



Joel T Smekens

September 5, 1943 - March 10, 2018

Joel T. Smekens, 74, a lifelong resident of Bluffton, passed away Saturday morning, March 10, 2018 at Lutheran Hospital in Fort Wayne.

Born Sept. 5, 1943 to the late Clemen and Martha Smekens, he married Barbara Brickley Aug. 5, 1989 at the First Baptist Church in Bluffton; she survives.

A 1961 graduate of Bluffton High School, he attended the Milo Bennett School of Linotype in English, Ind. After a brief stint at the Warsaw Times-Union, then-publisher Roger Swaim contacted him about an opening at The News-Banner. He began his career there May 23, 1963.

Joe began covering local high school sports in the fall of 1968; he continued to work as a Linotype operator by day and a sports writer by night until the News-Banner converted to offset printing and moved to a new building on North Johnson Street. At that time he began full time work in the news and sports departments. He was named the newspaper's sports editor in October 1977.

When he suffered his first heart attack in April 1986, publisher Jim Barbieri felt moving him to the post of managing editor would be less stressful. He served in that capacity until his retirement on his 65th birthday in 2008, completing a truly remarkable 45-year career. He had also been a News-Banner carrier for 10 years, first helping his older brothers on their route when he was 9 and eventually taking over the route himself.

After retirement, he worked part time at Thoma/Rich, Lemler Funeral Home.

Joe was the recipient of many writing awards during his career from the UPI and the Hoosier State Press Association; in 1985 he was recognized by the Indiana Basketball Coaches Association for his outstanding coverage.

In July 1986, he represented the family of Bluffton native Everett Scott for his induction into the Indiana Baseball Hall of Fame. Joe had led the effort to nominate Scott. At that ceremony, Joe met and interviewed national Hall of Fame Cincinnati Reds catcher Johnny Bench; he also had an opportunity during his career to interview NFL great Johnny Unitas.

Joe was inducted into the Bluffton High School Athletic Hall of Fame in 2000, was honored as the Grand Marshall of his beloved Bluffton Street Fair in 2008, and was presented with a Distinguished Hoosier Award by Gov. Mitch Daniels upon his retirement.

Joe served in the Indiana National Guard from 1964 to 1970. Joe attended St. Joseph Catholic Church in Bluffton; Joe and Barb attended the First Baptist Church in Bluffton. He was also a former member of the Bluffton Lions Club. Joe loved playing golf and was a regular with the Under the Tree Gang at Timber Ridge Golf Course in his retirement. His other hobbies were centered around his grandchildren's sports and musical performances. He kept up with watching and enjoying Wells County high school sports after his retirement as well as reading. He continued to write stories and articles.

In 2013, he published a book: "Window of Wells County — A Reporter's Favorite Stories," a collection of articles and columns from his career at The News-Banner. He was deeply appreciative and humbled by the response he received.

In addition to his wife, he is survived by a daughter, Angie (Scott) Harris of Poneto; a son, Brady (Kristina) Smekens of Warren; three step-daughters, Denise (Tom) Oswalt of Bluffton, Julie Fetters of Kapolei, Hawaii, and Diane (Patrick {Chip}) McArdle of Shawnee, Kan.; two brothers, John Smekens of Troy, Ohio and Mike Smekens of Bluffton; two sisters, Susie (Gary) Studebaker of Tampa, Fla. and Jane (Greg) Waters of Bluffton; 13 grandchildren, Kayla (Bryant) Ponchot, Janette (Kurt) Funk, Leah (Brandon)

Huggins, Joseph (Sarah) McArdle, Thomas (Paula) McArdle, Paul McArdle, Katie (Joey) Orozco, Chase (Mallory) Harris, Chandler Harris, Grant Harris, Sophia Smekens, Andrew Smekens, and Sydney Smekens; and seven great-grandchildren, Kyler Funk, Camden Funk, Brecken Ponchot, Mia Huggins, Molly McArdle, Emmy McArdle and William McArdle.

Services will be held Wed., March 14 at 10:30 a.m. at the First Baptist Church. Visitation hours are Monday from 5 to 8 p.m., Tuesday from noon to 8 p.m. at Thoma/Rich, Lemler Funeral Home, and Wednesday for one hour prior to the services at the church. Pastor Les Cantrell and Jeff Lemler will officiate.

Burial will be in Elm Grove Cemetery with Catholic Graveside Rites conducted by Msgr. Pius N. Ilechukwu. There will also be graveside military honors by the American Legion Post 111 Color Guard and the U.S. Army Honor Guard. Preferred memorials are to the Bluffton, Southern Wells and Norwell Athletic Departments.

