

Michael D. Salster



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Class of 1969

Obituary

The license plate on Michael David Salster's old burgundy minivan said it all: WORDCZAR.

The Amelia County resident, who died Tuesday of complications from prostate cancer at age 64, used words all his life as a journalist, public relations consultant and media director for Republican political campaigns and Virginia government.

He had retired in 2010 as director of communications for the Virginia Department of Human Resource Management and was co-owner of The Amelia Bulletin Monitor, which he edited from 1990 to 2000.

A memorial service will be today, Friday, at 11:30 a.m. at Hope Chapel, 9611 Wayside Ave. in Amelia Courthouse. Burial will be in Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Amelia.

The Marietta, Ohio, native was a speech therapy major at Ohio University before enlisting in 1968 in the military, where he eventually oversaw community relations for his command at the German headquarters of the U.S. Army in Europe and gained newspaper editing skills. "That's where he got his love for journalism," said his wife, Ann Morris Salster.

Returning stateside in 1973, he enrolled at Ohio State University, where he completed a journalism degree while earning \$75 a week as a full-time reporter at the Columbus Dispatch.

While covering general assignment, police and legislative news for the Dispatch until 1980, Mr. Salster won a Wolfe Prize for feature writing and a Gannett Award for spot news coverage.

He then worked as a public relations consultant, did corporate communications and worked for a public relations firm that helped establish a seat-belt law in Ohio.

He became a connoisseur of politics. "The irony was, his family members were staunch Union Democrats," his wife said. When he became public relations consultant for the grandson of President William Howard Taft, "his parents just about disowned him," she said.

In 1988, Mr. Salster came to Virginia, recruited as director of communications for the Republican Party of Virginia. He worked on campaigns including Maurice Dawkins' 1988 senatorial bid against Charles S. Robb and J. Marshall Coleman's 1989 gubernatorial bid against L. Douglas Wilder.

Leaving party headquarters, Mr. Salster later directed communications for former Lt. Gov. John Hager and state Sen. Steve Martin and worked on other campaign staffs.

While working for the GOP, he met Ann Morris, publisher of The Amelia Bulletin Monitor. They married in 1989, and Mr. Salster moved to Amelia to work on The Monitor.

"He'd come in to work and people would come to the door, scream, holler and carry on," his wife said. "At the Dispatch, he said they had armed guards and people couldn't ball up a paper and throw it in your face. He couldn't believe he could go to the grocery store and people would jump him. He learned that the heart and soul of a community was the weekly newspaper. He enjoyed it very, very much.

"He became close to a lot of people, and some loved him and some loved to hate him. Ten years ago, when he found out he had prostate cancer, he wrote a special column urging people to (have themselves checked by their doctors). That was something for Mike to do. He never talked about himself. More men came out of the woodwork, bringing him information about it and telling him their experiences with it."

In on the beginnings of the Sorenson Institute for Political Leadership at the University of Virginia, he taught in its Political Leaders Program, instructing candidates on the media.

In addition to his wife, survivors include a daughter, Jennifer Homza of Cleveland; a stepdaughter, Bekki Morris of Amelia; a stepson, Sam T. Morris of Arlington, Vt.; a sister, Joyce Ann Scott of Reno, Ohio; two grandchildren and six stepgrandchildren.