



Mark Sanders

August 29, 1953 - December 26, 2025

Mark Sanders, PhD – beloved father, husband, professor emeritus, and friend – died on December 26, 2025, at age 72. He is survived by his wife of 43 years, Gail McMillan; daughters Nicole Sanders Tarr and Rachel Sanders and their husbands Josh Tarr and Ryan Baker; sister Alison Sanders Limoges and her family; sister-in-law Kathy McMillan; and four grandchildren.

Mark was born on August 29, 1953, in Buffalo, NY to Evelyn and Joseph Sanders and grew up in Delmar, NY alongside siblings Alison and Paul. Evelyn nurtured her children's love of music and art. Mark had fond memories of family trips to visit grandparents in Florida and New York City. The silver lining of a mid-high school move to Pensacola was living on a golf course. Mark became an avid golfer.

Over a decade spent studying and exploring, Mark earned a BS from SUNY Oswego, MS in industrial technology from Illinois State University, and PhD in industrial education from University of Maryland (1980), where he met Gail.

In 1980, Mark joined Virginia Tech as an assistant professor of technology education and began a distinguished three-decade career. From the start, he was at the forefront of the digital transformation of graphic communications. In the 1990s and 2000s, he led the evolution of industrial arts education to technology education and later to integrative STEM education. He became

nationally and internationally recognized as a visionary scholar and educator who identified pivotal opportunities for his field to evolve. Mark created a resource-sharing graphic communications website in the early days of the internet, pushed for the Journal of Technology Education he co-founded to be published online, co-directed the first 'technology, science, and math integration' project funded by the National Science Foundation, and helped develop Virginia Tech's integrative STEM graduate program. He was a generous mentor and sponsor to his students and applauded the work of his colleagues. By the time he retired and was conferred professor emeritus in 2010, Mark had received 18 national and state awards. In 2012, he was inducted into the International Technology and Engineering Education Association's Academy of Fellows, his field's highest honor.

At home in Blacksburg, Mark was a supportive and dedicated father, husband, brother, and friend. He rarely missed a game or practice and happily structured his life around simple routines: early tee times, family dinners, watching sports, talking with old friends over a beer. He was a maker at heart, a skilled woodworker who built beautiful things for those he loved. His care manifested in his homecooked meals and steady presence. Mark and Gail opened their home to students, colleagues, and friends from around the world for dinner and conversation. He lived simply, frugally, and proudly, often with a mischievous smile about unfashionable accessories that embarrassed his daughters but amused everyone else.

In the final years of his life, as dementia steadily took away his ability to golf, walk, see, and communicate, the utmost pleasure he took in quality time with family and friends became even clearer. In 2023, Mark became a resident of Kroontje Health Care Center in Warm Hearth Village. His compassionate caregivers loved him for his politeness and quick wit. He was visited daily by his wife Gail, weekly by his longtime friend Gary Downey, and often by family.

Mark's life was a testament to authenticity, creativity, and the belief that time, care, and attention are the most valuable things we have to give. He will be profoundly missed and lovingly remembered. In keeping with his lifelong commitment to education and service, Mark's family has donated his brain to research led by the Virginia Alzheimer's Disease Center. In the same spirit, in lieu of gifts or flowers, they invite others to honor Mark with donations to the VADC or Remote Area Medical (Virginia).

Tribute Wall

TM

“ Gail, Nikki, and Rachael, we keep the memories we made with you guys, and Mark close in our hearts always. Sending our love hoping it helps heal the loss. Mike, Tana, Jessica, and Ariel.

Tana Matzuk - January 11 at 09:02 PM

SG

Even as his mind slowly failed him, Mark maintained his hallmark combination of curiosity and sense of humor. We'll continue to raise a glass of brew to an old buddy.