Friends can send online condolences to the family at www.thomarich.com.

Cemetery Details

Elm Grove Cemetery

3500 East State Road 124
Bluffton, IN

Previous Events

Visitation

MAR 12. 5:00 PM - 8:00 PM (ET)

Thoma/Rich, Lemler Funeral Home
308 West Washington Street
Bluffton, IN 46714
<http://www.thomarich.com>

Visitation

MAR 13. 12:00 PM - 8:00 PM (ET)

Thoma/Rich, Lemler Funeral Home
308 West Washington Street
Bluffton, IN 46714
<http://www.thomarich.com>

Visitation

MAR 14. 9:30 AM - 10:30 AM (ET)

First Baptist Church
202 W. Cherry St.
Bluffton, IN

Celebration of Life Service

MAR **14**. 10:30 AM (ET)

First Baptist Church
202 W. Cherry St.
Bluffton, IN

Tribute Wall



“ *Thoma/Rich, Lemler Funeral Home created a Tribute Video in memory of Joel T Smekens*



Thoma/Rich, Lemler Funeral Home - March 12, 2018 at 04:31 PM

AR

♥ *Beautiful memories* ♥

Amy Rigby - March 12, 2018 at 06:56 PM

KG

I worked alongside Joe at the News-Banner for 9 years, and admired him greatly. He was a pillar in the community and will certainly leave an emptiness in the lives of many. Sympathies to his family, you are all in my thoughts and prayers. RIP Joe!

Kim Grubb - March 13, 2018 at 01:12 PM



“ *Joel T Smekens*

September 08, 2022 at 08:26 PM

JT

“ *Julia Tobias lit a candle in memory of Joel T Smekens*



Julia Tobias - March 16, 2018 at 07:52 PM

TP

“ *The area has lost a man with a trademark smile, a positive attitude, knew no strangers, and his little red pick up truck seen running around town.
My thoughts and prayers are with the Smekens family.*

Tom Plummer

Thomas Plummer - March 15, 2018 at 01:44 PM



GF

“ *Hard to think of anyone who had a better understanding of Wells County (both news and sports) than Joe. He was an excellent writer and columnist and friend. He will be missed! Geoff Frank*

Geoff Frank - March 14, 2018 at 04:24 PM

JG

“ *Brady and family, my thoughts and prayers are with you all. Take comfort from the wonderful memories and keep them close to your hearts.*

Julia Glessner

Julia Glessner - March 14, 2018 at 11:55 AM





“ *Healing Tears - All White* was purchased for the family of Joel T Smekens.



March 14, 2018 at 09:46 AM



“ *Elsa, Cliff, Gabby, Mitchell, Cooper, Blake Fetters* purchased the *Red, White & Blue Sympathy Standing Spray* for the family of Joel T Smekens.



Elsa, Cliff, Gabby, Mitchell, Cooper, Blake Fetters - March 13, 2018 at 06:54 PM



“ *Joe was such a valued friend to all who knew him. It was my privilege to call him a friend. He will be missed by his family and friends. Prayers to all in his family for comfort and peace.*

Susan Poulson

Susan Poulson - March 13, 2018 at 04:45 PM

AS

“ I have a funny story from January 2014 about Joe and my mom, Phyllis Hamilton. One afternoon he had stopped past CHristian Care to drop off a copy of his wonderful book. Mom teased him about being all dressed up just to visit her, and he admitted he was on his way to the Ft. Wayne crematorium. She teased him about looking like he was on a date and said "Well, I guess one of these days you're going to be MY last date, and I hope you'll dress like that to take me to Ft Wayne, too!" They laughed. Three days later Mom had a fatal clot in her lungs, and a week from that conversation Joe was indeed taking her on her "last date". After the funeral when we all had left the gravesite, Joe said he and the bulldozer man stood in a blizzard and toasted Mom with a final cigarette: "This one's for Phid"! What a great story to brighten up that sad time. I hope Mom and Joe have reconnected now in the Bluffton section behind those Pearly Gates! He was one of a kind, and a special guy - thanks for sharing him with us all these years.

Ann Hamilton Shields - March 13, 2018 at 03:43 PM

JG

“ Our deepest sympathy to Barb ,Angie , Brady & the siblings of Joe. What a GREAT guy. I never saw him without a very big smile. That is the way he lived his life. We are not able to attend , in person , but all of you will be in our prayers. RIP Joe , our friend.

Jerry & Darlene Garrett - March 13, 2018 at 03:30 PM

BG

“ Joe was a good friend and mentor to me. We shared great stories of his beloved Dodgers and my Reds. He took a chance on me as a sports reporter for the News Banner back in 1986. I wasn't very good, but he gently guided me in my efforts. What a gentleman!



