



Joe B. Richards

June 12, 1929 - October 13, 2024

Joe B. Richards, age 95, passed away on October 13, 2024, in Bend, OR, where he had lived for the past two years. Joe was born June 12, 1929, in Colfax, WA, the only child of James A. Richards and Alice (Bryan) Richards of Steptoe, WA. When Joe was 10 years old, his parents relocated to Ontario, OR, where his mother was a teacher and school librarian.

During WWII, Joe got up at 5:00 AM to deliver milk before school. Because many of the local men were serving overseas, exceptions were made so that 15-year-olds could drive to do essential work. Another exception made it possible for Joe to drive his parents' car at age 15 to play tenor sax in a band on Saturday nights—even crossing the border into Idaho for dances. During the summers Joe worked in construction and for the US Forest Service in firefighting units. He loved playing football in high school and described himself as “one of the lightest fullbacks in school history and clearly the slowest.”

In 1947 Joe entered the University of Oregon where he majored in liberal arts. He joined ATO and was president of the fraternity his senior year. He graduated in 1951. He married Roberta Tussing in 1951 and they had three children: Jeff Richards, born in 1952, Martin Richards, born in 1956 and Laura Richards, born in 1961. Joe graduated from Willamette Law School in 1954 and was hired as a deputy district attorney in Eugene in the fall of 1954. In 1955 he joined attorneys John Luvaas and Ralph Cobb as an associate attorney and in 1956 the law firm of Luvaas, Cobb & Richards was formed.

Joe practiced with the same firm over the next 58 years as it expanded to Luvaas, Cobb, Richards and Fraser and then Luvaas/Cobb. His practice focused on employment and labor law issues. He represented several school districts including Eugene School District 4-J. In 2013 Joe transitioned from owner to “of counsel” for the firm before retiring at the end of 2016. He then practiced as a pro bono attorney for the Lane County Legal Aid and Advocacy Center until 2020. Joe established himself early on as an active member of the community. In 1958 he was voted Eugene Junior First Citizen. He was president of the Active 20/30 Club as well as president of the Eugene Chamber of Commerce and president of the Lane County Bar Association. Joe was one of the early supporters of Pearl Buck School in Eugene and served as their attorney and as a fundraiser for Pearl Buck Center. He served three terms as a State Representative in the Oregon Legislature from 1965 to 1970, serving on the Ways and Means Committee all three terms as well as the Judiciary Committee and various others. Governor Bob Straub appointed Joe as chairman of the Oregon Environmental Quality Commission. He served two terms from 1975 to 1983. In 1984 he was appointed by Governor Vic Atiyeh as chairman of the Oregon Water Policy Review Board. Joe was one of three Lane County attorneys who went to Mississippi in the late 1960s with the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, a group chartered by President Kennedy. The organization called on the private bar to bring its resources to bear on civil rights problems beleaguering the nation. Joe represented a black man accused of killing a local bootlegger, successfully arguing for a life sentence rather than the death penalty. From 2016 to 2000 much of Joe’s time and energy was spent on defending clients of Lane County Legal Aid who were facing eviction, delivering meals on wheels and serving on the board of Nightingale Hosted Shelters, which started a respite shelter and supportive community in south Eugene for people who were unhoused. Joe was an avid supporter of United Way of Lane County. He was board president in 1979, served on the campaign committee and chaired the Alexis

de Tocqueville Society in 2004/2005.

In 2017 Joe was awarded the Owen M. Panner Professionalism Award by the Oregon State Bar Litigation Section which honors a member of the Bar who exemplifies the highest personal and professional standards. Using the words of Joe's son Martin, "Dad's moral sense of fairness seemed to lead him. Whether it was homelessness, environmental issues, legislative agenda, his client in Mississippi or raising his kids, fairness was a priority. That and being a jokester. That's what I'd like people to know about Dad."

On May 14, 1982, Joe married his good friend Marian Harrell and they set out to successfully blend their two families which consisted of Joe and his three children named above, who were already out of the nest, and Marian and her two children by her former marriage, Amy Harrell, age 11, and Nathan Harrell, age 8. Amy and Nathan describe Joe as "a wonderful role model" and over the years they forged a strong and loving relationship with him and his children.

Joe was always one of the first members to show up at the Downtown Athletic Club just as the door was opening each workday morning. From there he would head to his favorite coffee shop for granola and morning coffee and to enjoy reading the Register Guard. He was still often one of the first attorneys to arrive at the office. Joe had a vigorous running program for over 30 years. He enjoyed running year after year in Eugene's Butte to Butte and San Francisco's Bay to Breakers. He enjoyed sailing at the Eugene Yacht Club and took up windsurfing at Fern Ridge Lake in his 50s. In later years, he walked regularly in the southeast hills of Eugene. He enjoyed foreign travels and happily accompanied Marian on whatever trip she had meticulously planned. He loved music and was an avid reader. Joe particularly loved spending time with his children and all eight of his grandchildren.

Joe and Marian celebrated their 42nd anniversary this year. In 2022 they moved to Bend from their long-time home in Eugene to be nearer their Oregon children and six of their grandchildren.

Joe will be greatly missed by his wife, Marian; his three children, Jeff Richards (Holland) of Tupelo, MS; Martin Richards of Superior, AZ; Laura Richards and her partner Kent Byers of Santa Rosa, CA; step-children, Amy (Bob) Campbell, LaPine, OR; Nathan (Stacy) Harrell, Bend, OR; grandchildren, Joseph Wheelock and his partner Megan Rice of Coarsegold, CA; Jennifer Wheelock of Austin, TX; Caitlyn Campbell, Colton Campbell, and Chase Campbell, of LaPine, OR; and Jack Harrell, Brooke Harrell and Molly Harrell of Bend, OR.

A celebration of life will be held in Eugene at a later date. Remembrances may be made through gifts to United Way of Lane County or Nightingale Hosted Shelters.

Tribute Wall

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“ I first met Joe in 1976 when I was employed as his legal secretary. Our friendship continued over the many years and miles. Joe was a friend, mentor, "Dutch uncle. He was genuine, dignified, never arrogant, a person for all peoples. His intelligence and abilities were superior - his fascination to learn was a quest, and he was a practiced leader. An experienced world traveler, he was quite satisfied with a "beer (Bud Light) and a beach." Joe was fun. He was proud of Marian, indeed his children and grandchildren. Joe will forever be in my heart and head. I was most fortunate to be included in a part of his life.
Leslie Suva, Bandon, Oregon

Leslie Suva - October 31, 2024 at 12:54 PM