

LEO DAVID SWEENEY, JR.



Age 61, of Pittsburgh, PA, passed away on Friday, November 29. Born October 7, 1963 to Mary Agnes (Wilde) Sweeney and Leo David Sweeney, Sr., he was a graduate of Central Catholic High School and the University of Pittsburgh, going on to become a realtor for Howard Hanna Real Estate Services for over 35 years. Leo's three biggest passions were tennis, cooking and his family. He is survived by his

wife, Maria Lauro; and son, Leo.

Leo's lifelong love for tennis began on the Highland Park tennis courts, right across from his childhood home on Stanton Avenue. As a young boy, Leo practiced on those courts every day. His hard work paid off: he soon became a ball boy for the Pittsburgh Triangles in the mid-1970s. At the age of 12, he convinced Wimbledon champion Vitas Gerulaitis to make an appearance at the Highland Park courts, where Leo and his partner won a doubles match against the champion by aiming every ball at Gerulaitis's partner. Later, Leo served as the captain of the tennis team at Central Catholic, a role he reprised for varsity men's tennis at the University of Pittsburgh.

After college and a short break from playing, Leo returned to the court with a zest for the game, which, through frequent practice, included winning the Paul G. Sullivan Clay Championship at Frick Park, and gaining a national USTA ranking for his age group. Yet, tennis was more than a sport; Leo's competitors remember him fondly not only for his grit and determination, but as a selfless, honorable friend who cared for his peers on and off the court. Recognized by Citiparks in 1998 for his community service, he viewed tennis as a way to help and support others. Leo would say one of his proudest accomplishments was teaching his son to play tennis and watching him compete for Allerdice.

Off the court, Leo was a passionate and excellent home cook. Among friends and family, he was famous for his 'feasts', elaborate events when guests would gather in his home to share in food prepared by Leo. He would spend the better part of a day in the kitchen painstakingly preparing his spread, ensuring every element was perfect. Whether it be his Sunday sauce, roast chicken, or sausage and peppers, Leo found joy in bringing others into his home and offering them a delicious, home-cooked meal.

He first met his wife, Maria, at Magee Women's Hospital. Born one day apart in October 1963, the newborns' mothers shared the same room, the young Leo and Maria kept in bassinets next to one another. They later met on Maria's 17th birthday, when they joined a group of high school friends at a Pittsburgh Playhouse screening of *Yellow Submarine*. After graduating from high school, they began dating and Leo's mother remembered Maria's mother. Their relationship blossomed into a strong marriage that lasted over 30 years. In all pursuits, Leo was Maria's biggest cheerleader. For many years, he encouraged her to try out for *Jeopardy!* She finally did in 2023 and after she got the call to be on the show last August, he excitedly coached Maria to prepare for her taping in October. Unfortunately, he did not get to see her appearance, which is upcoming on December 20.

Together, they raised a son, Leo, to whom his father gave not only a family name but a joy for sports and cooking. Whether it was on the tennis court or in the kitchen passing on recipes, Leo loved to spend time with his son. He never missed the chance to watch a Steelers' game with the younger Leo, the two always sharing a Mineo's pizza. He was proud of his son's accomplishments, first as a graduate of Carnegie Mellon University and now as a law student at American University.

Leo will be remembered as a fiercely loyal and loving husband, father, friend and son. He was especially dedicated to his mother, whom he cared for with deep devotion in the final years of her life. He will be forever missed by those who loved him.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations to the Shadyside Boys and Girls Club and the Highland Park Tennis Club.

Visitation will be held on Thursday, from 5-7 p.m., at the **D'ALESSANDRO FUNERAL HOME & CREMATORY LTD.**, Butler, at 46th Sts., Lawrenceville, to be followed by a Celebration of Leo's Life at Industry Public House. Mass will be held on Friday, at 10 A.M., at Sacred Heart Church in Shadyside.

www.dalessandroldt.com

Send condolences post-gazette.com/gb