Brett Garrett

Brett Garrett - March 13, 2018 at 12:28 PM

LM

“ I want to extend my condolences. I always appreciated waiting on you on Friday mornings. You were always so kind and considerate. It was easy to see the love you had for each other. I will miss you!
Linda McAfee

Linda McAfee - March 13, 2018 at 10:13 AM

MS

“ Dearest Smekens families, Joe, as we knew him was a wonderful high school friend of me and my husband. Always smiling, being his friendly self and kind. He was especially comforting to us, two years ago, at the funeral home during our mom;s passing. He shared his book with us. Our special memory of Joe, was whenever he saw my husband, he would call him, Scale Gooley, to amuse us .Our hometown has lost a wonderful servant! You are all in our prayers, Madeleine(Habig) and Gale Schooley. BHS 1961

Madeleine Schooley - March 13, 2018 at 09:33 AM

DO

“ He will truly be missed! What a great guy! I always appreciated the article Joe wrote about my brother Bob Betz when he passed away. Then when my husband Larry died less than a year ago, Joe was instrumental in getting the news out about the book he had written. He always put his arm around me and asked me how I was doing! He always thought of others first. What a servant's heart! Many prayers and thoughts to the family! RiP, Joe!

Diane Owen - March 13, 2018 at 06:33 AM

DH

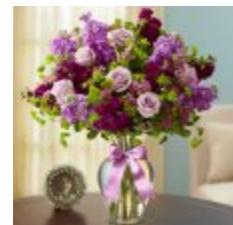
“ I met Joe when we were members of the National Guard. We went to basic training together at Fort Leonard Wood . Somehow Joe arranged for an old DC3 airplane to pick us up at the Fort Leonard Wood airport and, with 25 mile week end passes, 6 or 8 of us from Bluffton, flew into Baer Field and spent the week end in Bluffton. Joe and I became good friends. We talked sports and family and he and his brother, Mike and I played several rounds of golf together. I was proud to call Joe my friend. Condolences to the family.

Dennis D. Houtz

Dennis Houtz - March 12, 2018 at 10:17 PM



“ Shades of Purple was purchased for the family of Joel T Smekens.



March 12, 2018 at 08:02 PM

JG

“ Jerry & Darlene Garrett lit a candle in memory of Joel T Smekens



Jerry & Darlene Garrett - March 12, 2018 at 07:32 PM

TF

“ The Gordon and McCullough Families purchased the Floor Plant for Sympathy for the family of Joel T Smekens.



The Gordon and McCullough Families - March 12, 2018 at 04:03 PM



“ European Sympathy Dish Garden was purchased for the family of Joel T Smekens.



March 12, 2018 at 02:32 PM

VJ

“ Thinking of you all. This is a sad time for Bluffton. Joe will most certainly be missed. Wishing you God's peace and comfort in the days ahead. Love from Valerie and Doris Ann Wilson and Patty Glenn

Valerie Wilson Jackson - March 12, 2018 at 01:41 PM

BH

“ Joe was a wonderful journalist and an even better person. He'll be missed. God Bless you and your family.

Bill Haecker - March 12, 2018 at 12:58 PM



“ Classic Sympathy Dish Garden was purchased for the family of Joel T Smekens.



March 12, 2018 at 12:31 PM

WF

“ Willy Temmerman and Family purchased the Peace, Prayers, & Blessings- Lavender and White for the family of Joel T Smekens.



Willy Temmerman and Family - March 12, 2018 at 11:43 AM

GB

“ Our sympathy to Barb, Angie, Brady and the rest of Joe's family on his passing. It goes without saying that Joe was loved by all and made Wells County a better place throughout his life.

George and Jan Babcock - March 12, 2018 at 10:47 AM



“ 186 files added to the album LifeTributes



Thoma/Rich, Lemler Funeral Home - March 12, 2018 at 10:36 AM

ES

Joe was a real gentleman and a tribute to the journalism profession. I always enjoyed reading his work and cherish I have an autographed copy of his book. He will be missed by all who knew him. All the best to his family during these difficult times. Peace be with you.

Edwin Shipley - March 13, 2018 at 11:00 AM



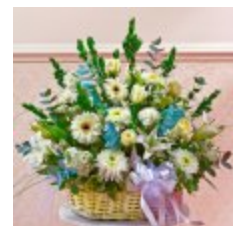
“ Peace, Prayers, & Blessings- All Red was purchased for the family of Joel T Smekens.



