

Eunice Groark

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Eunice Barnard Strong Groark, Connecticut's first female lieutenant governor and a lifelong booster of the state, died unexpectedly Tuesday, May 8, 2018 in **Bloomfield**. She was 80. She was born in Sharon, CT on February 1, 1938, the daughter of Arlene Murphy and Harry Barnard Strong. She spent her early years on a farm in Falls Village, a place that remained dear to her heart. Her time spent outdoors, fetching milk, hiking and picking flowers, fostered a true appreciation of nature and its conservation, something she spearheaded as the president of the Connecticut Chapter of the Nature Conservancy. Her young years were not without hardship. She was a survivor of the great **Hartford** Circus Fire in 1944 and her mother died when Eunice was just 8 years old. But those incidents taught her strength, independence and determination. She graduated from Oxford School, Westover School and Bryn Mawr College, and was an ardent believer in the value of a single-sex education for women. With a passion for law and government, she entered the University of the Connecticut School of Law, where she met her husband, Tom, on their very first day when he offered her a ride to lunch. They married at the end of their second year of school, on June 27, 1964. The following year, they graduated. Eunice was one of only three women to graduate in her class, passed the bar and set off to Washington, D.C. where Tom had a job in the Civil Rights Division of the US Justice Department. It was the beginning of a 54-year love story where each encouraged the other to be their best selves as they put family and community before all else. They returned to Connecticut in 1966 and settled in Hartford. While staying home to raise three daughters, she kept busy. A proud descendant of Hartford's founder, Thomas Hooker, and a true champion of the city, she gave bus tours of Hartford's historical sites and of the Mark Twain House. Eunice returned to the workforce as a member of the Filer Commission to reorganize state government. Her interest in public service had been learned from her father who worked in state government and was an aide to Governor Baldwin. Soon thereafter, Eunice was approached by a neighbor to run for the City Council in Hartford. She was elected in 1981 and served two terms as a minority Republican on the council, including one term as the minority leader. She unsuccessfully ran for Mayor of Hartford against Thirman Milner but carried about 40 percent of the vote, a strong showing for a Republican in Democrat-dominated city. After running **Roger Eddy's** campaign for US **Senate** against U.S. Sen. **Christopher Dodd**, she was selected by the Hartford City Council to be the corporation counsel of Hartford from 1987 to 1990. It was in that position when she gained the attention of Lowell P. Weicker who decided to launch an independent bid for governor of Connecticut. Weicker picked Eunice and the two successfully ran as members of the newly created A Connecticut Party ticket, beating Republican John Rowland and Democrat Bruce Morrison. With the state of Connecticut in a fiscal crisis, they passed the income tax. Eunice, as Senate Pro Tem, was also the tie-breaking vote for a groundbreaking assault weapon ban in 1993, after a heated debate that included state Sen. Doc Gunther pointing a rifle at her on the Senate floor. She was proud of her accomplishments as lieutenant governor. In the last days of her life, she often mentioned that when she left office, Connecticut enjoyed a budget surplus. After Weicker decided against running for re-election in 1994, Eunice ran with Audrey Rowe, forming the first-ever all female ticket for governor and lieutenant governor. After retiring from public office, Eunice taught a political class at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at **Harvard University** and Wesleyan University, she also served as trustee at Renbrook School,

Kingswood-Oxford School and Westover School. She remained active on numerous boards and organizations including the Nature Conservancy, the Mark Twain House, the Hartford Public Library, People's Bank and its foundation, The Phoenix Fund, Open Hearth, the Twilight Club, Old St. Andrew's Church, and the Garden Clubs of Hartford and America. In her spare time, she loved to take walks at the reservoir, bird watching, reading, volunteering, gardening and spending time in Niantic with her family. In her most recent years, she cared for her ailing husband with great devotion. She is survived by her husband, Thomas J. Groark of Bloomfield; her daughters, Eunice (Kevin Clark) Groark of Wellesley, MA; Marie (Marv Nelson) Groark of Seattle, WA; and Virginia (Josh Hale) Groark of Chicago, IL; and her seven grandchildren: Harry and Phoebe Clark; Louise, Owen and Virginia Nelson; and Charlie and Tommy Hale. Calling hours will be held on Friday from 3-7 p.m. at the James T. Pratt Funeral Service at the D'Esopo Funeral Chapel, 277 Folly Brook Blvd., Wethersfield. The funeral will be held Saturday at 10 a.m. at Old St. Andrew's Church, 59 Tariffville Rd., Bloomfield. Burial will be private at Lime Rock Cemetery in Salisbury. Everyone is asked to meet directly at church. Donations may be made to Duncaster Employee Education Fund, c/o Duncaster, 20 Loeffler Road, Bloomfield, CT 06002, or the Nature Conservancy Connecticut Chapter, 55 Church Street, Floor 3, New Haven, CT 06510-3029. For online expressions of sympathy to the family, please visit www.desopo.com.

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