



Dr. Nedra Kay Swart Kinerk

May 13, 2025

Dr. Nedra Kay Swart Kinerk, 92, died on Tuesday, May 13 in her home in McAllen, Texas. She suffered a nine-month battle with cancer, but she enjoyed, danced and lived to the fullest every day in the weeks prior to her passing. She was born on Thursday June 30, 1932, in the home of her grandparents Charles and Kate Swart in Frankton, Indiana. She grew up in Anderson, Indiana, with her parents, Marvin and Okal Swart and two sisters, Marilyn Oakley and Leanna Su. In 1950 she graduated from Anderson High School. Her parents and older sister were educators, and Nedra chose to become a teacher too. She enrolled at Ball State Teachers College in Muncie, Indiana, where in 1951 she met Robert Lewis Kinerk, whom she married in October 1951. She graduated with a B.S. in Education in 1955.

Nedra became a teacher in the local Anderson Township schools and taught there continuously as she raised four children and studied to earn a master's degree from Ball State (now) University in 1962. One of her professors found her to be an outstanding candidate and urged her to apply to the doctoral program. She accepted the challenge and was awarded a doctor's degree in education (Ed.D.) in 1970. She completed her course work in August 1969 (a single year instead of the normal two). Her specialty was in discovering best methods for training teachers how to teach children to read. She created innovative methods to video record reading lessons and improve teacher performance using feedback and comparative observation of differing methods of reading training.

Her doctoral dissertation was entitled "A Study of the Effects of Videotaping in the Development of Teaching Behavior Among Participating Students." In her research observing student teachers at Burriss Lab School, in Muncie, she found that beginning teachers tend to be stricter with pupils than necessary. She found that after videotaping, student-teachers were able to form better self-appraisals, thus becoming better reading teachers.

A member of Pi Lambda Theta, national education honorary society, she also was in the Association for Childhood Education, the Anderson Federation of Teachers, and the Indiana Association for Supervisors and Curriculum Development.

In her final year with the Anderson Schools, she was supervisor for team teaching at Hazelwood School, working with Ball State interns and student teachers.

In 1970 she was appointed professor at the Kokomo campus of Indiana University. She excelled in the university environment and was named chair of the education division within a few years. She remained as top administrator until her retirement in 1988.

Starting in 1973 she served as an Indiana Civil Rights Commissioner. Despite being a lifelong liberal Democrat and an active labor union leader, her well-known fairness and civility caused her to be reappointed as Commissioner for 13 years by consecutive Indiana Republican governors.

In October 1987 Indiana Gov. Robert D. Orr named Nedra a "Sagamore of the Wabash," one of the state's highest honors for distinguished service. Some of her fellow Sagamores included astronaut Gus Grissom, President George Bush, Barbara Bush, and entertainers Willie Nelson, Ginger Rogers and Dave Letterman.

Nedra and husband Robert first ventured to South Texas for winter vacation in 1979. After enjoying happy times in Hidalgo County, they decided to move permanently to Mission, and then to McAllen. At this time, she and Robert purchased and operated South Texas citrus groves. After a great freeze in 1983, they sold their land and began to enjoy a simpler retirement in the

sunny South Texas climate. Leaving Indiana behind forever, they became year-round residents in 1988.

Nedra then began expanding her efforts to enhance and improve the city of McAllen and all of Hidalgo County, Texas. She focused on the area's parks, roadways, zoning, schools and "smooth clean elections."

Robert and Nedra became active members of the First Christian Church, where Nedra made new friends, and she served as Elder for many of years in the past decades. In 2001 they became friends with its new pastor, the Rev. Max Grubb and his wife Roda.

Reflecting upon their long friendship, Roda remembers: "Nedra always had an open heart for visitors. Being new to the Valley and a new pastor's wife, I wasn't sure what to do. Nedra was the one who always was welcoming.... I remember her choosing to be the one to meet newcomers to church, never meeting a stranger. I don't know how she did it, but she could make anyone feel at home. I saw her in many meetings and events and she invariably had a smile, handshake and time for you.

Roda continues, "A force to be reckoned with: mayors, presidents of chambers of commerce, colleges, universities, and companies respected this short, vital woman who loved to dance and laugh. Open-minded, accepting yet organized and having strong opinions, she saw what needed to be done and dove in to get it done, finding those souls brave enough to step up to the plate with her to accomplish things.

"Fierce when it came to taking care of her family she loved intensely, she was a teddy bear with her grandchildren and great-grandchildren ... so full of love, yet humble in all her doings. An inspiration to so many with her tenacity, intelligence and deep caring for her community, I have been proud to have her as a close and dear friend," Roda concluded.

In 1999 Nedra co-founded Futuro McAllen, an organization for civic betterment. Working with Helen Snider, Rick DeJulio and Greg Townsend they strove, year after year, to improve their city. They met with great success and

Futuro was encouraged to expand its focus county-wide. In 2014 it became Futuro RGV (Rio Grande Valley).