March 12, 2018 at 10:15 AM

GS

“ Gearhearts & Smiths purchased the White Large Sympathy Arrangement In Basket for the family of Joel T Smekens.



Gearhearts & Smiths - March 12, 2018 at 09:16 AM

SO

“ Sue and Len Olund purchased the Multicolor Bright Sympathy Floor Basket for the family of Joel T Smekens.



Sue and Len Olund - March 12, 2018 at 12:44 AM



“ Springtime Wishes was purchased for the family of Joel T Smekens.



March 11, 2018 at 09:51 PM



“ Love's Embrace Roses – White was purchased for the family of Joel T Smekens.



March 11, 2018 at 06:58 PM

JM

“ OH MY!!! Smeken's Clan. This is Judy Mugg. I was so sorry to hear of Joe's passing. It bought back so many memories of our Families time together. I sure hope I can get down to see you all. Prayers are with all of your families.

Judy Mugg - March 11, 2018 at 02:17 PM

TB

“ Without that grin, there goes the neighborhood! We'll miss Joe.

Tom and Maureen Butler - March 11, 2018 at 01:34 PM

SS

“ To the Smekens and Fetters families, Steve and I send our sympathies to you all. Your in our thoughts and prayers. Joe was a great guy. Bluffton will miss him.

steve sawyer - March 11, 2018 at 01:07 PM

DG

“ Our prayers are with the Smekens family. Joe will be missed by all. I always enjoyed reading his articles. I will miss his jokes. Dan Gerdom



Dan Gerdom - March 11, 2018 at 09:15 AM

BC

“ So very Sorry to hear about Joe! He was such a very nice Man! A very Good Sports Writer for many years! Joe knew everything about Wells County Sports! Our Prayers are with the Smekens Family at this time! He is now in Heaven with his Lord Jesus Christ! God Bless all the Family! ! Love, Barry and JoEllen Crosbie! ❤️ A Avid Bluffton Tiger!



Barry Crosbie - March 10, 2018 at 09:23 PM

JZ

So sorry to hear our neighbor down the street has went to Heaven. What a great man he was. He was an outstanding sports writer, not only for Wells county but the surrounding area. When I married Sandy Mann and move to Bluffton 25 years ago, Joe remembered me from the Berne Bears 1961 basketball team that we got beat by Kokomo in the last game of the semi state. Kokomo went on to win the state that year. We often joked about the Tigers and the Bears basketball games. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the family. What an awesome man Heaven Gained.

Jerry Zeigler - March 11, 2018 at 09:46 AM

MP

Joe was a great person to work with at the News-Banner. Such a kind person. "Go rest high on that mountain!" You will be greatly missed. Prayers for comfort, peace, and strength to the family.

Martha Poling - March 11, 2018 at 09:20 PM

BR

A kind, sincere, and encouraging man! Our loss is heaven's gain.

Bill Record - March 12, 2018 at 09:58 AM

TC

My mentor and forever my friend.

Tim Creason - March 12, 2018 at 12:25 PM

LA

*So sorry to hear this. I just recently had a nice conversation with Joe at the funeral home when my uncle passed. Joe and my uncle were neighbors on Central St. growing up and we just shared a few memories at the funeral home. Such a nice man, will be missed by many. Sympathy to the family from our family.
Dave and Linda Aker*

Linda Aker - March 12, 2018 at 12:51 PM

TW

Joe was a wonderful guy! With the budding of girls' sports in the mid-seventies, he was interested and fair in his coverage of these competitions. Back in the day, I actually needed to talk on the phone with him or leave a message to inform the NB sports department about our Norwell girls' basketball games or tennis matches. His interviews with me were insightful and pleasant. He was a professional friend. Our community was fortunate to have him.

Terri Worden - March 12, 2018 at 02:22 PM

SO

Joe Smekens, my Brother/Friend, Godfather to my son. He was the definition of good and decent. Uncle Joe, Scottie's favorite Uncle I'm sure they are sharing funny stories together in heaven. He will be missed forever, Sue Olund

Sue Olund - March 12, 2018 at 11:47 PM

RY

*So sorry to hear of Joe's passing. We grew up together in the same Bluffton neighborhood - were best childhood buddies. What a wonderful life he lived, what wonderful memories for us all. Deepest sympathies to the family.
Roger Yule*

Roger Yule - March 13, 2018 at 07:27 AM

LT

Thinking of the family during this time of loss. Must have been a great guy. Happy memories will lessen your sorrow as time goes by. May you find peace. Larry & Bonnie Trout

Larry and Bonnie Trout - March 13, 2018 at 12:05 PM