

Edward Leo O'Keefe Jr.

June 4, 1931 - January 1, 2021

A world renowned icon in the wine industry, yet a gentle giant to his family, Edward Leo O'Keefe, Jr, 89, of Traverse City, passed away peacefully at his home on January 1, 2021, surrounded by his family and the vineyards he loved.

Born June 4, 1931 in Philadelphia, PA, Ed was the son of Marie (McNiel) and Edward Leo O'Keefe, Sr. Ed lettered in every sport, excelling in diving while at John Bartram Senior High. He continued his education at West Chester University, earning his Bachelor's Degree. Ed excelled at athletics while at college, especially as a gymnast, earning a spot on the National Gymnastics Team and made the first cut in the 1952 US Olympics. He also enjoyed downhill skiing. He enlisted in the military and served as Captain in the Airborne Special Forces in Europe, remaining a Reserve Officer until the late '80s. Ed was one of only three people (at the time) in US history to receive a perfect score on his Army fitness test. Known for his entrepreneurial spirit, and after having opened and operated a string of extended-care health nursing homes in the Midwest for a number of years, Ed left his work there in 1974 to move to Acme to open the first vineyard and winery in Northern Michigan. He became well known for his expertise, not only here, but worldwide. Even though many thought him crazy for attempting this wine endeavor in Northern Michigan, they didn't know Ed O'Keefe and he set out to prove them wrong when he established a vineyard on his 55 acres, thus bringing the wine industry to life here.

Ever the anonymous do-gooder, he exemplified the term generous by the many contributions he made to this area. He often said his greatest accomplishment however, was winning the Danny Boy singing competition at Dill's on St. Patrick's Day, which was a tribute to his Irish heritage which he was so proud of.

Ed is survived by his children, Maria O'Keefe of Kansas City, MO, Laurie (Jeff) Brunette of Orcas Island, WA, Colleen Safir of Bradenton, FL, Eddie (Allison) O'Keefe, III, and Sean (Stacey) O'Keefe, all of Traverse City; his grandchildren, Gary and Rory Safir, Kate and Nicky O'Keefe and Molly and Fionn O'Keefe. Ed is also survived by his former wife Sharon O'Keefe of Holmes Beach, FL. Preceding Ed in death was his son in law Gene Safir and

his brothers Paul and Robert Bortell.

The Celebration of Ed's life take place via life stream on Saturday, January 9, 2021 beginning at 1:00 P.M. To participate in the service, please log in to www.rjfh.tv and then click on Ed's photo. You will then be connected to the live stream. In person attendance will not be available.

For those who desire to remember Ed through a memorial contribution, the family would suggest Munson Hospice c/o Munson Healthcare Foundations, 1500 Medical Campus Drive, Traverse City, MI 49684. (www.munsonhealthcare.org) or The Cherryland Humane Society, 1750 Ahlberg Rd., Traverse City, MI 49696 (www.cherrylandhumane.org).

Events

JAN **Celebration of Life via livestream at www.rjfh.tv**01:00PM

9

via livestream at www.rjfh.tv

MI, US

Comments



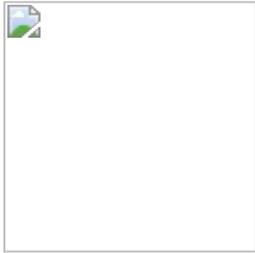
“ Video Tribute



Reynolds Jonkhoff Funeral Home & Cremation Services - January 09 at 03:29 PM



“ Celebration of Life Webcast



Reynolds Jonkhoff - January 09 at 02:14 PM



“ The Celebration of Life Webcast was a beautiful send off for your Dad. A fitting tribute. Danielle Smith mentioned your father's willingness to keep us safe while we celebrated the Joy's of youth in the lower level of the Arrowhead residence. St. Patrick's day festivities, sign productions and pure fun with you, Ed, Mark and the rest. Well. We were safe. Your dad loved all of us Eddie.

Sean. You did a remarkable job today. Your heart is huge.

L.Bone. You too. Excellent job.

That part of my life in the late seventies wouldn't of been whole without celebrating with you both.

All of you did a superb job sharing your love for Mr. O.

