

## Gloucester City News Obituaries May 2025

To see the obituaries in context on the newspaper page and to see any photos included, please ask to see the back issues, which may be in paper or microfilm format.

### ***Joseph Negri (May 8<sup>th</sup>)***

Joseph Negri, 64, born and raised in Gloucester City, passed away on April 24, 2025.

Joe's loving spirit is carried on by his wife, Kim; his children, Nicole and Joe; his grandchildren, Hayley, Jaden and Cooper; his sister, Betty; and his nieces and nephews. He is now peacefully reunited with his mother and father, Grace and Paul; his brothers, Jack and Gavin; and his sister Elaine.

Friends and relatives attended his Remembrance Ceremony at Creran Celebration in Gloucester City.

### ***Robert Yeager Jr. (May 8<sup>th</sup>)***

Robert J. "Bug Juice" Yeager Jr., 62, a lifelong resident of Gloucester City, passed away suddenly on April 29, 2025, to the shock and dismay of his family and friends.

A generous, outgoing, hard-working man who was often the life of the party, Bob was well known around town for his smile, his laughter and his sometimes edgy jokes.

Bob's viewing will be Thursday, May 8, from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. at the Etherington & Creran Funeral Homes, 700 Powell St., Gloucester City, followed by his Funeral Ceremony at 5 p.m. during which family and friends can speak and share their memories. The celebration of Bob's life will continue afterwards at Bobby Ray's, 13 S. Black Horse Pike, Mount Ephraim.

He is survived by his wife, Roseann (nee DePalma) Yeager, the love of his life and soulmate.

Bob is also survived by his daughter Alicia Faso (Anthony); his father, Robert J. Yeager Sr. (Marina); his grandchildren, Dominic, A.J., Nate, Justin and Vincent; his brother Erich Yeager (Masako); Katie Sauck (Brian) and Alexandra "Sandy" Yeager; his faithful fur babies Eva and Mia; his nieces and nephews Peyton, Briana and the late Garrett; and his brother-in-law, Anthony DePalma.

A graduate of Gloucester City High School, Bob served his country in the U.S. Army. Upon returning home, he worked as an exterminator for various pest control companies before starting his own successful business.

Besides servicing many local homes and businesses, he woke up early every morning and often drove to businesses as far as Vineland and throughout South Jersey. He took pride in serving his neighbors not just as clients, but as friends, and often did not charge them.

Bob was kind, loyal and had a wonderful sense of humor. He was spontaneous, thoughtful and very giving, and he leaves behind many anonymous acts of love and kindness. He was always there for a friend in need.

He enjoyed watching sports, attended nearly every opening day game for the Philadelphia Phillies and going to many of the Army vs. Navy football games. Often times he would become emotionally involved by celebrating a win or cursing a loss with equal passion. He also enjoyed riding his Harley Davidson motorcycles.

Bob was a member of the Gloucester City Knights of Columbus, Council 674, a gold member of the Gloucester City Democrat Club, and a member of Crescent Park VFW Post 3563 in Bellmawr. After a hard day on the job, Bob would easily make friends, buy rounds and crack jokes at various local establishments over the years, including Applebees and Gloucester City taverns. Recently he and his wife, Roseann, enjoyed going to the Spread Eagle and Bobby Ray's. At times he would stir the pot, leading to interesting discussions about many topics.

They were good friends with their next door neighbors, Rick and Patti Kropp, and together they would transform Bob's front yard at Halloween to scare and delight fellow residents of Park Avenue.

Robert Yeager Jr. and his "five-mile" smile and contagious laugh will be fondly remembered and sadly missed this Thursday, and for many years to come.

### ***Ernest Leonard Jr (May 15<sup>th</sup>)***

Elder Ernest "Ernie" Leroy Leonard Jr. peacefully departed this life on April 24, 2025 at the Center of Rehabilitation in Washington Township. He was born on March 25, 1957 in Wilmington, NC, New Hanover County to Ernest Leroy Leonard Sr. and to the late Clara Pauline Canty Leonard.

Ernest, an Army military dependent, was educated in the Fort Dix Army Base, Wilmington, NC, Mt. Holly and the Willingboro School System. Ernest enlisted into the Army following graduation in 1976 to study medical surgical equipment technology and worked as an operation room technician. Ernest served his time in different US Army military bases and served a term in Korea.

