

Jackalyn Margaret Ross Laxalt

4th First Lady born in Nevada (Yerington)
Governor Paul D. Laxalt (1967 – 1970)

At a Glance:

Born: Jan. 31, 1927, Yerington, Nev.

Died: July 17, 2004, Reno, Nev.

Burial: Reno, Nev.

Maiden Name: Jackalyn Margaret “Jackie”
Ross

Race/Nationality/Ethnic Background: Scotch-
Irish

Married: Paul Dominique Laxalt, 1946.
Divorced in 1972

Children: Gail Johnson, Sheila Lokan,
John Paul Laxalt, Michelle Laxalt,
Dr. Kevin Marie Laxalt,
Kathleen "Neena" Laxalt

**Primary City and County of Residence and
Work:**
Carson City, Nev., Scottsdale, Ariz., Reno, Nev.

Major Fields of Work: First Lady, drug and alcoholism counselor

Other Role Identities: Wife, Mother



Photo courtesy Neena Laxalt

Nevada native First Lady dedicated life to large family, and to substance abuse counseling

Jackie Laxalt was born in Yerington, Nev., and raised in Carson City, Nev., to John R. Ross, a prominent lawyer and later a federal judge, and his wife, Margaret Burns Ross. She was the eldest of two children. In her younger years, she developed her talent as an accomplished pianist.

Jackie graduated from Carson High School in 1944 and went on to attend the University of Nevada, Reno, where she hoped to become an author of children's books.

In 1946, Jackie was introduced to Paul Laxalt who had just returned home from serving in the United States Army overseas. Jackie and Paul began dating and married on July 30, 1946. Following their marriage, the couple moved to Santa Clara, California, and then Denver Colorado, where Paul finished up his undergraduate and law degrees respectively. After his graduation in 1950, Jackie and Paul returned to Carson City where he practiced law with Jackie's father. By 1957, the Laxalts were raising their six children and Paul began his political career as one of the state's most popular elected officials by winning his first statewide race, for lieutenant governor, in 1962, and was then elected governor in 1966.



As the state's first lady from 1966 to 1970, Jackie oversaw the refurbishing and remodeling of the Governor's Mansion. With their six children, the Laxalts were the largest family to occupy the mansion.

With six children, politics, social obligations, time apart from her husband, and the everyday circumstances, life became increasingly stressful for Jackie. Ultimately these stressors, coupled with Jackie's dealing with years of her husband's infidelity, took their toll. On February 4, 1972, the Laxalt marriage ended in divorce.

After her marriage of 25 years ended, she moved to Scottsdale, Ariz., where she began her journey to find herself. In December 1974, Jackie began sobriety treatment to address substance abuse problems. She then spent many years in Arizona and Nevada counseling others with substance abuse problems.

Jackie returned to her beloved Nevada in early 1991 where she established a successful alcoholism counseling practice. Over the next 13 years, she excelled in dedicating her life to her children and grandchildren. One poignant tradition she started was her own creation of beautiful needlepoint Christmas stockings for every one of them. To this day, every time her family members hang their special holiday stockings, they know that she is right there with them.

Jackie loved the visits from family and friends who traveled to visit her. She never lost her quick wit or sense of humor, traits which endeared many to her spirit.

"Mom loved her children, grandchildren and Nevada, and she was proud of having been Nevada's favorite first lady," said daughter Michelle Laxalt, of Washington, D.C.



Back row: David and Kevin Laxalt.
Middle row: Kevin Marie Laxalt, Jackie Laxalt, Kelly Olson,
John Paul Laxalt.
Front row: Sean Bernard, Cindy Laxalt

“My mother taught all of her children to be independent, to not roll over and lose if we thought we were right. She taught us to be warm and loving, and gave us our sense of humor,” said daughter Neena Laxalt of Reno.

And while Paul Laxalt has often pointed to his Basque heritage, Neena Laxalt added her mother of Irish descent encouraged her children “to be proud that we were Irish.”

On July 17, 2004, Jackie Ross Laxalt, age 77, passed away in a Reno hospital where she was being treated for respiratory problems. She is buried in Mountain View Cemetery in Reno, Nev.

Written by Neena Laxalt

Sources of Information

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