



## David Van Heest

June 16, 1947 - May 2, 2023

David Jack Van Heest: Born June 16, 1947 – Died May 2, 2023 (age 75)

David passed away early Tuesday, May 2nd after a short hospitalization. David was born in Holland, Michigan, to Rev. Jacob ‘Jack’ Van Heest and Josephine (DeJongh) Van Heest, while Jacob finished his seminary studies. David is preceded in death by both of his parents and his sister Sharron (Tony) Santefort. Surviving him are his husband of 35 years Doug Abell, sisters Marianne (Joel) Bouwens, Nancy (Rev. Michael) VandenBerg, and Dr. Jaci Van Heest, nephews, niece, great nieces and nephews, as well as a host of special and dear friends and family.

David graduated high school in Fulton, IL, and then attended Hope College in Holland, MI, where he graduated with a Psychology major and a teaching degree and served as the president for Alpha Theta Chi fraternity. He then taught English at Zeeland High School for 27 years where he had the opportunity to teach his nephews as well as hundreds of students that always thought of him as a tough teacher but, “the very best teacher” they ever had. David also taught at Hope College and Davenport University as an adjunct English teacher for several years.

David also put his talents to use in Saugatuck at the Red Barn Theater as a performer, set builder, and all around stagehand. He enjoyed Tulip Time and

served on staff and as a volunteer, leading bus tours, announcing the parades on local access TV, and presenting a program on growing tulips. His talents seemed as diverse as his curiosity and he also put them to work, studying and becoming a Master Gardener and advisor to many backyard gardeners. David and Doug moderated the Lakeshore Gardeners for many years. David also used his faith and Master Gardener skills to help plan, implement, and maintain the Memorial Garden at Hope Church, the home of his adult faith.

Besides his artistic and writing skills, David volunteered with the Red Cross, the AIDS Quilt, Room for All, and served as both an Elder and Deacon at Hope Church. He also served on the boards of many organizations he supported. David loved to help friends with their passions and projects and enjoyed time with all of them in social gatherings and culinary activities. His family, friends, and perhaps the entire Holland community knew of his pies and desserts which he frequently shared.

David and his husband, Doug, loved walking through the neighborhood and the city meeting and talking with friends and planning to get together. They loved visiting the Farmer's Market on Wednesdays and Saturdays, picking out local produce and flowers to enjoy in their home. The two of them enjoyed traveling to visit friends in Florida and northern Michigan or to visit botanical gardens and greenhouses.

David was a Renaissance man with a love for learning only surpassed by his love for sharing all of it with friends. His sister sums up her brother's loves with four words: Flowers, Food, Friends, and Faith.

Memorials in David's honor may be made to Hope Church's Memorial Garden Fund, 77 W 11th St, Holland, MI 49423.

A Memorial Service will be held Friday, May 19th at Hope Church in Holland,

MI, with visitation at 10:00am and service at 11:00am with a lunch to follow at the church. Reverends Gordon Wiersma and Jill Russell, officiants.

# Previous Events

## Visitation

MAY 19. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)

Hope Church  
77 West 11th Street  
Holland, MI 49423

## Memorial Service

MAY 19. 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (ET)

Hope Church  
77 West 11th Street  
Holland, MI 49423

# Tribute Wall

TJ

“ I was a student of Mr. Van Heest in the mid 1970's. I happened to think about him tonight which tells something about his impact as a teacher! I decided to Google him to see where he was after all these years. I was sorry to see that he has passed but I wanted to share my condolences and to remember him with positive thoughts as a dedicated teacher and a very nice and compassionate person. He is someone who made a positive impact in my life and someone who I will always remember with great fondness. So sorry for your loss.

Thomas De Jonge - July 30, 2025 at 07:14 PM

WN

“ With Love, Your 11th Street Neighbors purchased the Treasured Lilies Spray for the family of David Van Heest.



With Love, Your 11th Street Neighbors - May 16, 2023 at 05:07 PM

Tom Lampen

“ Mr. Van Heest was the best teacher I encountered through all my school years. His freshman English class turned me into a life long lover of books. I know he enriched the lives of countless students.