After the success of their 2004 festivities in honor of McAllen's founding, the McAllen Centennial committee was formed. Its members developed two goals: establish a McAllen history museum and a folklife festival. McAllen Heritage Center (MHC) was established in 2006 and opened in June 2008. Co-founders include Nedra, Elva M. Cerda and Spurgeon "Spud" Brown. PalmFest Folklife festival (now known as Fiesta de Palmas) also was started in 2006 and continues today.

MHC executive director (and co-founder) Elva Cerda said "I was very lucky to meet Nedra through our work on the Centennial committee. We formed a close bond and strong friendship that allowed us to work on goals for our beloved McAllen. Her dedication helped us meet our goals as well as sustain them. Both entities continue to thrive and flourish today."

During her 37 years in McAllen, Nedra served on many municipal boards and committees, including Parks, Traffic, Fiesta de Palmas, Performing Arts, and Convention Center. When not occupied with civic functions, Nedra supported and enjoyed attending McAllen Community Concerts, Broadway in the Rio Grande Valley shows, and music at the Valley Symphony Orchestra. It was here that she only recently met one of her closest friends, the celebrated concert pianist Tanya Gabrielian, who was a frequent soloist with the Symphony.

Nedra has travelled with family members to every U.S. state (except Alaska), and to Abu Dhabi, Canada, England, Germany, Japan and Mexico.

Among Nedra's many milestones in the Rio Grande Valley:

- 2001 Planning Advocate (Citizen) award - Texas APA (American Planning Association).
- 2005 Co-founded McAllen Palm Fest to commemorate 1904 railway entering the city.
- 2014 McAllen Chamber of Commerce Woman of the Year.
- 2020 McAllen Mayor Jim Darling with city commission created and

presented the first annual Nedra Kinerk Citizenship Award.

- 2022 NSK-90 birthday party at McAllen Heritage Center.

- 2025 Futuro RGV president 2016 to 2025.

- 2025 Futuro RVG establishes “Dr. Nedra S. Kinerk Emerging Leadership Scholarship.”

- 2025 State of Texas proclamation honoring Dr. Nedra Kinerk, sponsored by Rep. R.D. “Bobby” Guerra.

- 2025 City Commission declared Feb. 24, 2025, as “Nedra Kinerk Day” in McAllen. Nedra accepted the honor, thanked each commissioner, then jubilantly danced around the dais with Mayor Javier Villalobos to ABBA’s hit tune “Dancing Queen.”

Commenting on Nedra’s celebrated life in the Rio Grand Valley, Gregg Wendorf, editor/publisher of the Pharr Advance News Journal wrote: “Nedra has overcome adversities in her life, without ever sounding as though she’s been defeated, which includes the death of one of her daughters [Cheryl Marie] from brain cancer at the age of 53, and the death in 2010 of [Robert] her husband of 59 years.”

On Jan 31, 2025, she entered Hospice Care by Amavi, administered by her friend Ivan Melendez, M.D.

She is survived by three of her four children: Michael David Kinerk (Dennis Wilhelm), Karen Leigh Kinerk, and Steven Joe (Aileen) Kinerk; three grandchildren: Jennifer (Andrew) Walters, Robert T. Kinerk and Kaitlyn (Raymond) Helsley; and six great-grandchildren: Evan Walters, Alanna Walters, Connor Kinerk, Colton Kinerk, Brendan Kauth and Kaleb Helsley. Nedra’s husband Robert Lewis Kinerk, and their eldest daughter Cheryl Marie, pre-deceased her.

Nedra already inscribed her epitaph on her McAllen gravestone, shared with Robert, her late husband: “Love Lives Forever.”

Funeral services will be at 6 pm on Monday, May 19, 2025, at Kreidler Funeral Home, 314 N. 10 St, McAllen TX 78501. Visitation at 5 pm prior to service.

In lieu of sending flowers, the family requests that donations be directed in

Nedra's honor to one of her most cherished accomplishments, the McAllen Heritage Center (she was a co-founder). Donations may be sent to the center at: 301 S. Main St.,
McAllen, TX 78501. Or donate on-line to: <https://www.mcallenheritagecenter.com/donate.asp>

The Heritage Center will host a Nedra Kinerk Birthday Bash on her 93rd birthday, Monday, June 30, 2025. Save the date. Check the Heritage Center web site in June for further details. <https://www.mcallenheritagecenter.com/> As she would wish, Nedra gets the last word: (from Pharr Advance News Journal article, Mar. 5, 2025) Nedra said to visiting editor Stephan Wingert, "No don't say you're 'sorry.' Say: 'it's been a blessing toknow you.'" Nedra Kay Swart Kinerk, Memorial Album
<https://youtu.be/sO-wtKWWHG0>

A webcasting of Nedra's service will be available here:
<https://vimeo.com/event/5141640/2874884814>

Previous Events

Visitation

MAY **19**. 5:00 PM (CT)

Kreidler Funeral Home, Inc.
314 N 10th St.
McAllen, TX 78501
(956) 686-0234
kreidler@sbcglobal.net
<http://www.kreidlerfuneralhome.com/index.html>

Funeral Service

MAY **19**. 6:00 PM (CT)

Kreidler Funeral Home, Inc.
314 N 10th St.
McAllen, TX 78501
(956) 686-0234
kreidler@sbcglobal.net
<http://www.kreidlerfuneralhome.com/index.html>