



Peter Robert Fontana

April 20, 1935 - March 29, 2026

Peter Robert Fontana, a beloved husband, father, and esteemed professor of physics, passed away peacefully on March 29, 2026, at the Bailey Family Center for Caring in Saint Augustine, Florida, at the age of 90. Born to Rene' and Mathilda Fontana on April 20, 1935, in Berne, Switzerland, Peter's life journey was guided by a profound sense of purpose and faith that led him across continents and into the hearts of many.

During World War II, Peter lived with his family in the small village of Mueren, Switzerland. A gifted student, he was a graduate of the Swiss Institute of Technology with a Bachelor Degree in Physics, a Masters Degree from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio and a Ph.D. from Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. He was a Research Associate, Assistant Professor and Professor at the University of Chicago, the University of Michigan and Oregon State University. His research was published extensively and led to several patents and professional accomplishments that are too many to list. Peter's life, however, was defined not only by his achievements in academia but also by his deep faith in God.

While in Corvallis, Oregon Peter met the love of his life, Shay Nelson (McCarthy), who was working as a high school teacher. Peter and Shay married on June 30, 1984, laying the foundation for a life of adventure and shared mission. Together, they adopted two daughters, Erika and Laura,

whom they cherished and nurtured with unwavering love.

In 1994, after an encounter with a Missionary to Haiti and a week long trip to Haiti, Peter and Shay answered God's call on their life to missions. They relocated to Saint Augustine, Florida and established a mission in Haiti, where they sponsored schools, initiated a feeding program, and built an orphanage known as Fontana Village. Throughout their journey, they witnessed countless miracles of provision and protection, bringing hope and sustenance to children and families in need. He received numerous grants through Rotary International for Haiti and was the recipient of many awards including the Paul Harris Service above Self Award as well as in 2004 Good Samaritan Award from Catholic Charities. The couple's contributions to Haiti included the construction of a church and a school that provided daily meals to children. The mission, also known as Hope for Haiti, has impacted the lives of more than a thousand children over 30 years.

In addition to his parents, Peter was preceded in death by a brother, Mario Fontana and his sister Antoinette Zurcher of Switzerland. Peter is survived by his best friend and wife of 42 years, Shay Fontana of St. Augustine; daughters, Erika Fontana and her husband Michael, of St. Augustine, and Laura Fontana and her husband Matteo, of Eugene, Oregon; a sister, Evelyne "Evi" Delaca of Switzerland; a sister-in-law, Elsa Fontana also of Switzerland; and a brother, Francesco Fontana of Miami.

Peter leaves behind a legacy of love, intellect, and faith that will resonate for generations to come.

A celebration of Peter's life will be held at 11 am on Thursday, April 9, 2026 at Anastasia Baptist Church. Donations in honor of Peter can be made at www.fontanavillagehaiti.com. Those unable to attend can view the live-stream by going to: <https://iframe.dacast.com/live/2a7a09ae1c0559a83ef537e05e6a14a>

6/0d926f14-3fd3-923f-c556-1f0bb777106f

St. Johns Family Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements.

Cemetery Details

St Johns Crematory

385 State Road 207
Saint Augustine, FL 32084

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

APR 9. 11:00 AM (ET)

Anastasia Baptist Church
1650 A1A S
Saint Augustine, FL 32080

Tribute Wall



“ *St. Johns Family Funeral Home created a Tribute Video in memory of Peter Robert Fontana*



St. Johns Family Funeral Home - April 07 at 04:12 PM

RM

The passing of an extraordinary person leaves an extraordinary void, and such is the void left by Mr. Fontana's passing. For us in Haiti, Mr. Fontana was not just the founder of a foundation, but a father who cared deeply for the well-being of his children. Papa Peter proved his love for God through us, the children of Haiti. Despite the hardship caused by our country's situation, Papa Peter brought us a little comfort and hope. He will continue to live in our heart and our smile.

Rolande Méridien - April 07 at 06:06 PM

RM

Our condolences go out to his wife Shay, his daughters Laurie and Ericka, and all his family and friends.

Rolande Méridien - April 07 at 06:12 PM



“ *Days of Sunshine Bouquet was purchased for the family of Peter Robert Fontana.*



April 08 at 12:52 AM

SH

“ *The years I spent working alongside Peter in Haiti after the earthquake remain some of my most cherished memories from my time overseas. He was an absolute force. His deep care for the children of Haiti—and his unwavering commitment to the country—left a lasting impression on me and helped shape the course of my own career.*

Peter will be deeply missed, but his legacy will endure. My heartfelt sympathies are with Shay, Erika and Laura during this difficult time.

Sarah Halfman - April 07 at 12:53 PM

RH

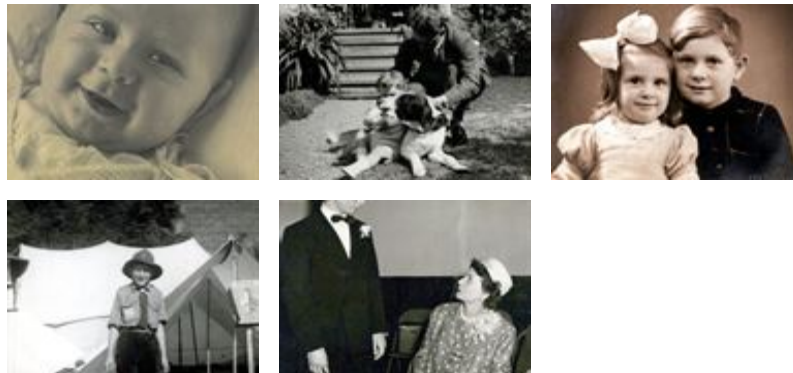
“ *Rolande and fontana foundation of Haiti. purchased the Ocean Breeze Spray for the family of Peter Robert Fontana.*



Rolande and fontana foundation of Haiti. - April 07 at 12:27 PM



“ *56 files added to the album Life Tributes*



St. Johns Family Funeral Home - April 06 at 03:41 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Peter Robert Fontana.

April 05 at 11:09 AM



“ Divine Peace Bouquet was purchased for the family of Peter Robert Fontana.



April 05 at 11:09 AM



“ My deepest sympathies to Shay and the rest of the family. My time in Haiti with Peter are among my most cherished memories. What an amazing man, and what an amazing and enduring legacy. Peace and blessings to you all. - Larry Carter

Larry Carter - April 03 at 02:00 PM