

HEAVEN IS GOING TO HAVE BEAUTIFUL PARKS

Ronald Shirley, a former city Parks and Recreation Department director who was known for master landscape gardening and coaching high school sports, died Dec. 27 from prostate cancer.

“Heaven is going to have beautiful parks,” said Margo Shirley, his wife of nearly 40 years.

Ronald Shirley, who was 70, was born and raised in Santa Fe and led the city parks department for 28 years before retiring in 2007. He started in the department as a laborer after funding for his social work position at the former B.F. Young Junior High School ended, his wife said. Her husband always told his workers he wouldn’t ask them to do anything he hadn’t done or wouldn’t do, Margo Shirley said.

Ronald Shirley also coached football and girls basketball at Santa Fe High School. “He wanted to foster the good in the kids,” his wife said.

Lifelong friend Tom Manning, the athletic director at St. Michael’s High School, called Shirley a sports enthusiast. From listening to Yankees games on a transistor radio as kids to texting about player statistics and their fantasy football teams as adults (Shirley was a Giants fan), the two friends never lost touch of their passion for sports, Manning said.

Manning and Shirley became friends when they were 8 years old and growing up in the same neighborhood. Through the years, as college roommates and then as fathers and coaches, Manning said, Shirley always had his back. “We were more like brothers than friends.”

Shirley also was known for his “Ronnie-isms,” his wife said, describing what she called an “unbelievable” sense of humor.

He sang in the shower, made jokes after every new haircut and sent anonymous letters to his friends who liked the Dallas Cowboys — a team he despised, Margo Shirley said with a laugh.

More than anything, she said, her husband was a man of faith, family and community.

He graduated from St. Michael’s High in 1966 and New Mexico State University in 1972 with a degree in social work. He married Margo in 1979, and the couple had two children and three grandchildren, who called him “Sherpa.”

His one regret was not becoming a teacher, his wife said. But for her and others, he accomplished that goal.

“He taught people to be kind,” she said. “He taught me humility.”

Shirley’s daughter said she saw him as the epitome of a good person. “He always gave and never wanted credit,” Lindsey Shirley-Stringer said.

Ronald Shirley’s son, Aaron Shirley, said his his father taught him about being an admirable man, enjoying sports and putting family first.

“The message he always told me is life’s hard and it’s all about how you get up,” Aaron Shirley said.

Even during his five years of fighting cancer, Ronald Shirley stuck with that mindset. His wife said he never complained. He kept his sense of humor and never missed his morning cup of coffee.

Since her husband’s death, Margo Shirley said, she has continued to make a cup of coffee the way he liked it — cream with no sugar, heated in the microwave for 25 seconds after brewing. She sets it next to his picture as she sips on her own coffee, savoring one of his loves.

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Ron Shirley

May 15, 1948 - December 27, 2018

(1). Ron (Ronald D. Shirley) Shirley was born on May 15, 1948 in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He graduated from St. Michael's High and received his Bachelor's Degree from New Mexico State University. After retirement, Ron received his Master Gardener Certification from New Mexico State Extension service. Ron died on December 27th, 2018 after a courageous battle with prostate cancer.

(2) . Ron, worked as a Social Worker for La Familia Medical Center and Santa Fe Public Schools. He began his career with the City of Santa Fe in 1978, retiring in 2006, as Parks and Recreation Director after 27 years of dedicated service. Serving the needs of the Community and beautifying his beloved City...he could be seen driving his 'Unit 600" wagon throughout the City. He was a visible leader and you never knew when "Boss" or "Mr. Shirley" would appear. Ron, oversaw Parks, Recreation, Swimming Pools, Human Service Providers, open space and trails, Santa Fe Beautiful, Ft. Marcy Complex, GCC, Marty Sanchez Golf Course, graffiti unit, special events and Plaza activities .

Ron, felt the most important aspect of his job was to make certain the Youth of his beloved City had access to the usage of the various City facilities especially the fields. As a result of this commitment ...he worked closely with the various youth athletic leagues and Public and Private schools in Santa Fe.

Ron's passion for sports was known by all. He coached his children and hundreds of other City youth in YAFL, Little League and Softball. He also coached at the high school level at Santa Fe High School ; girls basketball and football and was a basketball referee.

(3). Ron lived his life serving the needs of others, as a devoted husband, father, grandfather, uncle, friend, community member and boss. Ron was well respected by his employees , and he didn't ask them to do anything he hadn't done. He was vested in his community and took pride in his Parks and expected the same from his employees. He represented the City with humility and gave credit to his employees for the successes during his tenure. He was a man of few words ... preferred to stay in the background while they got all the credit. Ron expected the best from himself...and that expectation was the same for his employees. Ron, truly cared for his employees on a personal level. He was there to listen, to guide, and to lead them. He could be heard...on many occasions saying he loved his job.

(4) Ron was born and raised in Santa Fe and upon graduating from New Mexico State University he returned to Santa Fe to make a difference in his Community...which eventually would give back so much to him and his family.

Upon Ron's retirement, he began his second career working for Santa Fe Public Schools. He worked as a Truancy/Attendance Officer at Santa Fe High School. His training as a Social Worker assisted him in those difficult situations. His primary focus was to make certain students were in class.

He also worked as an Elementary and High School substitute creating special relationships with the students, teachers, and principals. He became sought after to sub at schools.

Ron, was then asked to be the Athletic Manager at Santa Fe High where he remained for two years. His connections with the City and his expertise as Parks and Recreation Director helped him to succeed in this position.

Ron, also served for 7 years under Monsignor Jerome Martinez as a member on the Building Committee and founding member of Santa Maria de La Paz Catholic Community. He was a life long member of the SF Elks Lodge #460, youth leagues board member, and past membership of NMAA, NMPRA., to name a few.

His love for his beloved Yankees, New York Giants and Notre Dame was known by all, but not surpassed by the love he gave to his family, his wife Margo, daughter Lindsey (Paul), son Aaron and his precious grandchildren who he adored ; Adam, Liam and Maggie.

Submitted by Margo Shirley