

John Ernest Gregg Jr. | 1924-2016

Published Saturday, March 12, 2016



John Ernest Gregg Jr.

John Ernest Gregg Jr., also known as “Ernie” or “Sonny” to his Texas family, died Wednesday, March 2, 2016, in Denver. He had suffered a traumatic brain injury from a fall while raking pine needles in his front yard.

Memorial service is 10 a.m. Saturday, March 12, at the First United Methodist Church in Durango, Colo.

A memorial service for his Texas friends and family will be held in conjunction with the Gregg Reunion in Decatur in October 2016.

Ernie was born Aug. 5, 1924, in Marfa to J. Ernest Gregg Sr. and Mary Elizabeth Gregg. His father, originally from the Decatur area, was superintendent of schools in Marfa. Ernie graduated in 1942 from Marfa High School, where he played football and tennis and ran track. He attended Texas A&M University, graduating with honors in 1948 with a degree in mechanical engineering. His studies were interrupted by World War II, when he trained as a flight navigator with the Army Air Corps.

Ernie began his engineering career with the Bureau of Reclamation in Chico, Calif. During President Eisenhower’s administration, Ernie’s job was declared redundant – an event the family referred to as being “fired by Ike” or “FBI’ed.”

During this time, Ernie moved to his parents’ land south of Decatur where he helped build their retirement home. In 1953, the Bureau of Reclamation offered him a position in Durango, Colo., and Durango became his new home.

During his 33 years with the Bureau he worked on many water storage and irrigation projects. He retired from the Durango office as chief project engineer in 1979.

In 1975, after being a bachelor for many years, Ernie married Mary Ann Creek, a widow with three small children. They were an active family, participating in camping, backpacking, snowmobiling, canoeing, boating, scouting and competitive swimming.

After retirement, Ernie and Mary Ann enjoyed traveling. They visited Norway, Scotland, Ireland, the Holy Lands, Switzerland, Germany, Mexico and Alaska. They made camping trips in their RV in Colorado and across the western United States.

Ernie was a master gunsmith and enjoyed woodworking, hunting, fly fishing and bowling. He was a knowledgeable photographer, bird-watcher and gardener, taking great joy in the strawberries he could grow at 6,500 feet.

He earned his pilot's license in the mid-'70s, using his Cessna 172 to transport his kids to swim meets, Girl Scout camps and family events. He often flew to Decatur to visit family and to attend the annual Gregg Reunion.

Ernie was a member of Kiwanis and the NRA and helped design and build an indoor gun club in Durango.

He was a wonderful father and husband, a devoted Christian and member of the First United Methodist Church of Durango for more than 50 years. Over the years, he held every office available to laymen in the church and was a longtime member of the Methodist Men's weekly breakfast prayer group, where he perfected his recipe for biscuits and gravy and enjoyed his coffee.

Ernie is survived by his wife, Mary Ann of Durango, Colo.; sisters Elaine Boyer of Decatur and Mary Gregg of Denton; children Mark Creek of Flagstaff, Ariz., Jim Creek of Fort Collins, Colo., and Mary Jo Gerster of Golden, Colo.; and nieces Judy Boyer Deaton of Decatur, Jann Boyer Rainey of Hilton Head, S.C., and Ellen Boyer of Fort Worth.

Ernie was blessed with nine grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Memorial donations may be made to Flight for Life or to the First United Methodist Church of Durango.