

# LEE H. BRANDENBURG

June 8, 1930 - December 28, 2017

## ~ A Life Full of Kindness, Compassion & Boundless Energy ~

Lee H. Brandenburg, 87, of Monte Sereno and Pebble Beach, CA peacefully passed away surrounded by loving family and friends on December 28, 2017.

Lee lived his life to the fullest with purpose, determination and selfless dedication for those he loved and cared about as well as for the philanthropic causes he so passionately supported. Lee was truly the original "Most Interesting Man in the World" – a one-of-a-kind special soul whose mold was broken the day he was born. He was a multi-talented human being who shared his gifts so willingly with others – friends and strangers alike – always beginning with a hand shake or a hug. A brilliant man – he was equally comfortable chatting with presidents and movie stars as he was with children and with the down and out. In truth, Lee was just a very down to earth fellow, without pretense whatsoever.

Deeply admired and loved by his family and friends – both near and far – Lee lived a life full of boundless energy sharing kindness and compassion. With his hallmark twinkly blue eyes, big beautiful smile and pleasant demeanor, Lee was an incredibly caring person who went out of his way to make sure that no one felt excluded from any conversation, activity or gathering. He cared deeply for his fellow man, his community and his nation. Moreover, he was never one to say an ill-word about anyone, believing instead in the power of positive thinking.

Aside from being a successful real estate investor and developer Lee wrote two books: "The Captive American", which helped to spark political term limits in forty-seven states. He also wrote "The Dawn of Darkness," a novel about the Bataan Death March and the treatment of our prisoners in their prison camps in Manchuria, during the Second World War. He co-produced with William Crain: "The Kid From Not So Big", shown on HBO on Christmas Day, 1989. His latest project is a screenplay he has been researching and writing. He invented the "immobile home", a concept that gave mobile home owners a private patio, gardens and garages.

With wife Diane, he was a prolific philanthropist. Lee will be forever remembered for his unparalleled energy in all that he did, all while singing his favorite songs or telling his favorite stories and jokes along the way. Lee and Diane were beautiful partners in life, recently celebrating their 66<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, and to celebrate his 87<sup>th</sup> birthday, Lee threw out the first pitch at the San Jose Giant's baseball game in June 2017.

Lee was born on June 8, 1930 in New York, New York to parents Jessie (Sokolski) and Melford Brandenburg. He had one sister, Barbara (Goldberg) who pre-deceased him. Lee grew up in New York in the 1930's and 40's and experienced first-hand the effects of our nation's Depression on his family, friends and neighborhood. It taught him a thing or two about the value of a buck and about humanity for others. In the late 1940's, Lee followed his mom and dad to California. Lee attended San Jose State University where he became a member of the ROTC as well as the Sigma Nu Fraternity and graduated in 1952 a proud Spartan. He would meet Diane Struble while at SJS and in Lee fashion, actively wooed her to become his bride.

It was also at this time that Lee shipped off to Augusta, GA to obtain his officers, O.C.S. training at Camp Gordon. He then was stationed at the Presidio in San Francisco. He reached rank of First Lieutenant in the United States Army and he was always proud of his service in the US military.

In the mid-50's, after discharge, he decided to open a used car lot on West San Carlos Street known as The Private Owners Auto Exchange. He often laughed when recalling that he repainted damaged cars with a stick in lieu of a brush. Times were different back then, he'd remark with a chuckle.

Lee became a salesperson with the local San Jose realty firm of Stone & Schulte. After a few years of selling residential lots and earning between \$125 and \$175 commission per lot, Lee formed Empire Realty Company as his own real estate brokerage company as well as forming Brandenburg-Naylor, a development company intent on creating his own residential subdivisions. Some of Lee's subdivisions included the city of Saratoga's Subdivision No. 1, Country Squire Estates, as well as Argonaut Glen, portions of Mulberry Lane, Sweetbrier, and Briarwood in San Jose's Willow Glen area, Wooded Hills of Almaden, Lynn Oaks in West San Jose, and so many others.

During this time Lee also branched out into small office buildings, multi-family residential, and commercial retail - both strip centers and neighborhood shopping centers such as Park Victoria, the first center in the City of Milpitas, and Irvington Plaza, an early retail center in Fremont.

In the late 1960's Lee recognized an opportunity in the market to provide low cost housing in a private atmosphere with luxurious recreational facilities and embarked on developing adult mobile home communities in the South Bay.

He formed Brandenburg-Staedler in 1968 with Rudy Staedler to pursue these ventures and John V. Moore joined the team as a partner in 1972 to make it Brandenburg, Staedler & Moore. Together they built 17 communities in six cities comprising almost 4000 spaces, which most the firm still owns, operates, and manages today.

In 1978, Lee was joined by his son Eric to form "Brandenburg Properties" and in 1983, was joined by Bill Baron, and in 1986 by Chuck Butters.