Tom Lampen - May 05, 2023 at 09:03 AM

GD

“ We were neighbors and friends in the Historical District for many years.

*Prayers for Doug and family as you grieve and celebrate David's life*



*Graham Duryee*

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**Graham Duryee** - May 04, 2023 at 09:12 AM

FF

“ David was a gentleman. He did not appear to hold a grudge, even when deserved.

*He was wise and a lover of plants. I remember taking a hike with him, Doug and some other friends. Every minute or so he stopped to identify another wildflower or "weed". He was a gentle and good soul, and a great mate to Doug.*

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**Fred A Farage** - May 04, 2023 at 12:17 AM

NG

*I remember working with David at Zeeland Public Schools. He was a stellar teacher & gracious person who touched many lives!*

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**nancy gelderloos** - May 09, 2023 at 10:22 AM

JB

“ Mr. Van Heest was one of my favorite teachers at Zeeland. I was in his creative writing class my junior year. I remember he asked why one of my poems just...stopped. With the wisdom of a 17-year old explained that that was the point, some things just stop. He paused, nodded, and I felt understood. I'll always remember that.

*Jennifer (Baron) Bailey*

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**Jennifer J. Bailey** - May 03, 2023 at 10:42 PM

KM

“ David was a wonderful and generous person. I had the pleasure to work with him on the Worship Ministry at Hope Church. His openness and supportive nature was clear. His love of gardens and the natural world was evident. I will miss him. I loved seeing him with Doug knowing their love for one another. Blessings and Peace in this time of loss. Kari Miller

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**Kari Miller** - May 03, 2023 at 10:01 PM

CS

“ I am so very sorry to see this! Mr Van Heest was one of my very favorite teachers ever!!!! He has such an impact on me as a high school student that has lasted into my adult years! Rest easy!

*Carisa Statema  
Zeeland*

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**Carisa Statema** - May 03, 2023 at 09:43 PM

EB

“ Mr. Van Heest was one of my favorite teachers! He brought the best out of each of us and I still think of him fondly after all these years. May he rest in peace.

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**Emily Brand** - May 03, 2023 at 07:58 PM

JA

“ Always a bright and beautiful soul! Rest in justice, kindness and love. Jan Lunquist and Michael May

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**Jan** - May 03, 2023 at 02:55 PM

TC

“ Teresa Cabral purchased the Florist Choice Bouquet for the family of David Van Heest.



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**Teresa Cabral** - May 03, 2023 at 01:03 PM

TC

“ David - we shared some fun theatre times at the Red Barn and for the Tulip Time Festival and great dinners with you and Doug back in the 1980's-90's. Love you and will always smile fondly when I think of you. You were a treasure.

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**Terri Cabral** - May 03, 2023 at 12:51 PM

TF

“ I first heard of David when I moved to Zeeland in 1975. He was a “rock-star” teacher, loved by his students at Zeeland High School. Five years later, when I became Director of Music at Christ Memorial Church, David was a leader in the choir, singing in the tenor section. He was always honest, loving and supportive during that time. Although we lost some contact when my time at Christ Memorial came to an end, we always remained friends. When I came back to Michigan five years ago, David and Doug accepted my invitation to an Open House and it was nice to reconnect. David lived his life with great integrity, always being honest about who he was and being transparent about his faith and strong conviction that nothing could separate him from the Love of God. Even in times of great adversity and trial, David was confident about God’s love for him. David refused to hear the church’s “no”, preferring rather to listen to God’s “YES.” He has left a huge footprint. He has paved the way for others to hear Good News, instead of being marginalized and ridiculed. My life is better for having known him. May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

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**Thomas Folkert** - May 03, 2023 at 12:12 PM

PF

“ Our sincere condolences to you, Doug, and your entire family. David & you showed the world what love and commitment look like!  
*Paula Fabiano & Dale Brown*

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**Paula Fabiano** - May 02, 2023 at 03:21 PM