



Richard Edwin Waldecker

February 21, 1943 - June 20, 2026

Richard Edwin Waldecker - June 20, 2026, age 83 of Northville.

Beloved husband of the late Margaret. Loving father of James Waldecker. Dear brother of the late Connie Orr, and brother-in-law of Tim (Joan) Haber, William Axtell, and James (Cheryle) Axtell. Proud uncle of Michael (Tosha), Rick (Wendi), Elizabeth (Chris), Carol, Patrick (Allee), Alex (Danielle), and Victoria (Justin).

Richard Waldecker was born February 21, 1943 in Dearborn, Michigan to Edwin and Ethel Waldecker. Growing up on Audrey Street in Dearborn, he watched as Ford built its Research and Engineering campus during his childhood. He graduated from Edsel Ford High School in 1961, and as a young adult, he worked to put himself through college, stocking shelves at Kroger. In May 1966, he began applying his innate knowledge of cars and mechanics to a position at Ford Motor Company, where he worked until February 2007. By August 1971, he received his Bachelor of Arts degree from the Detroit Institute of Technology.

Both his work and education were interrupted in June 1967 when he was drafted into the United States Army. He was first stationed at Fort Holabird in Baltimore, Maryland where he was trained to be a counterintelligence agent. During the summer of 1968, he was sent to Army Language School at Fort

Bliss in El Paso, Texas to learn Vietnamese. Arriving in Vietnam on September 11, 1968, Richard served as an intelligence agent attached to the 101st Airborne. He applied his extraordinary memory and thorough investigative techniques to understanding the background and behaviors of both the enemy and army personnel. Richard had many stories from Vietnam. Although he was a sergeant (E-5), his investigations could only be stopped by a general or higher rank (e.g., President of the United States). The fact that he understood Vietnamese was kept classified from fellow agents but proved to be useful. His expertise with vehicles was tested by driving army jeeps at 70 miles per hour through the jungle at night with the headlights off to avoid being sniped by the Viet Cong (VC). Of greater concern than the VC was the possibility of hitting a water buffalo, which thankfully did not happen. After returning stateside in September 1969, Richard performed background checks on individuals entering the U.S. Army while being stationed in Rockford, Illinois. According to one story, he and a fellow agent were handed a notebook left in a diner that listed funding sources to groups terrorizing college campuses and government buildings at that time. The notebook was passed along to his command and was used to prevent further attacks. Richard was honorably discharged from the United States Army in July 1970 and returned to work at Ford.

Although he did not complete a graduate degree, Richard did take some graduate classes. It was during one of these classes (a course on 19th century British radicals at the University of Detroit in the fall of 1971) that he met his wife Margaret. They were married on May 5, 1973. Before marriage, Richard took a trip throughout continental Europe, and later ran in 1972 as the Republican candidate for state representative in the 32nd district (Dearborn Heights), losing to a long-time Democratic incumbent.

Richard and Margaret began married life in Dearborn Heights, but soon moved to a house on Orangelawn in Livonia. Their son James was born in

August 1974. Until 1987, Richard worked in automotive crash testing at Ford, preparing vehicles with the proper instrumentation for crash, supervising the crash, and then documenting the crash in reports for the government. He was rigorous in documentation and made sure government requirements were met. When an engineer attempted to conceal a vehicle's name, he wrote "Pinto II" in a drafted report, which prompted the engineer to reveal that the vehicle name was "Escort." As a result of an abundance of overtime hours for a record number of crash tests in 1977, Richard was able to move his family to a house in Canton Township, where he resided for over 48 years. Richard loved baseball and took his family to many baseball games from Detroit to Chicago to Montreal and throughout the Midwest. He also took his family twice to the United Kingdom and included a road trip (via ferry from Wales) to Ireland. He spent many hours teaching his son baseball and exercised extraordinary patience through many tokens at the batting cages getting young James to make consistent contact in the fast pitch cages.

During the second half of his Ford career, Richard worked on shaker testing of transmission components in Livonia, earning the nickname "Captain Video" for his early adoption of borescope imaging to understand component failures. Although he had played softball for many years, he transitioned to long-distance running in the 1990s and 2000s to manage his Crohn's Disease. Originally diagnosed with Crohn's in the early 1970s, he had endured many surgeries until he found lifestyle changes made a greater impact. He ran numerous marathons, half-marathons, and 10K races until his late 60s. He was briefly president of the Canton Historical Society and contributed to moving the Cady-Boyer Barn to Cherry Hill Village in 2006. After retirement from Ford in 2007, he was involved in the local Veterans of Foreign Wars post, the Early Engine Club, 101st Airborne associations, and the Association of Former Intelligence Officers. He loved farming and one of his greatest joys was getting out on his tractors. He owned five vintage farm tractors, which he

used for farming land in Canton Township under the ITC electrical lines near Cherry Hill Village. The “Under-the-Wire Farm” grew vegetables to supply food pantries and was used as an educational opportunity for student groups and church youth groups to learn about harvesting food. He was also a docent at the Ford Piquette Avenue Plant Museum from 2016 to 2020, telling the story of the Model T to visitors from around the world.

Richard also spent time in the mid-2010s speaking to veterans on the impact that exposure to Agent Orange has had on the health of many who were in Vietnam, including him. He was diagnosed with Parkinson’s Disease in 2016, which prompted a move many years later to Northville Township for enhanced levels of care. Throughout this trial and after Margaret’s death in 2018, Richard read the Bible numerous times, collected volumes on Reformed theology, and relied on his faith in Jesus Christ to know that his ultimate home was not in Dearborn or Canton Township, but among the places Christ has prepared for his people (John 14:2-3).

Visitation Thursday, June 25th from 5 PM to 9 PM and Friday, June 26th from 1 PM to 9 PM at Vermeulen-Sajewski Funeral Home, 46401 Ann Arbor Road West (between Sheldon and Beck) Plymouth.

Funeral Service Saturday, June 27th at 10:30 AM, also at the funeral home.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, 2965 Leonard Street NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49525.

Interment Parkview Memorial Cemetery, Livonia.

To share a memory, please use the share a memory tab on this webpage.

Cemetery Details

Parkview Memorial Cemetery

34205 Five Mile Road
Livonia, MI 48154

Upcoming Events

Visitation

JUN 25. 5:00 PM - 9:00 PM (ET)

Vermeulen-Sajewski Funeral Home Plymouth
46401 Ann Arbor Road West
Plymouth, MI 48170
(734) 459-2250
plymouth@vermeulenfh.com

Visitation

JUN 26. 1:00 PM - 9:00 PM (ET)

Vermeulen-Sajewski Funeral Home Plymouth
46401 Ann Arbor Road West
Plymouth, MI 48170
(734) 459-2250
plymouth@vermeulenfh.com

Funeral Service

JUN 27. 10:30 AM (ET)

Vermeulen-Sajewski Funeral Home Plymouth
46401 Ann Arbor Road West
Plymouth, MI 48170
(734) 459-2250
plymouth@vermeulenh.com

Tribute Wall



“ *Blue Caribbean Bouquet was purchased for the family of Richard Edwin Waldecker.* ”



2 hours ago



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Richard Edwin Waldecker.* ”



3 hours ago