This team went on to acquire and develop over 15,000 acres of property in 6 states and in British Columbia, Canada. Notable achievements over the course of this partnership include the nationally-acclaimed Cinnabar Hills Golf Club, a high-end public 27-hole golf club located in the heart of San Jose with the largest, most accurate historical golf memorabilia museum west of the Mississippi. The team also obtained approvals for an over 1,500 residential/golf community known as Silver Creek Valley Country Club in San Jose, re-claimed a 104-acre quarry on Capitol Expressway into a thriving retail and residential development and assembled 5.5 acres in downtown San Jose destined to become home to 1,500 residential units. Countless other projects and investments located in northern and southern California, Texas, Louisiana, Georgia, South Carolina and Florida kept Lee busy. And he loved every minute of staying busy.

Lee thought creatively and "beyond" most – as it was his passion to think, think hard and then think even harder. He was never afraid to ask a question, and he encouraged others to ask as well. He regularly encouraged others to think outside the box and to ask "why" when an answer wasn't feeling quite right. He was determined to achieve what he set out to accomplish. If he didn't have the skill, he'd learn it. If he didn't know the answer, he'd study up. He was just one of those guys that was always right in the middle of it all, and as a result, he learned valuable lessons along his life's journey.

Lee, and Diane, have been recognized with a number of prestigious awards over the years due in part to their incredibly generous community spirit, including the San Jose Medical Center Foundation Legacy Award, San Jose State University Tower Award, San Jose Legacy Award, Junior Achievement Business Hall of Fame, Glenn George Heart of Philanthropy Award, Boy Scouts Character Award, and San Jose Silicon Valley Chamber of Commerce Outstanding Community Volunteer Award.

Well known as his public gifts were, though, not as well-known was his generosity to strangers, friends, employees, and partners. A \$100 tip to a restaurant wait person would not be unusual, or financial assistance to a down and out friend for monthly expenses, or staff, he helped in buying a much-needed car or even a house, or partners he financed into new projects - all were bettered because of his altruistic and giving approach to life.

Lee was regularly known to enter a room full of strangers and exit the same room full of friends as he was curious and always interested in chatting with and learning about others. He had an expansive, inquisitive mind that allowed him to easily converse and was also regularly prepared to share stories of his own experiences.

He enjoyed traveling and in the process, would learn all there was to learn about his destinations and those he encountered along the way – most of whom became friends. Clearly, all who had the good fortune to encounter Lee came away with a story or two, songs in their heart and mind, and also came away a better person as a result.

In addition to travelling, Lee loved games, including Gin Rummy, but his true passion was golf. He loved the principles of the game: honesty, integrity, respect for history, and of course, the fellowship. He was a founding member of the Spyglass Hill Golf Club and had golf memberships during his life, including: Almaden Country Club, La Rinconada Golf Club, the Vintage Club, Sharon Heights and The Preserve. His most favorite, of course, would be Cinnabar Hills.

He was a regular attendee at The Masters Golf Tournament, and was a consistent amateur player in many televised golf tournaments, including the Bob Hope Desert Classic, the Sinatra Invitational and the famed Crosby Clambake. At the latter, year after year Lee and Diane would regularly host house guests at their home on the 2<sup>nd</sup> fairway at Pebble Beach, including Glen Campbell, Johnny Bench, Jack Lemmon, Foster Brooks, Arnold Palmer, Chip Beck and many, many others. There was always a party going on at the Brandenburg's – and everyone (and we really do mean everyone) was regularly welcomed with open arms.

By any measure, Lee lived a full and complete life – some would say more – without any reservations or holdbacks whatsoever. In late March 2017, however, Lee and Diane's eldest son Eric passed away from a sudden heart attack and as a result, both parent's hearts were broken. Lee would acknowledge that he was never quite the same in the aftermath. Through his transition, Lee now joins hands with Eric in heaven, together with Lee's beloved mom Jessie, who had a very special bond with both men. Lee also joins his father Melford and in-laws Dr. Homer and Adelaide Struble.

Who knows what Lee and Eric are up to high above us...but take a moment to chuckle knowing that God certainly has his hands full!

Lee is survived by his beloved wife of 66 years, Diane (who he lovingly called "Muffin" or "GiGi" – embraceable terms for the caring soulmate Lee so enjoyed in his life) and their three living children Karen, Gary and Bill. He is also leaves behind his four grandchildren Diana Lane (Jason), Brenten Brandenburg, Taylor Brandenburg and Jackson Brandenburg, his two great grandchildren, Bella Grace Lane and Aiden Lane, his two favorite cats, Scamp and Miss Muffit and an office full of dedicated business partners and team members. He is also survived by many cousins and second cousins located in the northeast.

A Celebration of Lee's Life – well, he wanted a "big-ass party" and we'd be remiss if we didn't share it that way – will be held in the coming months for friends and family to enjoy. In lieu of flowers, the family suggests that you take a moment to reach out and express a random act of kindness to family, friends or strangers alike. After all, Lee believed that if only our world could be a little kinder with a bit more shared empathy among us, we'd certainly be better off. And only if your spirit is inclined to do so, you are welcome to contribute to The Silicon Valley Children's Fund, The Forgotten International, The Tibet Fund or a non-profit organization you care about in honor of Lee Brandenburg and his incredible life of selflessly giving to others. Lee will be missed, though never, ever forgotten.

