

WISCONSIN WOMEN MAKING HISTORY

THEIR STORIES
OUR LEGACY

www.womeninwisconsin.org



NANCY ZIEMAN

1953-2017

City: Beaver Dam, Neenah

County: Dodge, Winnebago

Nancy Ziemman was a successful businesswoman and the host of the longest-running sewing show on television.

Nancy Lea Luedtke was born in Neenah, Wisconsin, on June 21, 1953. When she was 14 months old, she developed Bell's palsy—a partial paralysis of the right side of her face—from a bad ear infection. She taught sewing for the first time in high school as a junior leadership assistant to the sewing leader. She faced many health issues in her late teens, including extreme knee pain that required four surgeries in one year.

Nancy Luedtke delayed attending Stout State University, now University of Wisconsin-Stout, because of her knee injury. She was the first of her extended family to attend a four-year college. Near the end of her second semester, she suffered a pulmonary embolism—a blockage of one of the pulmonary arteries caused by a blood clot—and could not finish the year. She returned by the fall and stayed on track to graduate in four years despite all her health issues. In 1975, she graduated with degrees in home economics and journalism with an emphasis on textiles. After graduation, she moved to Illinois. Minnesota Fabrics hired her as a home economist, and she began teaching weekly sewing classes. She met her husband and future business partner, Richard Ziemman, and they married in 1977. The same year, she switched jobs and became a sewing machine salesperson, but found sales was not her strong suit. She became a freelance home economist and began holding sewing seminars in different stores, traveling often.

In 1977, Ziemman created Nancy's Notions, a mail-order sewing supply company that grew quickly. She served as president and secretary. In 1981, her family moved to Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, and she partnered with Wisconsin Public Television to broadcast her TV show, *Sewing With Nancy*. The show premiered in 1982, and Ziemman became the producer after the first producer left the show. In 1985, *Sewing With Nancy* began airing on national television. Nationally, 50 percent of the PBS markets in the country aired the show by the end of the 1980s. In 2014, it aired in 90 percent of markets. *Sewing With Nancy* ran for 36 seasons and was the longest-running sewing program on television. In 2002, she sold Nancy's Notions to the Tacony Company and stepped down as president in 2007. She then founded Nancy Ziemman Productions and partnered with Wisconsin Public Television to create Quilt Expo.

In 2015, Nancy Ziemman was diagnosed with bone cancer and, four months later, breast cancer. She passed away on November 14, 2017, one day after the airing of the final episode of *Sewing With Nancy*.

To learn more, visit <https://womeninwisconsin.org/profile/nancy-zieman/>