



James "Jim" Lester Russell

August 6, 1939 - January 17, 2025

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of James (Jim) Lester Russell, 85, of Peoria, IL. Jim passed away at the Richard L Owens Hospice Home on January 17th after waging a valiant fight against esophageal cancer. He was surrounded by his loved ones.

Jim was born on August 6, 1939, to Florence (Walker) Russell and Harry Russell in Champaign, IL.

He was a graduate of the University of Illinois College of Agriculture and was a member of Phi Gamma Delta. U of I is where Jim met his wife of 62 years.

Upon graduating, Jim married Mary Lou Houser, then entered the army as a 2nd lieutenant and was stationed at 2nd army headquarters in Laurel, Maryland. He completed six more years with the reserves. Following his discharge, he was employed by First National Bank of Chicago as a farm manager.

After eight years in Chicago, Jim entered the family telecommunications

business in Peoria.

He served on the board of The American Cancer Society, the board of The Children's Home of Illinois, served as President of Kiwanis, helped build homes for Habitat for Humanity, and was a faithful member of his church.

His happy place was on the golf course and fishing with his church buddies in Canada.

Jim loved his family deeply. Two days prior to his passing, he said marrying Mary Lou was the best decision he'd ever made and he had the best family.

He was a great friend to many and committed to his community.

Jim is survived by his wife Mary Lou and three children, Alyssa Lou Russell, of Peoria, IL; James Blake Russell (Emily Lah) of Albuquerque, NM; Clayton Andrew Russell (Wendy Prebil) of Coppel, TX; Grandchildren, Kyala Russell-Owens, Dylan Owens, and Brody Russell.

Jim is also survived by his sister, Nancy (Russell) Hatch (William Hatch) and his sisters-in-law Vicki Dunn, Janice Moody, and brother-in-law Marion Dunn along with many nieces and nephews.

A memorial visitation will be held Saturday, February 15th from 9:30a - 11a at

First Baptist Church, 411 W Lake Ave, Peoria, IL 61614, followed by a Celebration of Life to begin at 11a and presided over by Pastor Rob Collins. A livestream link can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/live/ONf6_dT1Mp4?si=hf4OPk4FcA48f3Xe

Donations may be made to Jim's church, First Baptist Church, 411 W Lake Ave, Peoria, IL 61614 or the OSF HealthCare Cancer Institute, 1310 N. Missouri, Ave, Peoria, IL.

Tribute Wall

SS

“ My sincere condolences to Mary Lou and all the extended members of the Russell family. I was a very young man when I first met Jim, I was hired as an apprentice to the Technical Manager at Houser Communications in Peoria right out of high school. Within a couple years the tech manager left for another job in Louisville, I was still fairly inexperienced but had begun electronic technical courses at ICC. There was quite a bit of uncertainty about promoting me to the technical manager position among the management as Jim was the CEO of multiple business operations in Peoria, Joliet & Champaign. Paging, Telephone Answering Services, Mobile Telephone and Maritime Marine Communication systems to maintain. Jim did not hesitate and ignored other managers opposition to making me responsible as tech manager. It was not just a professional confidence but a personal mentor he provided, he would drop by the technical office sit down and have some of the most intellectual and motivating conversations with me, Jim was an incredible inspiration to me, I was very impressionable at the time, his personal, professional and mentor guidance still influences me today. I did succeed in the technical manager position, when Jim sold the Paging Company I was part of that sale to the new owner.....I went on to have a family in TN and start my own company in Nashville / St. Louis in 1995 serving the telecom industry building cellular networks, today we are still in business and are a \$10M plus a year company. I did call Jim about 5 years ago to personally thank him for everything he did for me, guidance, values, professionalism. Of course Jim was always so modest, it wasn't just two days before he passed that he said marrying Mary Lou was the best decision he ever made, I recall him mentioning it a number of times :) I worked for Jim for almost 10 years. He made a monumental difference in my life, I will be forever grateful \n\nScott Shambaugh

Scott Shambaugh - June 26, 2025 at 01:53 PM

AN

“ Thinking of Jim-and you, his family. Paola Gianturco

Anonymous - April 07, 2025 at 01:11 PM

CM

“ We had no idea of Jim’s passing. We are so sorry. He and Mary Lou were our dear friends all through college and beyond as our children grew up together. We went on many trips together. \nWe went to high school with Jim. His close circle of friends was named after his nickname, the Crowleys. They still communicate to this day.\nOur thoughts and prayers go out to Mary Lou, Alyssa, and family.\nChris and Sandy Moyer

Christopher Moyer - April 06, 2025 at 09:04 PM

MM

“ Wishing you comfort and peace during this time. We feel fortunate to have met Jim and seen his love for his family.

Matt, Nicole and Violet McCloskey - February 17, 2025 at 05:51 PM

VF

“ With deepest sympathy,

Valentine-McCloskey Family - February 10, 2025 at 10:12 AM

DR

“ James "Jim" Lester Russell

Dale and Joyce Risinger - February 03, 2025 at 03:42 PM

DY

“ Me and papa would go with the family every year to steak&shake we would also go on a bunch of other trips, I liked the caterpillar museum and so many other places I cant remember the name of. All great times.

Dylan - January 21, 2025 at 12:57 PM

AN

“ Wishing you peace to bring comfort, courage to face the days ahead . Hugs to you and Mary Lou and the family , Love Patsy

Anonymous - January 21, 2025 at 12:24 PM