In 1982 while in the military in North Carolina Ernest married Lillian Pratt Leonard and born a son, Antwain, and raised three stepdaughters Tonya, Nicole, and Ericka. He liked to ski in the mountains with other soldiers. Ernest completed seven years military service and received an honorable Army discharge.

Ernest endured many challenges with relationships, drugs and alcohol in his young adulthood which led him to participate in what his raising was in church. He began to develop a normal lifestyle changing from the endured struggles when he gave his life to the Lord during a near drug overdose.

Ernest studied and shared his experiences and began to help others as his self. Ernest wrote many books about Christianity in hopes to acknowledge others. Ernest turned his life in the direction of positive change. He worked in the hospital system and at the US Post Office in Bellmawr until he enrolled in school to become a tractor trailer driver. In 1988, he married his second wife, the late Barbara Boone Leonard, with stepson Justin Boone.

Ernest studied theology and became a licensed preacher. He would visit different town churches in the states he drove the tractor trailer to and had a CB name "Preacher Man." He loved the frame as being a well-known and liked traveling preacher. In 2006 while in Georgia he married a third wife Ruth Mungaro Leonard with stepdaughter Lynette and stepson Kadzo.

In 2008 Ernest drove a Jetro company brand new Mercedes Benz tractor trailer from state to state and received many achievement awards. He always visited his sister Gladys, brother-in-law Donnie and their family when in the New Jersey area for a few days.

Ernest was stricken by a major stroke in 2010 which paralyzed his right side and affected his walking abilities which lead to becoming disabled to work. Afterwards, divorced, single and in recovery for seven years while growing close with his Georgia church family. He became dependent on his Atlanta For Christ Christian Non-Denomination Church in Riverdale. In 2018 church members the late Sister Minnie and the late Sister Carolyn were a great help. The two guardian angels packed his apartment up and aided in driving him to North Carolina to unite Ernest with his sister Gladys and brother-in-law Donnie by way of their meetup at Dad's home while on vacation. Ernest's 25 years in Georgia ended and a new leaf of life, faith, hope in recovery under the care of his sister Gladys POA and brother-in-law Donnie by the Anointing Grace of God.

Unfortunately, Ernest health deteriorated consistently due to multiple issues from remnants of the stroke and dementia. From 2019 to 2025, Ernest was a long term resident at five different health care facilities in efforts to improve. But, unfortunately, his condition continued to deteriorate with vascular issues and became a double amputee and bed stricken with stage four

***Nicole P. Gabriel (May 15<sup>th</sup>)***

Nicole "Nikki" Patricia Gabriel, 42, of Gloucester City passed away on May 7, 2025.

Nicole was the loving mother of Colin Stinsman (Ava) and Carter Stinsman, and the cherished daughter of Denise Gabriel. She will be sadly missed by her aunts, Victoria Gabriel and Gina Gabriel (Linda), and her best friend, Melissa Fischer. Nikki is also survived by many aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews and cousins. She was predeceased by her fiancée, Brian McCormick.

Relatives and friends attended her viewing at the McCann-Healey Funeral Home, 851 Monmouth St., Gloucester City, where her Funeral Service was celebrated. Cremation was private at the request of the family and there will be no interment at this time.

Condolences and Memories may be shared at [www.mccannhealey.com](http://www.mccannhealey.com).

***Paul R. Smith (May 15<sup>th</sup>)***

After a long battle against ALS and frontotemporal dementia, Paul Richard Smith, 69, of Marlton passed away peacefully on May 2, 2025, surrounded by loved ones.

Born in Camden on September 14, 1955, Paul lived a life defined by integrity, humor, and love – a rare combination that touched everyone fortunate enough to know him. Though he held a variety of roles throughout his career—from IT consultant and business owner to salesperson – Paul's legacy was never measured by job titles. He was brilliant and endlessly curious, but above all, he believed deeply that "people are the most important in your life." That belief shaped everything he did.

The most life-changing moment for Paul happened not in a boardroom or on a sideline, but in a Radio Shack in Philadelphia where, 47 years ago, he met the love of his life. When Stacey walked in, he knew instantly – this was the person he wanted to spend the rest of his life with. True to form, his proposal was as straightforward and genuine as he was: “So, you think we should get married?” And that they did, building a life filled with laughter, friendship, and unwavering devotion, in sickness and in health. Their bond was a quiet but powerful example of what it means to love fully and selflessly, day after day, year after year.

