# Mary Jane “Janie” Irwin

*1949 - 2026*

Mary Jane “Janie” Irwin, 77, of Yuma AZ, a pioneering computer scientist and longtime Penn State professor, died unexpectedly on September 28 in Socorro NM.

Janie was born July 14, 1949 and raised in Memphis, Tennessee, where her father taught at Memphis State University. She showed an early gift for math. Computer science wasn’t yet a degree there, so she majored in mathematics and took every computing course she could. She graduated magna cum laude from Memphis State in 1971 and went on to earn her M.S. and Ph.D. in computer science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where she was one of very few women in the program.

She joined the Penn State faculty in 1977 and stayed for 40 years. Along the way she led the Computer Science department, guided more than 25 Ph.D. students, was named Evan Pugh Professor and A. Robert Noll Chair in Engineering, and retired as professor emerita in 2017. An international expert in computer architecture, she was among the first to foresee that energy would become a defining limit on computing, and her ideas found their way into everyday laptops.

Her honors included election to the National Academy of Engineering and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, fellowship in the IEEE and ACM, and an honorary doctorate from Chalmers University in Sweden. In 2019 she became the first woman to receive the Phil Kaufman Award, her field’s highest honor. In 2024 she received the IEEE Gustav Robert Kirchhoff Award.

Just as important to her was opening doors for others. She had often been the only woman in the room, and she spent decades championing women in computing.

Away from work, Janie loved her dogs, who were constant companions. She preferred to spend her time in nature and the outdoors and was an avid traveler. She was a devoted bridge player, and an enthusiastic line dancer.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Darrell and Mary Simmons. She was followed in death on October 4 by her husband of 60 years, Vernon “Vern” Irwin. She is survived by her son John, grandchildren Kai and Milo, sister Nancy Carmon, and nephews David and Dirk Morris.

A private service will be held. Friends who wish to attend may contact John Irwin at jdirwin@gmail.com for details. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to Computing Research Association (cra.org).