brother-in-law Steve Muetzel of San Diego, CA.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests donations to the Sanford Pediatric Cardiovascular Surgery Fund held in the Sanford Health Foundation, the Sioux Falls YMCA, or Augustana College.

(Directions to Sanford Center, 2301 East 60th Street North - Sioux Falls, SD 57104) From I-229 North or South: From the Benson Road Exit 8, head West. At N. Lewis Ave, turn right. Turn right at 54th St. North. Follow to the Sanford Center.

For a map to the Sanford Center, please visit: <http://bit.ly/Nsztlb>