Of all his roles, the one Paul treasured most was being a father. He was the center of his daughter Danielle’s world – and she was his. Two peas in a pod, they were rarely seen apart. Whether it was school drop-offs and pick-ups, basketball games, evening trips to the road stand, walks around Princeton or just daily life, Paul showed up, always.

He was endlessly supportive, unconditionally loving, and made it known that nothing came before family. He wasn’t just a dad to Danielle, he became a second father to many of her friends – welcoming them with warmth and his signature dark sense of humor.

Paul also poured that same love and dedication into his community through years of volunteer coaching and building incredibly rich, long-lasting neighborhood friendships. He had a wonderful capacity for prioritizing and accepting others, nurturing confidence, and creating inclusive spaces for everyone to feel seen, valued, and supported.

Paul was always there for people in any way he could be – whether it be helping them cope and grow with humor, sharing yet another important “must know” sports fact, or preaching the gospel of Bruce Springsteen.

Paul was an incredible husband, father, brother, son, friend, and coach. He is predeceased by his parents, Estelle and Thomas Smith; his mother-in-law, Annette Metzger; his brother, Tom Smith, and his sister Lois Copsetta. He is survived by his beloved wife, Stacey Smith; his cherished daughter, Danielle Smith; his fur-daughter, Chloe Elizabeth Smith; his sister, Helen Smith; and an extended circle of cousins, nephews, and friends who became family over the years.

To know Paul was to know loyalty, laughter, and love. He lived fully, loved deeply, and left the world far better than he found it. The family is deeply grateful for the outpouring of love and support during this time. In accordance with Paul’s wishes, services will be held privately.

In lieu of flowers to his family, please remember Paul with a donation in his memory to: Animal Welfare Association at <https://give.awanj.org/give/652202#!/donation/checkout> (please write “in memory of Paul R. Smith” in the leave a comment box) or to Samaritan Hospice at <https://www.samaritannj.org/giving/donate-now/#1> or by mail to Samaritan Gift Processing Center, PO Box 71425, Philadelphia, PA 19176-1425. Please make check payable to Samaritan and write in memo, Paul R. Smith.

Funeral arrangements entrusted to the McCann-Healey Funeral Home, 851 Monmouth St., Gloucester City. Condolences and memories may be shared at [www.mccannhealey.com](http://www.mccannhealey.com).

### ***Theodore Van Zelst III (May 15<sup>th</sup>)***

Theodore Peter Van Zelst III, 62, a longtime resident of Southwest Philadelphia, passed away at Mercy Fitzgerald Hospital in Darby, PA, on May 5, 2025.

Teddy was predeceased by his parents, Theodore Van Zelst Jr. and Kathleen M. Van Zelst (nee Delaney). He is survived by his sisters, Kathleen M. Smith and Dorothy M. Gemmell (John); his niece Michelle and nephew Sean; as well as one great-niece and two great-nephews.

At his request, services and interment were private in Saints Peter and Paul Cemetery, Springfield, PA.

In lieu of flowers to his family, please remember Teddy with a donation to a charity of your choice.

Condolences and memories may be shared at [www.mccannhealey.com](http://www.mccannhealey.com) under the obituary of Theodore Peter Van Zelst, III. Funeral arrangements entrusted to the McCann-Healey Funeral Home, 851 Monmouth St., Gloucester City.

***Walter Ellis McDonald III (May 15<sup>th</sup>)***

Walter Ellis McDonald III, 23, of Gloucester City died in a work-related accident on April 28, 2025, leaving all who knew him stunned and shocked by the sudden loss.

Walter (aka Walt) was welcomed into heaven by the arms of his loving father who adored him more than anything. Walter was the loving and devoted spouse of Kyleigh McDonald (nee Gibson), cherished son of Michelle Ferry-McDonald and the late Walter Ellis McDonald Jr, beloved brother of Brittany Lynn Helms, Brighton Lacy Helms, little "sister" Lana MacAdams and his maternal grandmother Carol Ferry (nee Schiavo).

Walter is predeceased by his paternal grandparents, Walter Ellis McDonald Sr, Helen Kathleen McDonald (nee Dilts), and his maternal grandfather James E. Ferry Sr. who always playfully referred to him as "Eli." Walter leaves behind his adopted grandmothers, Debra Morgan, Maryanne Gibson aka "Bachi" and Beth Renlund Gibson aka "Nanny," and his adopted grandfather David Gibson aka "Poppy" as well as many uncles, aunts, cousins and friends-all of whom he loved dearly.