God bless you and keep you safe.

Phil

Philip Nachazel - January 09 at 07:16 PM



“ My condolences to all the O'Keefes and your families. I haven't seen Ed in about 30 years, but I have certainly heard a lot of stories about him from my parents and Aunt Sharon. I enjoyed seeing some photos of my parents mixed in! I am sending my love to all of you.

Liese Krauser

Liese Krauser - January 14 at 03:16 PM



“ I am sorry to hear about your loss. He definitely left an indelible impact. I am thankful to have known him and for all his support while I was a trainee at CGT and afterwards. Please accept my deepest condolence.

Oliver Asberger
Charlottesville, VA

Oliver Asberger - January 11 at 02:21 PM



“ Saddened to hear about Mr. O'Keefe. Our condolences....
Just wanted to share our story about Ed:

While we were regular visitors to Chateau Grand Traverse, a few summers ago my wife and I decided to book a stay at the Inn. When we parked outside the front door waiting to check in, we saw an older gentleman just outside the garage cleaning his car. My wife and I struck up a conversation with who we thought was one of the winery workers cleaning someone's car. After speaking for several minutes, we found out he was actually the owner! We chatted for about 30 minutes total. During our stay we saw Ed several times, including in the laundry room at the inn where he was doing his laundry!

He was truly a fascinating man and we are glad to have had that brief connection with him.

Dave and Pam
Macomb, MI

David Andrews - January 11 at 11:08 AM



“ Gary...OMG...You look just like your Grandpa! I will MISS him!!!
"Pirate Dave"
:(

David Alexander - January 09 at 07:16 PM



“ Sorry for for your loss. He was enjoyed & we miss him. The Friday night group.

beachy1 - January 09 at 04:24 PM



“ Sharing of Memories



Sean O'Keefe - January 09 at 02:33 PM



“ Just watched Ed's Service from FL...Pam and I laughed and cried! Most of all...What a Tribute! Ed would have LOVED IT!!!
David & Pam Alexander

David Alexander - January 09 at 02:17 PM



“ My husband George and I first met Ed years ago when along with my brothers Marc and Lou Santucci, we bought the land next door to Chateaux Grand Traverse to grow cherries and grapes. Marc introduced us to this larger than life man, who told great stories, which never had to be exaggerated because they were so exciting on their own. We were enthralled with him from the beginning. Every summer when we visited, one of our first stops was to see Ed and to buy wine to bring back to Md. We will raise a glass of our late harvest (ice) wine today in his honor. What a legacy he has left for you all Edie. A truly amazing man, and so admired and loved.

Nina Santucci Pozgar and George

Nina Santucci-Pozgar - January 09 at 07:31 AM



“ I am deeply saddened by the loss of a good friend and mentor who has left everlasting marks on my life.

I was hired as the first winemaker at CGT back in 1978 and what I found was a winery struggling to get on its feet. The first 2 years were very hard and everybody said Ed would not pull it through, but his unbreakable optimism to make his dream come true combined with a good portion of Irish and German stubbornness led to success. What a character Ed was, a truly free spirit who would barely fit in our "politically correct" world today. We met many times over the years, had fun, shared memories and a few glasses of wine. Ed was a great entrepreneur with a head full of ideas. He enjoyed life full of stories and broke out in song to cheer everybody up. When he is at heavens gate, I'm sure he will have no problem getting in, as Petrus will be roaring with lougher.

Our most sincere condolences to the family.

Roland Pflieger

Herxheim/Bg, Germany

Roland Pflieger - January 09 at 07:25 AM



“ I first met "the Irishman" on my first visit to Grand Traverse in the late 80's. All the stories I'd heard about him from my husband, Roland (1st winemaker for CGT), held true.

What a character!...so much fun was he, I found myself throughout the years, (even though on different continents) encouraging meet-ups.....

.... because I needed, what I called, an "Ed O'keefe Fix" ...yep,....the twinkle in his eye, his wit, his tales, his laughter and song.... Unforgettable.....

He will remain, a big plus in my life.

