



Ronald M. Payok

November 16, 1944 - July 10, 2023

It is with heavy hearts and a deep sense of loss that we announce the passing of Ronald Milan Payok, a truly exceptional individual who touched the lives of many. He departed this world on July 10, 2023, leaving a legacy of love, kindness, and caring to everyone who knew him.

Born on November 16, 1944 in Detroit, Ron graduated from Lowrey High School in 1962. He served in United States Army from 1967-1969. He later received a bachelor's degree from Wayne State University and a master's degree from the University of Detroit. He worked as an educator in Oak Park School District for over 30 years, serving Roosevelt Middle School, Oak Park High School, and finally, as principal at Lessenger Elementary School.

Much of Ron's life was spent with the community at St. Lazarus Serbian Orthodox Cathedral in Detroit, and especially its choir, SSS Ravanica. Through singing in church services on Sundays, choir practice, and trips to sing at other Serbian churches all over the country, Ron made lifelong, incredible friendships that flourish to this day.

It was as a member of the Ravanica choir that he met Michalene, who sang with the St. Demetrius church choir in Akron, OH. They married in 1971 and settled in Warren. Matthew was born in 1976. The family extended to Ron's mother Mary, his sister Joanie, Joanie's husband Milan, and his nephew

Gregory.

Ron and Michalene celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 2021, along with many of the same Ravanica friends who celebrated their wedding in 1971. Their love lasted a lifetime, through ups and downs, and could fill the pages of 1,000 books. It is said that their relationship even soothed hostile relations between Michigan and Ohio, and may have contributed to settlement of the Toledo War.

Ron was devoted to his family, but his "family" only started with his relatives. On Christmas and other holidays, his door was always open to anyone who needed a place to celebrate with others. He and Michalene were always surrounded by their friends in the Ravanica choir, living, travelling, and laughing. Ron also made his co-workers his family, especially his staff at Lessenger Elementary School, who still regularly get together more than 10 years after Ron's retirement.

In all the schools he worked, Ron's commitment to excellence and unwavering belief in the potential of every child were the cornerstones of his leadership. He possessed a remarkable ability to connect with students on a personal level, making them feel seen, heard, and valued. Through his warmth and genuine interest in their lives, he instilled confidence and ignited a passion for learning that would accompany these children throughout their lives.

In his personal time, Ron loved the Detroit Lions, the Michigan State University Spartans, reading, and listening to music. He and Michalene liked to travel and visited Serbia several times in the last 10 years. But most of all, Ron loved seeing his friends and family, joking, laughing, and telling stories. He cherished every moment he could with all of his loved ones, and those memories will last forever.

Ron is survived by his beloved wife of over 50 years, Michalene; his son Matthew (Jennifer) and his nephew, Gregory, who was another son to him; his grandchildren Trey, Etta, and World; his grandnephew and niece Nicholas and Amelia, who were grandchildren to him as well; and many other nieces, nephews, and extended family. He is also survived by his extraordinary, lifelong friends from the Ravanica choir and St. Lazarus, his co-workers and former students from Oak Park, and countless others whose lives he touched. To say he will be missed does not do justice to the hole he leaves our lives.

A celebration of Ron's life will be held on July 14, 2023 at St. Lazarus Serbian Orthodox Cathedral, 4575 East Outer Drive in Detroit, with visitation from 9:30-11:00 a.m., and a funeral at 11:00 a.m. Family, friends, and community members will gather to honor his memory, share stories, and draw strength from the lasting impact he made on their lives.

In lieu of flowers, the family kindly requests donations be made to the Ravanica Choir or to the college funds of his grandchildren in honor of Ron. Contributions made in his memory will continue his legacy of kindness and support for those in need.

In our collective grief, we find solace in knowing that Ronald Payok now rests in eternal peace, guided by the light of his faith.

Cemetery Details

Great Lakes National Cemetery

4200 Belford Road
Holly Township, MI 48442

Previous Events

Visitation

JUL 14. 9:30 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)

St. Lazarus Serbian Orthodox Cathedral Ravanica
4575 East Outer Drive
Detroit, MI 48234

Funeral Service

JUL 14. 11:00 AM (ET)

St. Lazarus Serbian Orthodox Cathedral Ravanica
4575 East Outer Drive
Detroit, MI 48234

Tribute Wall

JL

“ *Mr Payok was my principal at Lessenger in the 90s. For the 5 years I was there, he was my biggest supporter and every time I got sent to the office he always told me that I was too smart to behave like that. And when my mom passed in 1996 he not only showed up to the funeral but brought numerous other teachers and had the entire 4th grade make me cards n told me that my school was there for me. I will never forget the faith he had in me or the support and encouragement he gave. I'm grateful to have had him as a role model. I'm sincerely sorry for the family's loss.*

Jamie Lieberman - August 06, 2024 at 02:03 PM

NB

“ *Its many months since the loss of this wonderful man. I'm so very sorry that I didn't learn of his passing way before now.*

Mr. Payok was a strong advocate for many students he counseled. We all will miss him and have fond memories of his infectious laugh and handsome smile.

My deepest condolences to the entire family and to all of the Oak Park community. May Mr. Payok's memory be for a blessing.

Nancie Rakotz Becker - November 09, 2023 at 07:36 AM

JN

Thank you for bringing this to our attention, Nancie - Ron was a terrific man - very community-minded and dedicated to the education of our youth - I enjoyed speaking to the kids at the invite of Ron Payok - I used to bump into him at Davison Coney, as he we happened both to be bringing lunch back to our staffs. May Ron Payok's memory be for blessings.... Jerry Naftaly, former Mayor of Oak Park

Jerry Naftaly - November 09, 2023 at 04:49 PM

MG

“ Dear Michalene, Matthew, and family,

Cindy and I extend our deepest sympathy to the entire Payok family. We learned of his passing en route from our return from our Florida home.

Our lives and friendship extends around 75 years, and three family generations. I remember the days we ran around Serbian Hall as youngsters, church sports activities, church choir trips, lunch gatherings at WSU, and other family events.

Reflecting upon his life, what truly stands out was his love and commitment to others. He always gave of himself and never wanted anything in return. To be included amongst his friends was truly a treasure to behold. This genuine warmth and love extended from his family, personal friends, church community, and professional life as an educator. Many school principals are feared by their respective students, but Ron's students offered up hugs and kisses for him.

For all of us who shared our lives with him, there will be a tremendous void going forward. Thank you for everything good buddy, Vecnaja pamjat. Memory be eternal.

With love and warmest regard to all,

Millard and Cindy Golusin

Millard Golusin - July 13, 2023 at 08:32 AM