Steve Gerus - March 26 at 09:05 AM



“ Mark - took the time to reach out to me after I published a paper in 2016. He was using an audio reader due to his disease but he wanted me to know he was staying active in the profession. He expressed how much my publication was what he wanted to say about integrative STEM. This phone call from such a profound and powerful leader was so encouraging to me, especially because it took extra effort for Mark to make the call. I will cherish the memory always. Sending Prayers for the family.

Todd Kelley - January 06 at 01:56 PM

MB

“ Dr. Saunders helped guide my education to be the Graphics Comm teacher I am today. Thankful for his shared knowledge. I wish his family and loved ones peace.

Maura Barrett - January 06 at 11:17 AM

RP

“ *My sincere condolences to Mark's family.*

Rocky Price - January 03 at 07:33 PM

BP

“ *Bryanne Peterson planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Mark Sanders.*

Bryanne Peterson - January 02 at 09:27 PM

BP

“ *Bryanne Peterson purchased the Peaceful White Lilies Basket for the family of Mark Sanders.*



Bryanne Peterson - January 02 at 09:27 PM

CW

“ *Really can't say how much he did for me. He was a touch committee chair but also a friend. He presented are me to teach in the world of graphic communications. He was also a pioneer in our field. He will always be remembered with a smile. Enjoy endless rounds of good and tasty microbrews my friend. Peace and love.*

Charles Weiss - January 02 at 03:44 PM

CW

And he would be appalled at my typing!!! He was tough and a prepared me for my field 😊

Charles Weiss - January 02 at 03:46 PM

MS

He will be missed and remembered by many graphic arts teachers around the country and as a personal friend.

Mike Stinnett - January 02 at 07:10 PM

SB

Dr. Mark Sanders was a tremendous leader in our field. His passion, scholarship, and unwavering drive exemplified leadership and professionalism at the highest level. From early in my career and throughout it, Mark was someone I consistently sought out at ITEEA conferences, making it a priority to attend his presentations. They were always informative, insightful, and instrumental in advancing my thinking. Beyond his professional impact, Mark was a valued colleague and friend whose guidance, generosity, and thoughtful input I deeply appreciated. His influence on our profession—and on those fortunate enough to work alongside him—is enduring. Mark will be deeply missed. Thank you, Mark, for your dedication and service to continually advancing Technology and Engineering Education.

Steven Barbato - January 03 at 08:09 AM

MJ

Dr. Sanders, what can I say. From freshman graphics comm to senior student teaching advisor, Dr. Sanders definitely help guide me through my education and to become the teacher that I was. Great instructor and great person.

Michael Johnson - January 03 at 04:00 PM

DD

When I received a donated flexo press while teaching in Williamston, SC, I visited with Mark at VA Tech for advice on plate making. He was more than helpful during the time I spent with him.
Dave Dailey

David Dailey - January 04 at 03:52 PM

RS

Thanks to all of you who have shared these reflections. It's so nice to see your names and read your kind words.

Rachel Sanders - January 05 at 01:15 PM

AG

Mark Sanders was dedicated to his students and the profession of education. He was a caring and well-respected professional that inspired others. He will be missed.

Anthony Gilberti - January 06 at 06:51 PM

MC

“ 1 file added to the album Va Tech class of 83



Mike Carling - January 02 at 10:21 AM

MC

A visit in July 2017. Thanks for your hospitality Mark and Gail.

Mike Carling - January 02 at 03:23 PM

RS

Thank you for sharing this, Mike.

Rachel Sanders - January 05 at 01:13 PM

AP

“ Anita P. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Mark Sanders.

Anita P. - December 30, 2025 at 08:32 PM

AP

“Gail, I knew Mark somewhat, but of course know you more because of our times together. Because of this, I do know how much you loved him and how much of a beautiful life you two had until his unfortunate disease and then his recent passing. You have my deepest sympathy for your long and full devotion to him. Yet his passing must be in some ways a blessing both for him and for you?
With love, Anita Puckett

Anita Puckett - December 30, 2025 at 08:28 PM

MA

“Prayers for comfort, faith, and serenity in the Lord.



Mary - December 29, 2025 at 08:05 PM