Laura Pflieger
Herxheim,am Berg, Germany



Laura Pflieger - January 09 at 06:04 AM



“ Sorry to hear of your loss. I will never forget the high school parties at your house back in the late '70's! Your Dad was super tolerant back then and very "cool."

Take care and know our collective memories of your Dad will always live on!

-Danielle Shipman Smith

Danielle Smith - January 07 at 08:43 AM



“ I will miss this big hearted man. Yes he could be gruff but I knew he was a big teddy bear. Always enjoyed talking with him.

Gae Ellery - January 06 at 02:03 PM



“ Colleen: I have always been aware of your father as as a mover and shaker. Having you in my organic chemistry class made me think you are a chip off the old block. Be assured all the O'keefe family are in my prayers.
ADAM GAHN, MEMPHIS TN

Adam Gahn - January 06 at 11:05 AM



“ Wonderful to hear from you. I remember you to this day! You were an inspirational (the best) professor. My dad was a mover and a shaker. There can only be one of those in a family. I am retired in Florida after working for many years for the State of Michigan in environmental protection. After passing your class in quantitative organic chemistry, the world was my oyster.

Morley - January 07 at 09:20 PM



“ Eddie, Sean and the entire O'Keefe family..(Including the winery staff that Ed always considered family),
My heartfelt condolences to all of you. My memories of Ed are nothing but great moments in my life. His vigor for life and adventurous spirit didn't just bring an entire new industry to northern Michigan, it brought what they now call "Pure Michigan". His endeavors took a tourist town and turned it into destination. From the moment Ed and I connected because of our shared military experience to the night he and I sat in the tasting room and searched out the "Vanillian notes of Oak" in the Chardonnay Reserve, we became friends. See you on the high ground Ed. All the way and then some!

Stewart Boner - January 06 at 09:57 AM



“ Soon after I arrived in March of 1977 as an IBM Salesman from Detroit...I met Ed! We became great friends...Shortly after, our family's got to know each other and we remain friends to this day. I loved Ed! He was bright, driven & funny! I can remember in those early years...getting his wine business going was no easy task! But his determination was incredible...eventually "his way" payed off...Ed wound up putting TC WINES ON THE MAP! I realized he made it "big time" when I first saw his Ice Wine being sold in San Francisco! Ed was an "Idea Man"...his latest "wine dispensing machine" is a good example. In addition to making wines, Ed was innovative within the industry...paving the way for distribution laws...packaging and importing & exporting. Literally, because of Ed, Traverse City has an entire new economy in its back pocket. Ed's humor was as sharp as his mind...if there was a way to accomplish something...Ed would find it!!! He will be MISSED! RIP my friend!

David Alexander - January 05 at 11:11 AM



“ 7 files added to the album Memories Album



Stacey O'Keefe - January 05 at 10:58 AM



“ Eddie, Sean, et. al. - it was over 40 years ago that I first met your father. before that my wife had worked for his nursing home business. he was a true pioneer and many people who may never have heard of him have built on his vision. he was always honest and always a gentleman. I am very sorry for your loss.

David Creighton

David Creighton - January 05 at 10:12 AM



“ Mr. O'Keefe taught me how to do the jig at U and I St. Patty's Day in the 70's. Fond memory of my youth! He had vision and spirit!

Kimberly Dante - January 05 at 09:56 AM



“ Mr. O'Keefe was such a wonderful man! I had the pleasure of assisting him in purchasing all of his Mercedes-Benz vehicles. I have many fond memories of our talks. His history is so rich! We will all miss him here at Mercedes-Benz of Traverse City! Rest In Peace Sir!

Christy Petrini - January 05 at 09:19 AM



“ So sorry for your loss Ed. I only talked to your dad a few times but from that I could tell he was a kind good man. From the first wine tasting at Chateau Grand Traverse, I was hooked. Of all the area wineries-which there are many-I still prefer yours. I'm sure it's number 1 !!

Judy Aeschliman - January 04 at 07:03 PM



“ Eddie, Sean & Family,

I'm deeply saddened by the loss of your dad. I first met your dad more than 35 years ago. We had many, many conversations and meetings over the years during my career at MLCC, all of which were enlightening to me. Your dad was always upfront, usually pretty convincing and forever respectful, regardless of whether we disagreed on the issue at hand. What a wonderfully diverse life Ed had and it was such a treasure to get him off topic onto something from his past. Ed's legacy with the Michigan wine industry will last forever from his pioneering mindset.

