



James L (Jim) Morriss

August 9, 1936 - April 12, 2017

James L (Jim) Morriss Jr, 80, of Fayetteville, died April 12, 2017 at Circle of Life Hospice in Springdale. He was born on August 9, 1936 in Shreveport, LA to James Lane and Ellen Louise Carithers Morriss.

Morriss' more than 50 years in the newspaper business spanned significant changes and explosive growth in Northwest Arkansas. He started work at The Springdale News in 1950 at the age of 13, sweeping up the press room and melting down lead for the paper's Linotype machines.

From there, he went on to deliver papers, cover sporting events and take news and sports photos. Because the Springdale paper was a small, family-owned operation, Morriss did a little of everything, from writing obituaries to covering government meetings to following the police beat. He was a constant monitor of his police scanner, even during time off, frequently arriving at accident or crime scenes about the same time as law enforcement.

"He took a lot of pictures for the Police Department. He didn't care what time of day it was ... bad accidents," Carl Martens, who worked for the Springdale Police Department from 1965 to 1985, retiring as assistant chief "He'd come to the scene, and he wouldn't say a thing. But he gave a lot [of photographs] back to us. He sure did help the Police Department back when we didn't have any officers. He was one we could call out."

"He was always real interested in the police," said Jeff Harper, Washington County district judge and former Springdale police officer. "He told me he

would take Laney [his daughter] out to incidents when he was covering them.”

The late Laney Morriss retired as a captain with the Springdale Police Department, and many thought those early scenes led to her career.

As the town and the newspaper grew, Morriss was appointed city editor and then editor of the paper. Despite his leadership position, he continued to take care of even the most routine newsroom duties. Morriss said after he became editor, his publisher had to direct him to stop running the police beat himself and hire a reporter to do it. He took it upon himself to type in weekend obituaries on Saturdays until the last few years of his career.

“He worked too much,” said Gene Kincy, a former publisher of The Springdale News and The Morning News. “I told him ‘I’m going to fire you if you don’t go home and get some rest, and I’ll hire you back when you do.’”

While directing the newsroom staff, Morriss also wrote most of the newspaper’s local editorials, taking to task city council members and governors alike. Morriss once wrote an editorial critical of the policies of a newly appointed state official, a future Pulaski County sheriff and congressman named Tommy Robinson, only to find the blustery Robinson standing in his office door the following day.

“There wasn’t ever anyone who was more dedicated to Springdale or the news,” said Joy Drummond, who operated Washington County Abstract Co. on Emma Avenue in Springdale for many years and is still involved in the downtown revitalization effort. She also was a classmate of Morriss’ at Springdale High School and noted he always helped plan class reunions. Morriss retired from The Morning News in 2003 after 53 years in the newspaper business. He guided the staff as it covered the explosive growth that raised Northwest Arkansas into the national spotlight. He also oversaw a number of dramatic changes in the newspaper industry, including the conversion to computers for word processing and page design, digital photography and the 24-hour news cycle that came with the advent of the World Wide Web.

Morriss seems even more appreciated in these days of the rush to get a

headline, social media and “fake news.”

“He was a good friend to the community,” said Steve Clark, who retired from the Springdale Police Department as assistant chief in 2001. “What he was putting in print was what it was.”

“If we gave him anything, we didn’t have any worries about him doing anything with it he shouldn’t do,” Martens said.

“He would call me on things, a news item that couldn’t be reported yet. I’d go ahead and share it with him, and he never burned me,” said Winford Phillips, retired director of the Arkansas State Police, who spent much of his career in his native Northwest Arkansas. “What he tells me, I can take it to the bank.”

Mary McKinney’s father, the late Charles McKinney, served as Springdale mayor for 20 years. “I recall Dad saying he was always fair and that he was one of the better reporters,” Mary McKinney said. “He would get everything that was newsworthy accurate. He was a quiet man, quiet spoken. My dad never said anything negative about him. He said he was very accurate and thorough.”

“Jim Morriss personified ‘community journalism,’” said a longtime friend, John C. Hughes, former editor and publisher of The Daily World in Aberdeen, Wash. “I once spent a month in Springdale on a special assignment for Donrey Media Group and watched Jim interact with his staff and his community. He was a gifted writer, a first-rate editor and a world-class human being. Jim had a gentle touch, but he could spot BS at a 100 paces. ‘Integrity’ was his middle name.

