



Willis LeRoy Smith

April 19, 1932 - December 31, 2024

RIGA—Willis “Willie” LeRoy Smith, 92, passed away peacefully on December 31, 2024, at Brookdale Senior Living in Bowling Green, Ohio. Born on April 19, 1932, at the family farm in Riga, Michigan, he was the son of Harland D. Smith and Stella Mae (Mason). Willie graduated from Blissfield High School in 1950. On August 30, 1952, he married Elaine Ann (Anteau) in Jackson, Michigan.

Shortly after their marriage, Willie was deployed overseas to serve in the Korean War as a member of the Army’s 21st Infantry Division. Upon returning home, he worked as an over-the-road truck driver for Mather Springs and Continental Coffee and spent several years as a transmission repairman. Later, Willie and Elaine became the owners of Central Distributors in Toledo, where they dedicated over 40 years to their business, often working seven days a week.

Willie and Elaine traveled extensively, visiting all 50 states, Mexico, Canada, and Austria. However, his heart was always at their sesquicentennial farm in Whiteford Township, Michigan. The farm was a cherished gathering place for family and friends, hosting countless memorable parties and welcoming everyone with open arms—turning strangers into lifelong friends. Willie was also known for his green thumb; he cultivated a thriving vegetable garden every year, producing an abundance of fresh produce that the family enjoyed.

The fruits of his labor were often preserved through canning and freezing, sustaining the family long after harvest.

A man of deep faith, Willie was a longtime member of Sylvania United Church of Christ and served as the Moderator at Central Park Congregational Church. His steadfast belief in God's Word enabled him to face life's challenges and joys with grace.

Willie was an active community member, coaching Little League baseball and supporting Sylvania and Whiteford schools' choir and band programs, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and the Monroe County 4-H program. He was a proud member of the Sylvania Moose Lodge, the VFW, the American Legion (Joseph W. Diehn Post 468), and the Ottawa Lake Sportsman's Club, where he eagerly participated in the annual fish fry alongside close friends.

An avid outdoorsman, Willie loved deer hunting, traveling to Montana with his brother Harry and moose hunting in Canada with his dear friend Bill Haddix and his sons. His passion for car racing led him to the Indianapolis 500 with his sons and brother, as well as many NASCAR events at Michigan International Speedway.

He is survived by his children Janelle (Mark) Chamberlin, Wayne (Paula) Smith, Brenda (Tim) Breneman, Keith Smith, Kent (Sharon) Smith, Kirk Smith, Teresa (Shawn) Hudson and Laura (Kenneth) Kroesche, Nancy Penchoff-Smith; 17 grandchildren; 14 great grandchildren, one great-great grandchild, and sister Frances "Fran" Goetz, brother-in-law Robert Anteau, sister-in-law Henrietta (Thomas) Jahns and special cousin Allison Ouellette. He was preceded in death by his wife of 70 years Elaine, parents and siblings, Jeanne, Harry, Dorothy "Dot", and Mary Anne.

A memorial service will be held on Saturday, January 11, 2025, at 10 a.m. at

the Sylvania United Church of Christ located at 7240 Erie St., Sylvania, OH 43560. Memorial visitation will take place on Friday, January 10, 2025, from 5:30-8:00 p.m. at Wagley Funeral Home, Tagsold Chapel in Blissfield. A luncheon at Sylvania United Church of Christ will immediately follow the burial service.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that you send donations to Sylvania United Church of Christ, Honor Flight or to a charity of your choice.

Online condolences and memories may be shared at www.wagleyfuneralhomes.com.

Previous Events

Memorial Visitation

JAN **10**. 5:30 PM - 8:00 PM (ET)

Wagley Funeral Home Tagsold Chapel (Blissfield)

301 S. Lane St.

Blissfield, MI 49228

(517) 486-2133

info@wagleyfuneralhome.com

<https://www.WagleyFuneralHome.com>

Memorial Service

JAN **11**. 10:00 AM (ET)

Sylvania United Church of Christ

7240 Erie St.

Sylvania, OH 43560

Tribute Wall



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Willis LeRoy Smith.

January 10, 2025 at 01:03 PM



“ Basket of Memories was purchased for the family of Willis LeRoy Smith.



January 10, 2025 at 01:03 PM



“ Country Basket Blooms was purchased for the family of Willis LeRoy Smith.



January 09, 2025 at 09:21 PM



“ Dear Smith Family, We have fond memories of your mom and dad. Your mom was so patient and such a wonderful example for many of us. Willie's energy was amazing and he was so spirited. We consider ourselves fortunate to have spent many years together at Sylvania UCC. May your sweet memories be a comfort to you all in the days ahead. Deepest condolences, Irland and Kathy

Kathy Tashima - January 07, 2025 at 06:57 PM

AV

“ *Laura, Ken, Hannah & Heather,
So sorry to hear of your Dads passing. He will be missed, but will
live in your hearts always. May you have Gods peace at this time
and know others share your grief.
Love and prayers, Auntie A*

Agnes Kroesche Voges - January 06, 2025 at 08:55 PM

LH

“ *I have many childhood memories of Willie helping in 4-H and the fair
with horse events and shows. He was the go to guy if you needed a
brush quick before going in the ring or the scooper picker upper
when the horse left a trail down the isleway as you're coming out of
the stall. After Wayne and Paula married, there were some shared
family events at the Smith house that were always memorable. You
could also show up at the sportsman's club Friday night fish fry's
and expect to see Willie helping out and picking up your plate. He
was an ambitious, friendly, caring person and always entertained
the room. Rest in peace Willie.*

Lisa Hooker - January 06, 2025 at 08:15 PM