



Robert Paul Neelis

October 8, 1954 - December 2, 2025

Robert “Paul” Neelis, age 71, passed away unexpectedly on the afternoon of Tuesday, December 2, 2025. He was born on October 8, 1954, in St. Ignace, Michigan, to Carl and Ann (Martineau) Neelis.

Paul was a lifelong resident of St. Ignace and poured his heart into owning and operating two well-known businesses, Justrite Bakery and Northern Lights Restaurant, for many years. Not yet willing to embrace retirement, in the more recent years he worked for St. Ignace Area Schools as a transportation supervisor.

Paul spent much of his free time outside on his property, where you’d almost always find him with a cup of coffee, working on a project in the woods or crafting something in his woodworking space. He found great joy in time spent with his family, whether taking rides in his side-by-side or sharing playful moments with his beloved grandchildren.

Paul is survived by his significant best friend, Janice Steiner; his children, Dana (Dan) Dombroski, Justin (Wendy) Neelis, Derek Neelis, and Ashley Neelis; grandchildren, Maddison, Preston, and Elliana Neelis and Celia Dombroski; brothers, Randy (Nancy) Neelis, Joseph Neelis, Jeff (Holly) Neelis; sisters, Ellen (Michael) McDonald, Monica (Gary) Sorenson, Mary Kaye (Phillip) Ruegg, and Carla Neelis; he is also survived by Nicole, Jimbo,

Maizey, and Emerson Brown; Kari, JoJo, Trevor, and Avery Visnaw; and Amy, Ed, Owen, Caden, and Eli Lester.

Paul was preceded in death by his parents, Carl and Ann Neelis.

A graveside memorial will be held next summer, with details to be announced at a later date.

Paul's final resting place will be St. Ignatius Loyola Catholic Cemetery in St. Ignace, Michigan.

Family Life Funeral Homes – St. Ignace assisted the family with arrangements. Condolences may be given to the family at www.familylifefh.com.

Obituary as submitted by family.

Cemetery Details

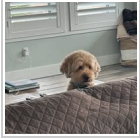
St. Ignatius Loyola Catholic Cemetery

Chambers Street
St. Ignace, MI 49781

Events

Details are pending.

Tribute Wall



“ My condolences to the entire Neelis family. I have many good memories of Paul at the convent and then when your family moved in to the neighborhood. We had a great neighborhood...tons of kids and we all played together until it was too dark and we had to go home. Paul would on occasion orchestrate a candy sale in Fitzpatrick's playhouse. Always the businessman 😊 We were always good friends...all the way until the last time I saw him. I ran into him in the high school parking lot last summer while I was visiting my brother. We had a nice chat. Felt like we picked right up from the old days. I was shocked and saddened when I heard of his passing. My heart goes out to the family and I will hold my memories dear ❤️

Julia LaChapelle - March 31 at 04:59 PM

M(

“ Paul was my boss for many years at The Northern Lights. He made a significant impact on me at a young age, especially as someone who didn't have a dad in my life. He probably didn't realize that! I admired him very much and was grateful for that experience. As I went on in my adult life I often used that restaurant, and Paul, as my standard for other workplaces and bosses. One lesson Paul taught me that always stuck with me, and I share with others: “Everyone has a place and skill to fit somewhere.” There was an employee that everyone had difficulty with, and instead of letting them go Paul put them in a position that was a better fit - and everyone was happy. We had a lot of late night talks about stuff like that. Thank you, Paul, for being a good human and mentor to so many.

Maria Beaudry (Custer) - December 08, 2025 at 12:46 PM



Jason
Evans

Thank you for this. I've had the same experience. I worked for Paul from 14-28 and he pushed me to me great. Got to take care of his property in the slow days. Such an amazing man. Hearing of this really hit me hard. He was a big part of my life and who I am. I will miss him so much.

Jason Evans - December 08, 2025 at 11:23 PM

EM

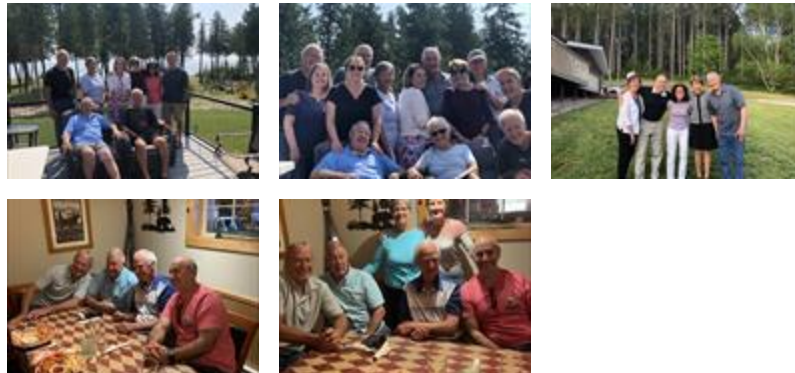
“ 3 files added to the album Neelis Family



Ellen McDonald - December 06, 2025 at 02:58 PM

EM

“ 5 files added to the album Neelis Family



Ellen McDonald - December 06, 2025 at 06:37 AM

KB

Very sorry for your loss Joe and Randy and your entire family. Kk in Tucson

Kay Bednar - January 07 at 03:54 PM

TC

“ As a fellow 1972 classmate, hearing of Paul's (I never called him Robert) surprising passing at a rather young age was indeed sad news. Looking back at the time I spent with him in high school brings great memories from classes together (sat behind me in senior math) to running with him for senior class elections as part of the Federalist Party. I remember him always wearing a smile & willing to help anyone with any problem. Whenever the family & I were back in Swinging Iggy, we made it a point to stop at the Northern Lights to grab a bite to eat & say hi. RIP, Paul...



Terry Crouch - December 06, 2025 at 12:41 AM

ST

“ Monica, my heart goes out to you at this time. You are 8n my prayers

Sandra)(Goudreau) Thornton - December 05, 2025 at 10:04 PM



“ I worked for Paul at the Northern Lights Restaurant! He wasn't just a boss, he wasn't just a friend,he was family!!! I have so many great memories of him and his children! Prayers for all! He was a great man, he will be missed.

Bette Nye

Bette Nye - December 05, 2025 at 06:06 PM

EM

“ I loved Paul. When we're young, he decided to make a co-cart with an engine from a lawnmower. I remember helping him, finally getting it running. We had so much fun doing that. He and I would take the wagon from the Justrite Bakery to bring baked goods to the docks for the hotels on the island. My Dad would pay us the fee he would have paid the taxi. We loved it. Later in life whenever Mike and I ate at his restaurant he would never let us pay, visiting with us every time. He was always such a good egg. We will miss him dearly. Paul was special; a wonderful warm and loving presence whenever we were around him. His sister Ellen, and brother-in-law Mike

Ellen (Neelis) McDonald - December 05, 2025 at 04:49 PM

SB

“ Paul was my boss, and friend for 27 years that I worked for him. He was an easy going guy we all had a lot of laughs with Paul. He was a great boss. We all had good times including the customers. We were all like family. I'm shocked and heartbroken to hear this. Really going to miss him. I had to quit due to my health and that was the saddest day of my life but this is even sadder. Going to miss Paul. Rip Paul

Sylvia Belonga - December 05, 2025 at 04:31 PM