“Your community has lost one of the finest journalists in Arkansas history,” said Hughes, who is now Washington state’s chief historian.

Morriss, a University of Arkansas graduate, was inducted into the Lemke Journalism Alumni Society’s Hall of Honor in 2003.

“Jim was a good friend of mine and a good friend to the department of journalism [at the University of Arkansas],” said Roy Reed, a retired UA journalism professor. “He was always ready to help young people get started

in the fine art of reporting. I'll always appreciate what he did for journalism.”

“He was a newspaper man’s newspaper man,” said Bill Rogers, vice president of communications and special projects for the Springdale Chamber of Commerce. Rogers worked at The Springdale News as a sports reporter fresh out of college. “Everyone I ever knew who ever worked for him had the utmost respect for him as a man and a newspaper man.

“I was young, 21, and scared to death of him,” Rogers recalled, when Morriss called him into his office one day. Morriss reached in his drawer and shared with Rogers a scorecard from a St. Louis Cardinals’ game in the old Sportsman’s Park. The scorecard, from a game Morriss attended as a child, included many of the Cardinals’ Hall of Fame players, Rogers said. Morriss was a great Cardinals’ fan.

“For him to think, ‘Bill would think that’s pretty cool,’ was special — and I did! He was someone who valued the news and the community and how those two meshed together. We were so fortunate to have him,”

“All who knew him can tell of Jim’s impact on their lives,” said Dave Edmark, city editor for The Springdale News and The Morning News. “He hired me twice; one for my first job and again 10 years later as an editor. He fostered a workplace in which everyone was able to explore and flourish to the extent of their creativity, but with his own sober judgment, he was also able to save staffers from their own unwise impulses. He showed us how to put out a quality product. He encouraged us to be competitors and to be thorough. He was a repository of information, history, details and lessons. He was our mentor.”

“Jim and I were colleagues and friends for more than 45 years,” said Brenda Blagg, a longtime reporter and columnist for the newspapers. “He was as much a brother to me as a boss. Ask many of the people who worked for him, and they’ll tell you he was a great influence on them personally and professionally. He certainly was on me.”

“In my book, he was one of the best,” Kincy said. “He was the best editor I’ve ever seen — and I’ve seen a lot. I never worried about him or his department.

He put out a good newspaper every day. He put out an accurate newspaper. All who knew him gave him a lot of respect.”

“If anything ever came up at the newspaper — when dealing with people, customers, readers, other employees — he always had the experience and mainly the wisdom to help you,” said Danny Dotson, a longtime advertising director for The Springdale News and The Morning News. “He was a dear friend.”

And the man Morriss’ reporters and the community knew was the same man his family knew, agreed his children Trey Morriss of Bossier City, La., and Shana Clark of Springdale. “He taught us a lot of responsibility, integrity and respect,” Clark said. “He was real.”

“We use the term ‘servant leadership’ at work,” Trey Morriss said. “He set that same example for us at home. He taught us we were servants.”

Although Morriss spent many hours at his beloved newspaper, “he made his kids his priority,” Clark said. “No matter what, he was at our track meets and our band concerts.”

The siblings fondly remembered weeks spent at the beach in Corpus Christi, Texas, in a condo shared by the newspaper’s owners, Maudine and T.C.

Sanders — “back when the newspaper was really a family,” Clark said.

“Dad was really the glue that held the family together,” Trey Morriss said. Their mother worked “crazy hours” in real estate, “and dad was not the type to sit back and watch things fall apart. He did the laundry and the cooking and ran the house. The work ethic you saw at the office, was the same one we saw at the house.”

Morriss was preceded in death by his daughter, Laneta Carol (Laney) Morriss; his mother, Jo Condra; and his brother, David Paul Condra.

