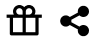




OBITUARIES



Charles D. Dilks, retired executive vice president of the University City Science Center and avid conservationist, has died at 83

He was an expert in finance, building development, and property management, and former colleagues said he “guided [the center’s] transformation into today’s thriving network.”



Mr. Dilks was a lifelong outdoorsman, and some of his best times came in the woods and on water.

Courtesy of the family

by Gary Miles

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Charles D. Dilks, 83, of Chestnut Hill, retired executive vice president of the University City Science Center, innovative entrepreneur, celebrated conservationist, veteran, volunteer, and singer, died

Saturday, Dec. 28, of cardiac amyloidosis at his home.

Mr. Dilks was the second person hired in 1963 by the nascent science center in West Philadelphia, and he spent the next 37 years helping the country's first urban research park become one of the most successful start-up incubators. He was an expert in finance, building development, and property management, and former colleagues at the Association of University Research Parks [said](#) he "guided [the center's] transformation into today's thriving network through his mentorship and leadership."

Mr. Dilks negotiated hundreds of business partnerships and joint ventures for the science center that resulted in new science and technology companies and millions of dollars in revenue. He established a property management company for the science center, organized its estate marketing program, and oversaw the development of more than 20 buildings on and near Market Street in West Philadelphia.

His collaborations helped create the Philadelphia-based Ben Franklin Technology Center of Southeastern Pennsylvania and the Kyoto Research Park in Japan. He helped found the Association of University Research Parks in 1986, served as its president from 1998 to 2000, and earned its [Career Achievement Award in 2001](#) and [Appreciation Award in 2021](#). He also earned the President's Award from the International Business Innovation Association.

In 2000, he established Dilks Consulting Inc. and [partnered with other companies](#) and colleges on university research park projects across the country. He lectured and advised, and served as chairman of the West Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce.

Away from the office, Mr. Dilks liked to ski, hunt, fish, and sail. He [served on boards](#) for the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, Schuylkill Center, Friends of the Wissahickon, and other conservation groups.

"We were at the very edge of bankruptcy. I had many sleepless nights."

Mr. Dilks in 2013 on the Science Center's rocky start in 1963

The Chestnut Hill Conservancy [honored him in June 2024](#) for his commitment to conservation easements and [said in its May newsletter](#): "His leadership and commitment have greatly enhanced the organization's capacity to preserve our natural resources and the beloved Wissahickon."

In 1962, Mr. Dilks came upon a previously unknown type of crab species in New Jersey and brought it to the attention of the Academy of Natural Sciences, which named it [prehepatus dilksi](#) after him.

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“Charlie Dilks’s legacy is a testament to the power of dedication, vision, and community support in conservation,” writer Chrissy Clawson said in a May 2024 story on chconservancy.org.

Mr. Dilks was a baritone and graduate of Yale University, and he sang with the Yale Glee Club in college. Later, he and his wife, Gene, toured Africa, South America, and Eastern Europe with the Yale Alumni Chorus, and raised funds for underserved communities and gifted instruments to youth orchestras.

He spent two years in the Navy after college as a navigator on destroyers in the Mediterranean Sea and Persian Gulf, and served in the Navy Reserve through 1970. “His life was a testament to his life motto, *carpe diem*, seize the day,” his family said in a [tribute](#). “He stitched together diverse interests to form a vibrant life characterized by integrity and enthusiasm.”

» **READ MORE: [University City Science Center going strong at 50](#)**

Charles Day Dilks was born Nov. 28, 1941. He grew up near Cresheim Creek and Wissahickon Valley Park in Chestnut Hill, and learned early to appreciate and protect nature. He attended Chestnut Hill Academy and graduated from the Westminster School in Simsbury, Conn., in 1959.

He earned a bachelor’s degree in American studies at Yale in 1963 and a master’s degree in business administration at Drexel University in 1973. He served as a representative for his Yale Class of ’63, earned its Distinguished Service Award, and was president of the Philadelphia Yale Club in the 1970s.

He met Gene Felix at a Chamber of Commerce event, and they married in 1968 and had daughter Christina and sons Charles Jr. and Mark. “He was different than anyone I had met,” his wife said. “He was enthusiastic and indomitable.”

Mr. Dilks followed the Eagles, played tennis and squash, and enjoyed season tickets to the Philadelphia Orchestra. He was on the board at the Woodmere Art Museum and the school committee at Germantown Friends School.

“Charlie’s dedication and vision have been instrumental in our growth.”

— Lori Salganicoff, former executive director of the Chestnut Hill Conservancy, in 2024

He and his wife tended an impressive garden of woody plants on their property, and *The Inquirer* featured their historic Tudor-style home in a renovation story in 2016. “He had a warmth and generosity that made him uniquely authentic,” his daughter said.

His wife said: “His enthusiasm sprang from how much joy he found in everything he did. That is perhaps his most magnetic quality and the one that drew so many to enjoy being with him.”

In addition to his wife and children, Mr. Dilks is survived by five grandchildren, a sister, and other relatives. Two brothers died earlier.

A memorial service is to be held at 2 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 12, at the Church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, 8000 St. Martin’s Lane, Philadelphia, Pa. 19118.

Donations in his name may be made to the [Class of 1959 Fund at Westminster School](#), Office of Advancement, 995 Hopmeadow St., Simsbury, Conn. 06070; the [Association of University Research](#)

[Parks](#), 5470 E. Broadway Blvd., Tucson, Ariz. 85711; and the [Chestnut Hill Conservancy](#), Conservation Easement Program, 8708 Germantown Ave., Philadelphia, Pa. 19118.

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