

COLONEL ROBERT J. SULE, USAF (RET.)



Colonel Robert J. Sule, USAF (retired) passed away on November 6 in Linwood, New Jersey at the age of 83. With a playful quick wit and boundless curiosity, Bob Sule - also known as "R.J.," "the Electric Cowboy," and "the Colonel" - collected lifelong friends at each stage of his life and career. Along the way, he also collected a host of passionate interests - including Labrador retrievers, history, music, photography,

fishing, aviation, movies, and cooking - and the tackle, gear, souvenirs, and other "equipment" that went with them. Sule was born on New Year's Day, 1940 in Lewiston, Idaho, the eldest son of John Sule, a lumberjack, and Edna Piatt Sule, a registered nurse. He grew up in Clarkston, Washington, attended Clarkston High School, and earned his bachelor's in Economics at Central Washington State in 1962, with a U.S. Air Force Reserve Commission. He later received his MBA from the University of Utah. In the Air Force, he achieved the rank of "full bird" colonel through duty in Taiwan during the Vietnam War, as an air traffic control officer, and finally as an Air Force public affairs officer. After leaving active duty, he was the chief recruiter for the U.S. Air Force Academy in Pittsburgh. He met his future wife Suzanne Ray while stationed at NAFEC in Pomona, New Jersey, and they were married in Nanzhuang, Taiwan in 1970. They moved to Pittsburgh in 1972, when Sule left active duty to pursue a career in real estate at Dravo Corporation. He was named Dravo's director of real estate in 1978, where he managed the development of housing and industrial projects across the country. His most high-profile project as a developer was Dravo Tower (now BNY Mellon Center) in downtown Pittsburgh, part of the city's "Renaissance II." In 1986, Sule was named president and CEO of Blue Ridge Real Estate Company and Big Boulder Corporation, running the Jack Frost and Big Boulder Pocono ski resorts and developing resort housing. He and his family moved to the Pocono Mountains, where he worked as a hands-on president/manager at the resorts and created a warm, family atmosphere among the employees. Living in the Poconos also gave him the opportunity to practice his fly fishing and host ski weekends for his New Jersey in-laws and nieces, affectionately known as the "Lehigh Tunnel Gang." After leaving Blue Ridge, Sule returned to Pittsburgh and worked in commercial real estate with the Galbreath Company, CBRE, and Massaro. In the 1990s he began appearing as an extra in Hollywood film and TV productions made in Pittsburgh. Occasionally, he would garner a "featured extra" role: in the board room scene of Dogma (1999), he played "Mr. Brace," and had the honor of being humiliated and shot by Ben Affleck and Matt Damon; in Smart People (2008), he stood in a line between Sarah Jessica Parker and Dennis Quaid with a deadpan expression as they swapped dialogue over the top of him. A fixture at the Rivers Club, Sule loved horseback riding and cowboy lore and wrote about them in occasional guest columns for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette on cooking and travel. He also ardently defended Pittsburgh's connections with the launch of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, which drew together his love of the Northwest with his pride in Pittsburgh. In retirement in Linwood, New Jersey, Sule enjoyed being close to his extended family, sharing meals, gatherings, and holidays with them, and having dinner at the American Legion in Somers Point and the Margate City Log Cabin. Over the years, his dogs were among his best friends: Votan, his German Shepard during the Air Force years; Mo, the family's black Labrador Retriever during the Ross Township years; Amos, the precocious Pocono ski slope yellow Lab; and Ezekiel ("Zeke"), Sule's irrepressible late-in-life Lab "puppy." Colonel Sule was a member of the Knights of Columbus, Fourth Degree. He is survived by his wife Suzanne; their daughter Kerstin and son-in-law Ron Schuler; their son Michael, daughter-in-law Emily and granddaughter Eila; James Robertson, his son from a previous relationship; and a squadron of nieces, nephews-in-law, grandnieces, and grandnephews. He was predeceased by his parents, his brother Gary, sister-in-law Debbie, and niece Jennifer Sule. There will be no visitation. A funeral mass will be celebrated at Epiphany Church, Longport, NJ, on Saturday, November 18, at 11 a.m. The family is grateful for the kind care of NJ Health Hospice and Palliative Care, especially Isabelle Normil. Memorial contributions may be made to the Wounded Warriors Project at <https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/donate>. "Keep 'em flying," as the Colonel used to say. "R.J. continues" in the hearts of his family and friends. Arrangements by the **GEORGE H. WIMBERG FUNERAL HOME**, Linwood - Ventnor. Condolences may be extended to the family at ghwimberg.com.

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