

MICKEY ARNOLD



Of Wilkinsburg, PA., died peacefully on November 7th at home with Martha, his wife of 52 years, by his side.

Born September 21, 1947 in Lilly, Pa., as the fifth of six children, Mickey attended Scanlon Hill Elementary, a two-room schoolhouse, along with five classmates. He was part of the local Little League championship team in 1958 and formed lasting friendships playing Legion baseball. At Lilly Washington High School, his fondest memories similarly were rooted in sports, as a stand-out baseball and basketball player, and weekend get-togethers with buddies at the local pool hall, where they all took aim at the best pool shot in town, "The Bear," against a backdrop of rock & roll music.

Graduating high school in 1965 as the Vietnam War was swinging into high gear, Mickey enlisted in the U.S. Navy with his childhood best friend, Mike McCarthy. First posted to the aircraft carrier USS Coral Sea, he was assigned to the signal bridge where he learned flag semaphore, the Navy's visual communications system using two hand-held flags. He loved being a Navy signalman, remarking later that it was the first time in his life "he realized he could be great at something." The position also gave him a bird's-eye view of fighter pilots executing precision take-offs and landings from the carrier flight deck, scenes that remained permanently etched in his memory. He deployed to Vietnam for a second time the next year aboard the USS Bennington and was on the flight deck November 9, 1967, when it served as the recovery ship for the unmanned Apollo 4 space mission, the first launch of the Saturn V rocket. Mickey served a third Vietnam deployment aboard the minesweeper USS Impervious, receiving his honorable discharge from active duty in September 1968 as a Petty Officer Third Class and spending three years in the Naval Reserves, through 1971. In the Navy, Mickey was awarded the National Defense Service Medal and Vietnam Service Medal with Bronze Service Star.

After a brief stint as a fireman with the Penn Central Railroad in Cresson, Pa., Mickey moved to Pittsburgh to find work, taking a job as an in-patient psychiatric aide at St. Francis Hospital in Lawrenceville, where he helped people, including teenagers, suffering with sometimes severe mental illness by providing occupational and recreational therapy. He described working in mental health as a "life-changing experience," one that inspired an unwavering calling for serving particularly at-risk young people. Mickey's heart was always with the underdog.

At St. Francis, he also met the love of his life, Martha O'Donnell, a fellow aide, bonding with her over ping pong in the lounge. He asked for her hand because "she always beat me"; she said yes "because of his compassion for the patients and their situation." They were married at the Pittsburgh Oratory on April 30, 1971, and celebrated with a simple family lunch featuring corned beef sandwiches and homemade cake.

Under the GI Bill, Mickey enrolled in the Community College of Allegheny County, earning an Associate's Degree in social work, while also working for the Neighborhood Youth Corps Program, where he counseled alienated and at-risk teenagers. Around the same time, with daughter Hannah and son Aab having arrived, Mickey opened a used furniture and antique business, the Olde Rocker Shop, with his brother-in-law Russ O'Donnell, in Regent Square where McBroom's beer store exists today. It was the first in a series of entrepreneurial pursuits.

Mickey continued his education at the University of Pittsburgh, attending night school to earn a Bachelor of Science Degree cum laude in vocational distributed education in 1977. The same year, while pursuing a Master's Degree in education at Pitt, which he earned in 1980, he began a decades-long career with the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

A capstone to his years of working with at-risk youth, Mickey was hired as a teacher in the diversified occupations program at Letsche Alternative High School, which offered a skills-centered, counseling-based curriculum as well as cooperative work experience. To his students, he was an advocate, a mentor, sometimes even a lifeline, and almost always the rare person who truly believed in them. While his professional charge was to create opportunity, his personal mission was to make them feel as he did atop the signal bridge of the Coral Sea – that they could be great at something, too. And they responded. Mickey went on to serve in other teaching roles at South Vo-Tech and Langley High School, before retiring in 1999.

From his earliest childhood days in the mountains, Mickey loved the outdoors, playing in the woods, camping, simply being out in the fresh air and sunshine – sometimes to the point of misadventure. Such as the day he and the boys attempted to conquer the Youghiogeny River rapids in Ohiopyle in a green family canoe called "The Good, Bad & The Ugly" – which, true to its moniker, hit a rock, broke apart and sank. Barely making it to safety, Mickey emerged from the water barefoot, needing to fashion makeshift shoes out of a discarded milk carton for the long and rocky trek back up-river. Years later, shoemaking became a second entrepreneurial pursuit.

After apprenticing with well-known local cobblers, Mickey founded Champion Shoe Rebuilding in Swissvale as a moonlighting gig. His work was featured in a Pittsburgh Post-Gazette magazine story aptly titled: "He Puts Sole in His Work." The piece quoted a customer who said, "Another cobbler we went to didn't want to help." Mickey's reply: "I know the feeling, but there's always someone out there who will. You have to keep trying until you do." You bet he knew the feeling.

With his successful cobbler shop established, Mickey set out to become a Board Certified Pedorthist and launched his own practice creating therapeutic footwear and supportive orthotic devices for patients with disabling foot disorders.

Competitive sports were another constant throughout Mickey's life. An avid adult softball player, he played on or managed more teams than his family could count each season, most memorably Night Cap, Duke Softball and Pittsburgh Gold. Many of his younger teammates regarded him as a father figure, someone who, as he'd done for so many throughout his life, took them under his wing and made them believe in themselves as he believed in them. And then there was "Quick Mick." Earned as a kid and validated with his "lightning speed running down the first base line" in softball, the nickname resurfaced in the early 2000s, as he competed in the Senior Olympics, earning Gold in the 200 Meter race.

And, of course, the Pittsburgh Steelers. A season ticket holder for several years, he found his "wing men," the tight-knit crew who, one year, carried him in and out of the stadium after he tore his meniscus, and who will carry him off to eternal rest as pallbearers. Long since forgiven are his numerous "Irish exits" during the lean years, later known as "pulling a Mickey," after one on-field blunder too many would send him silently up the aisle, out the stadium gates, to the bus stop and home.

On October 19, 2006 Mickey and Martha's life forever changed, when he fell off the roof while working on their house and suffered a broken neck. After he surprised doctors by surviving the night, they told him he would never walk again. Through sheer force of will he proved them wrong – Mickey's walking for his last 17 years consisted of dealing with constant pain and making the few steps between his bed and his living room chair each morning, where he spent his days before returning to bed at night. It was a journey that could take an hour or more each way. But once again Mickey demonstrated something he was great at – how to confront adversity and overcome it through determination, grit and an unflinching sense of humor.

Mickey spent his later days researching his family ancestry and military service from his chair, identifying four relatives who fought in the Civil War. He eagerly looked forward to March Madness brackets and the Little League World Series. And he continued to escape to his beloved outdoors through television shows about myriad adventures – everything from the mountains, to the wild west and the high seas.

There will be no visitation. A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated

In lieu of flowers, the family has established a GoFundMe account at <https://gofundme.com/f/mickey-arnold> - the proceeds of which will go to the ballfield at the War Memorial Park in Lilly, Pa. to ensure it continues to be a field of dreams for generations to follow, as it was for Mickey. Arrangements by **JOHN A. FREYVOGEL SONS, INC.** 4900 Center Avenue at Devonshire Street (freyvogelfuneralhome.com)

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