Walter was afforded the opportunity to be homeschooled, allowing him to pursue the passions and interests that shaped him into the incredible man he had become. Walter was passionate about volunteering since he was very young. Whenever he saw a need, his first reaction was to see how he could help fill it. As a result, he got involved in many different projects over the years.

When he turned 13, he connected with groups that could not only provide opportunities for service, but could help him develop better leadership abilities so that he could better serve his community. He started training as a fire cadet right after his birthday. His commitment earned him a jacket in his second year. At age 16 he became a part of the Blackwood Terrace Junior Firefighter program as well as the NJ State Police Explorer program. He continued both until he graduated high school.

With the hopes of serving our country as a U.S. Marine, Walter joined the South Jersey Young Marines at the start of high school. Upon his graduation from boot camp, Walter was awarded more ribbons than anyone the Unit Commander had ever pinned. His commitment to his Young Marine Unit earned him their Young Marine Award in 2017 and 2019. He graduated as a Staff Sergeant, a rank he worked hard for.

At the start of high school, Walter became a founding member of the South Jersey Homeschool Key Club, a student run group that focuses on volunteering. Their motto is, "Service Never Sleeps," and that motto truly embodies who Walter was as a person. Ask anyone who has been the recipient of one of Walters middle-of-the-night rescues. Walter served as the vice president of the Key Club during the 2017-2018 school year, and he led several of his own volunteer opportunities for the group. In 2017 Walter created a service project on POW/MIA Recognition Day for the SJHS Key Club that he invited his Young Marine's Unit. He felt that it was important to bring awareness to his

community, especially given the lack of events commemorating the day in his area, so he opened the event up to the public. He brought in a speaker and organized a formal Missing Man ceremony that he participated in with his fellow Young Marines. He invited those grieving loved ones to bring out pictures of family or friends that were POW or MIA so that they could be honored at a special table.

To commemorate the event, he stamped 100 dog tags with the letters POW/MIA to be given free to attendants so that they would be reminded of our prisoners of war and those still missing in action. He received an award for this from the District Kiwanis Club. Also in 2017, The SJHS Key Club had to vote on a project for their club to focus on. Walters Project, Graveyard Guardians, won the vote and likewise received a grant to move forward with the project.

It really bothered him when he learned that oftentimes the graves of those who served our country are overgrown with weeds and debris. He felt strongly that we should care about those who served, not just while they're living, but even after they're gone. He believed that we can show respect and honor for those who served our country by the service of tending their graves regularly. As a patriot who cared deeply for his country, Walter had been serving his area every September 11 by gathering with his community to place 2,997 American flags at the Pennsauken Township 9/11 Memorial honoring each person who lost their lives during the attacks. Walter earned the Presidential Gold Award for volunteering as well as the Servant Leadership award.

Besides organized group volunteering, Walter volunteered at church from the time he was old enough. With the call of the Lord on his life, he blew the Shofar, ministered with Flags as a part of Cavalry for Calvary and played drums in the worship band. When Walter lost his father in 2020, he chose not to pursue his career in the military. He wanted to take care of his family, and be close to them. He eventually pursued his dream of being a diesel mechanic and started his career with United Rentals, where he worked until the end of his life.

Walter met the love of his life, Kyleigh at 16 when they were serving as volunteer firefighters. He committed his life to her, and loved her with all of his heart. Together they planned and executed their wedding. True to who he was, he chose a place that would benefit veterans and had his wedding at Freedom Park, where donations would benefit Operation Safe Haven.

Walter was wise beyond his years and had a lifetime of accomplishments in his 23 short years of life. Married to Kyleigh since 2022, Walter took pride in becoming a homeowner and rebuilt their house to make it a home. He was a hard worker, a man of strong faith, courage, loyalty, commitment, leadership and dedication. Walter was a true man of valor and honor.

Relatives and friends attended Walt's visitation in the McCann-Healey Funeral Home, 851 Monmouth St., Gloucester City, where his Funeral Services were held. Interment was private.

In lieu of flowers donations to his wife, Kyleigh, would be most appreciated as she navigates life without her husband.

Condolences and memories may be shared at [www.mccannhealey.com](http://www.mccannhealey.com).

