



John Mitchell Leeper

November 2, 1950 - September 1, 2023

John Mitchell Leeper, 72, of Versailles, passed away Friday, September 1, 2023, at Boone Hospital Center, Columbia, MO, after a 17 month struggle from injury and illness.

He was born November 2, 1950, in St. Louis, Missouri, at Barnes Jewish Hospital, a son of Robert W. and Selma (Old) Leeper and later step-father Arley Kelle. He was third in a line of six siblings.

John was baptized December 3, 1950, at All Soul's Catholic Church in Overland, MO, with his first communion on May 11, 1958, at St. William Church in St. Louis.

He graduated from Hazelwood High School, Hazelwood, MO, in 1969. He had spent his freshman year at Lasalette Catholic Seminary in Jefferson City to become a priest until it was suggested he would make a better Lutheran.

Upon graduation, he joined the U.S. Air Force but was honorably discharged for a health condition.

In 1970, he married Eugenie Salyer from which three children were born.

Growing up in a family of six children, John began working at an early age. He

liked to tell about standing on a milk crate flipping donuts in the deep-fryer early in the morning before school at a local bakery. He later begged a job from a florist shop near his home in St. Louis sweeping floors, watching and learning floral design as he swept. After he and Jeannie were married, he was in line to purchase the florist shop when his father-in-law called saying he needed him to help keep Pioneer Restaurant open around 1973. They moved to Versailles where Milo taught him the ropes. Not able to stay away from the flowers, John opened a small florist shop in Versailles. For a period of time, he owned and operated TOPS Café in downtown Versailles. For many years, he contracted with the county jail to deliver meals to the prisoners two times a day. Pioneer catered many events in the community including Gates Rubber Co., Quality Industries, Chamber of Commerce, Christmas parties and many weddings which included the wedding cake.

Things changed in 1985 for John. He married Ruth Roland Siegel and also acquired two daughters and another son. John and Ruth raised six children, then aged 12 years to 2 years old, along with running the restaurant. In fact, their wedding invitation may be the only one printed in the local newspaper. He felt such love and connection with this community that he didn't want to miss anyone. Ruth tells of the night before their wedding when John was decorating their wedding cake and she was in the office writing paychecks.

John became active in the local Boy Scout Troop here in Versailles joining his sons on many campouts and to Osceola for summer camp, hosting annual swim parties for the troop and even going along on two High Adventure trips to Key West.

He was a 30+ year member of the Versailles Lions Club serving as president and other offices. John and Ruth hosted many Ladies' Nights on their patio and swimming pool with most everyone getting wet by choice or by chance. Those many friends remain today.

John was elected city alderman in April of 1993. In August of that year, Mayor Chuck Pryor appointed him acting-mayor when he was elected to the State Senate. John continued as mayor until 2001. He enacted many positive changes for the community and....one fall, in a campaign for flu shots, Jeanne, and RN, came to city hall and was photographed as she gave him a flu shot. The newspaper headline should have read, "Mayor Shot by Ex-Wife".

The restaurant was sold in 1998 but he didn't sit still very long performing the lead role at the Royal Theatre's "Pajama Game", crewing a 48' sailboat to St. Martin, and working full and part-time at area flower shops. John developed an interest in computers and took six months of classes at a Microsoft Certified Technical Education Center in St. Louis in 2000 learning this new vocation. Microsoft recognized his knowledge and work ethic quickly advancing him as though he had the requisite college degrees he needed for the jobs. In time, he qualified as a project manager and traveled all over the country at the drop of a hat for IBM for many years. He then worked independently closer to home or actually at home for other tech companies. He thoroughly loved it.

In 2005, John and Ruth re-acquired Pioneer although he continued his IT work contributing on weekends or when working from home. In 2012, the restaurant changed hands again. By then, they had discovered RVing and he was able to work as Ruth drove them to out-of-state destinations as long as he had secure internet. John and Ruth traveled mainly to see their children and grandchildren while stopping to see the sights along (and near) the way. In 2013, John and Ruth visited family in Tucson, AZ, and have returned every winter since loving the warmth, lack of humidity and wonderful friends made there. In preparation for old(er) age, a vacation home was purchased in March, 2021 and they planned to travel by air to and from Missouri instead of

driving. This intent was thwarted when he had heart surgery April 18, 2022, and the resulting complications of a bedsore left untreated for too long.

In addition to his wife, Ruth, survivors include his children and spouses: Tom (Jenny Cooper) Leeper, Acworth, Georgia; Becky Siegel (Aaron) Cooper, St. Louis, Missouri; Jimmy (Sanam Kittikuhlsingh) Leeper, Doha, Qatar; Jill Siegel Newton, Versailles, Missouri; Tim (Erica) Leeper, St. Louis, Missouri and Matthew (Carolyn) Siegel, Wells, Maine. His grandchildren include Sidney and Isaac Leeper; Vyra, Carly and Marin Cooper; Seth (Brahya), Logan and Paige Newton; Grace and Myles Leeper; Cole Griffith, Nolan and Emma Siegel and one great-granddaughter, Harper Newton. His siblings are Judy (Larry) Sparks; Bob (Barb) Leeper; Don (Detlef) Walenter; Jan (Roger) Pointer and Jerry Leeper. He was preceded in death by his parents and in-laws, Kenneth and Venona Roland.

A celebration of Life will be held Sunday, September 24th, at the Kidwell-Garber Funeral Home in Versailles with a visitation at 1:00 p.m. and memorial service at 2:00 p.m.

Memorial contributions can be made to the Versailles City Parks, 104 N. Fischer or Versailles Community Betterment, P.O. Box 301.

Arrangements are under the direction and care of the Kidwell-Garber Funeral Home of Versailles.

Previous Events

Visitation

SEP **24.** 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM (CT)

Kidwell-Garber Funeral Home - Versailles Chapel
207 North Monroe St.
Versailles, MO 65084
(573) 378-4655

Celebration of Life

SEP **24.** 2:00 PM (CT)

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Tribute Wall

JN

“ I meant John and that 1980 was just a young kid in trouble he told me to wrote the pioneer he's a real good friend me and the gene he was his best friend and best person ever in my life when we Departed I left town we met here and there always come visit him every once in a while I'll pop in and out pop in and out but he was always there for me he's the best thing ever met stranger and I will never forget him and I will always love him he's one special person that I would never forget love you John

Jonathan Glenn Neff - October 09, 2025 at 06:58 PM