I hope you can find some comfort knowing your dad's at peace and know that he lives on through you guys and your entire family. Thoughts and prayers to you Eddie, Sean and your whole family.

Peace be with you Ed.

Rick Perkins

Rick Perkins - January 04 at 12:49 PM



“ Wonderful wishes to the great family, of a kind, strong man. Edward Leo O'keefe Jr. We will be celebrating your life, every, New Year!

Gary Kage - January 04 at 08:07 AM



“ My husband and I love Traverse City. And we love the wine. But our favorite place was at the B&B that Mr O’Keeffe lived in. We loved talking with him. Listening to his life stories. One night we were at Corks and Forks it was held at Chateau Grand Traverse. We were up almost all night talking to Mr O’ Keeffe. It was such a high lite. He was an amazing man. And never dull. He was kind and generous. We always stayed there because we loved the atmosphere he created. He was a legend. And a friend. May God bless and be with his much loved family. He was so proud of. He will be sooo very missed.

Will & Alaina Smith - January 03 at 09:52 PM



“ Devastated with the knowledge that we'll never speak again, my friend, but also relieved that you're now free of the worldly frustrations you've endured, in these last years...As I contemplate the nearly five decades of memories your presence imprinted into my life, I'm most reminded of qualities I've long recognized in you, which others may have missed, but I think were fundamental to your being so inherently jovial...From my troubled youth, well into manhood, I was blessed to have the opportunity to draw life lessons from you, without which I doubt I'd have survived the twists and turns my life would take...I am eternally grateful, that you never lost faith in me, and that I was granted the gift to personally thank you, while you were still able to understand the depth of my respects for you, Ed...Never one to be entrapped in social or political ideology's, you were always completely self sufficient in your thinking, and therefore enjoyed full truth in life, which only genuine objectivity allows. You hated no one, and treated everyone fairly...but could also "raise the rafters", passionately arguing your beliefs, while also enjoying freedoms, only afforded those capable of readily admitting when they were wrong...I'm going to miss you dear friend, but am also blessed to have shared one last great "belly laugh" with you, just weeks ago...My most sincere condolences to Sharon, and each of your amazing children, and theirs...I can only imagine the sense of loss you all must be suffering...Godspeed Ed O'Keefe; I'm certain the heaven's erupted into a grand, rapturous soiree upon your arrival...and can only dare to dream of a life so well lived, by a man so well loved.

Todd Young - January 03 at 05:19 PM



“ I'm sorry for your loss Eddie, Sean and family.
I'm having a Mass said for your father at Holy Rosary Catholic Church in Cedar.

God's peace be with all of you.

Philip Nachazel

Philip Nachazel - January 03 at 02:57 PM



“ Sorry to read about your dad, Eddie. I only talked to him a few times and from that I could tell he was a good, kind person. I wish you the best. Your wines are still my favorite!

Judy Arschliman

Judy - January 04 at 06:56 PM



“ FOLLOWING RISK CAREERS, EDDIE BECAME THE MOST INNOVATIVE ENTREPRENEUR TO INTRODUCE THE WINE INDUSTRY TO NORTHERN MICHIGAN.
ALONG WITH LEELANAW'S BERNIE RINK AND LARRY MAWBY, THE BUSINESS OF 'AGRITOURISM' WILL CONTINUE TO MARK THE AREA ALONG WITH ITS GROWTH IN CYBERNETICS AND ROBOTICS.
FROM THE TIME CHATEAU CHANTAL SOLD ITS FIRST GRAPES TO EDWARD, TO THE TIME OF ITS FIRST BOTTLE, TO TODAY; WE WILL REMAIN GRATEFUL TO ED FOR MULTIPLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO OUR OWN PERSONAL AND CORPORATE GROWTH.
TI VOGLIO BENE EDWARD!
WILL OFFER A MASS IN THANKS
BOB

ROBERT BEGIN - January 03 at 11:20 AM