***Michelle L Whiting (May 22<sup>nd</sup>)***  
October 15, 1979 — May 11, 2025

She was the kind of person whose energy lit up every room she entered. With an easy smile and an open heart, she made people feel seen, heard, and welcome, like old friends, even if they'd only just met. Talking to her felt effortless, like a conversation you never wanted to end. Her laugh was contagious, her spirit magnetic, and it wasn't long before everyone knew her name.

She had a gift for helping others—whether it was showing up when someone needed support or just knowing the right thing to say. That natural kindness, paired with a fearless loyalty, earned her a circle of friends that stretched wide and ran deep.

Country music was her heartbeat. She found herself in the lyrics, stories of heartache, grit, and wild joy. Live shows were her escape, a place where she could let go, raise her hands to the sky, and feel completely alive.

More than anything, she poured herself into her children's lives. She was the loudest cheerleader at their games, the tireless driver to practices, and the warm hug waiting at the end of a hard day. Her love for them was fierce, unwavering, and total.

But behind the strength and the smiles was a journey that hadn't been easy. Life had thrown its share of curveballs, and the path forward wasn't always clear. Still, she faced it all with a stubborn kind of grace, pushing through the hard times, trying to find herself while giving so much to everyone else.

She was a light—brilliant, beautiful, and gone too soon. But in every person who loved her, every laugh shared, every country song that still brings her to mind, that light lives on.

Michelle L. Whiting was taken... from our lives, our hearts, and our family on Sunday, May 11, 2025. She was only 45 years old.

Michelle was born in Philadelphia and had been a lifelong Gloucester kid, neighbor, and mom. Her life was her children, and we never imagined that tomorrow would never come.

Michelle leaves to cherish her sweet memory, her life, and her children, Gavin, Dakota, and Summer Callahan. She is the daughter of Donald and his wife Antonette Whiting, and the late Mary (nee Bartleson). Her best friends and partners in crime, Tammy & Kelly, will deeply miss her but never forget her. Michelle is also survived and will be sadly missed by her brother, Ronald Whiting, Michael Whiting, Jason Piccone, and Anthony Pezzetti. She had been predeceased by her sister, Christina Whiting, and her brother, Paul Piccone.

The time-honored tradition of reuniting those we love with nature will be held privately.

### ***Olivia C. Blymer (Nay 22<sup>nd</sup>)***

Olivia Catherine Blymer, surrounded by and in the loving care of her family, passed peacefully at home on May 13, 2025, at the age of 20.

The beloved and cherished daughter of James H. Blymer and Kellie Sweeney Blymer, Liv was an adored and loving sister to Jenai Gonzales (Jonathan Walker) and Riley Blymer. She was a cherished granddaughter of James and Maryann Blymer, Joan Gonzales, and of the late Edward Sweeney, the late Gail Sweeney, and the late Margaret Sweeney.

Olivia was a loving niece of Theresa Netz and Bruce Myers and the treasured goddaughter and niece of Jeanette and Matt Dembinski. She is also survived by her cousins, who were more like best friends, Maddie and Jake, along with

countless other loving aunts, uncles, cousins, and devoted friends. Her beloved cat, Stevie Nicks, and dog, Roxy, will miss her dearly.

A lifetime resident of Brooklawn, Olivia attended Alice Costello School and went on to graduate with the Gloucester High School Class of 2023. She left a lasting impact on her teachers, coaches and classmates. Liv had a deep love for music—especially attending concerts and collecting vinyl records. She enjoyed thrifting and had a passion for the outdoors, whether hiking, boating with her grandparents, or spending time at the beach with her family and friends. As an avid Philadelphia sports fan, Liv, Riley and their father faithfully followed the Phillies and 76ers. She also joyfully embraced her newest role as an aunt to Evy, Gwen and Lauren.

Olivia's warmth, kindness, and vibrant spirit will forever be remembered by all who knew and loved her.

Relatives and friends attended Olivia's first visitation in the McCann-Healey Funeral Home, 851 Monmouth St., Gloucester City. A second visitation took place in St. Agnes Church, Blackwood, where her Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated. Interment will be held at a later date at the New St. Mary's Cemetery, Bellmawr.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to: Nate's Story at <https://funraise.org/give/Nates-Story/596cfa52-d0f0-485f-9f48-95a0286dfe1d/> or by mail to Nate's Story, 174 Gehrig Ave., Gloucester City, NJ 08030. Please write in memo, Olivia Catherine Blymer.

Condolences and memories may be shared at [www.mccannhealey.com](http://www.mccannhealey.com).