

# JOHN J. ZELEN



John Zelen dedicated his more than 40-year career to law enforcement.

He served 30 years as a Pennsylvania State Trooper and then another 11 years as a detective in the Allegheny County District Attorney's Office.

"He defined himself by his police career," said his oldest daughter, Kim Zelen of Churchill. "He was always a policeman. Even after he retired and was out

of uniform. He never sat with his back to a door!"

John Jacob Zelen, of Green Tree, died Sunday, Jan. 5, 2025, at home. He was 87.

Mr. Zelen was born Dec. 27, 1937, in Braddock, PA. He grew up in nearby Swissvale and graduated from Swissvale High School in 1955. He joined the Navy after high school, serving honorably for four years holding various duties including being a radarman aboard the USS Mills.

He joined the State Police in 1961 and was later assigned to the organized crimes and vice details. He was also a member of the original Allegheny County Fugitive Task Force. As a trooper he was a witness to defining moments in history, including his work during the 1968 riots following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., the Steel Haulers' strike and the Johnstown area flooding, both in the 1970s.

He retired in 1991 from the state police and spent five years directing security for movies filmed in Pittsburgh. Mr. Zelen joined the District Attorney's Office in 1997 as a detective and spent nearly 11 years investigating white collar crime.

He was married for 30 years to his loving wife, Stephanie Zelen. Together they enjoyed shopping for and collecting antiques across the region. He also enjoyed spending time with family and cooking.

"We had a lot of fun together," Stephanie Zelen said. "He was very outgoing and funny and very romantic. He would do very nice things. He had a big personality."

He was proud of all of his family and was especially happy to see grandson, Brandon, become a state police trooper.

"At Brandon's state police graduation, my dad was on stage as part of the ceremony. Everything was very formal but when Brandon got to my dad, he just grabbed him in this big bear hug and presented him with his badge," Kim Zelen said.

In addition to his wife, Stephanie, he is survived by daughters, Kim Zelen, Janice George (Ronald) of Churchill and Lisa Zelen (Michael) of Scenery Hill, PA; stepdaughter, Christian O'Shea (Timothy) of Sewickley; son, John C. Zelen (Nicole) of Edgewood; seven grandchildren, two great-grandchildren and many nieces and nephews.

He is also survived by a sister, Carolyn Desko (Don), of Wilkins Twp. and a brother, Robert R. Kerlik (Paula), of Greenville, PA.

He was preceded in death by his father, John Zelen; stepfather, Andrew Kerlik; mother, Helen (Seko) Kerlik; and two brothers, William R. Zelen and Andrew J. Kerlik.

Visitation will be Sunday, Jan. 12, 2025, 2 to 4 p.m. and 6 to 8 p.m. at **WILLIAM SLATER II FUNERAL SERVICE**, 1650 Greentree Rd., Scott Twp. 15220, (412-563-2800). A service will be held Monday, Jan. 13, 2025, at 11:30 a.m. at the funeral home followed by burial at National Cemetery of the Alleghenies, in Washington County, PA.

[www.slaterfuneral.com](http://www.slaterfuneral.com)



## SLATER

Send condolences [post-gazette.com/gb](http://post-gazette.com/gb)