He is survived by a son, James L. (Trey) Morriss III and wife Melody of Bossier City, La.; a daughter, Shana Clark and husband Anthony of Springdale; grandchildren Adam Morriss and wife Kimberly of Maumelle, Matthew Morriss and wife Sydney of Maumelle, Hannah Morriss of Bossier City, Dakota Downum of Vacaville, Calif., and Peyton Downum of Springdale;

great-grandchildren, Monroe and Emma Morriss of Maumelle; a niece, Kristy Condra and a nephew, Preston Condra and wife Kelly; and longtime companion Marian Catron of Springdale.

Visitation will be held from 5:00-7:00PM on Tuesday, April 18 at Sisco Funeral Chapel in Springdale. Funeral Service will be at 11:00AM on Wednesday, April 19 at Cross Church in Springdale. Burial will follow in Fairview Memorial Gardens.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to Circle of Life Hospice 901 Jones Rd, Springdale, AR 72762, or Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, 6931 Arlington Road, 2nd floor, Bethesda, Maryland 20814.

You may sign the online guestbook at www.siscofuneral.com

Cemetery Details

Fairview Memorial Gardens

1728 E. Mission Blvd.
Fayetteville, AR 72703

Previous Events

Visitation

APR **18**. 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM (CT)

Sisco Funeral Chapel
705 West Meadow
Springdale, AR 72764
(479) 751-4577
siscofuneralchapel@gmail.com
<https://www.siscofuneral.com>

Funeral Service

APR **19**. 11:00 AM (CT)

Cross Church - Springdale
1709 Johnson Road
Springdale, AR 72762

Tribute Wall



“ *James L (Jim) Morriss*

January 21, 2023 at 02:29 PM



“ *A great loss to the Northwest Arkansas community and the journalism community. Jim hired me while I was still a college student as sports editor at the old Springdale News, and later as a reporter. He was a tremendous mentor and friend and a man of the highest integrity. My deepest condolences to the family and to all his friends who are struggling with this great loss. Thank goodness we had this great man in our lives.*
Chuck Hemingway

Charles Hemingway - April 19, 2017 at 06:14 PM



“ *Our deepest sympathy to Jim's family. Bobby and Lois Hopper*

Bobby and Lois Hopper - April 19, 2017 at 07:20 AM



“ *Divine Peace Bouquet was purchased for the family of James L (Jim) Morriss.*



April 18, 2017 at 12:26 PM

SJ

“ Colonel Morriss...Please know that I am so sorry to hear of your Father's passing. I am praying for you and your family that the Lord with both strengthen and comfort you during this difficult time. With utmost respect and sincerity...Shirley Johns

Shirley Johns - April 18, 2017 at 11:44 AM

GC

“ I enjoyed reading about the life of this honorable man and his great legacy. Prayers and condolences are with the Morriss family for your loss.

George Cole - April 18, 2017 at 09:50 AM



“ 70 files added to the album Memories of Jim Album



Sisco Funeral Chapel - April 18, 2017 at 08:32 AM

TL

This is a terrific collection of great photographs. Thanks.

Tammi Reed Ledbetter - April 19, 2017 at 05:34 PM

TS

“ *Sending much love and many prayers your way. Rob and Tracey Sanchez*

Tracey Sanchez - April 17, 2017 at 09:58 PM

TF

“ *The Philip Straub and Richie Phillips family purchased the Enchanted Cottage for the family of James L (Jim) Morriss.*



The Philip Straub and Richie Phillips family - April 17, 2017 at 07:58 PM



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of James L (Jim) Morriss.*



April 17, 2017 at 11:24 AM

DA

“ *DPC - Don, Tim, Aleshion, Bruce, Charles & Adam purchased the Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum for the family of James L (Jim) Morriss.*



DPC - Don, Tim, Aleshion, Bruce, Charles & Adam - April 17, 2017 at 10:10 AM

MA

“ *Trey, Shana and the rest of the Morriss family - praying that God's peace and strength will ease the difficult days ahead. May the message of Easter be a comfort to you!*

Mark Alvarez - April 17, 2017 at 08:13 AM

SW

“ *This is truly an accurate picture of Jim's life. He was always so nice to me and my family. The Sanders family along with Jim, Charles Bickford and others at the Springdale News were wonderful supports of Springdale and its citizens.*

Jim was a very positive influence on the many people he encountered in his life in Springdale. We were all blessed because of his efforts.

My thoughts and prayers are with Jim's family and friends.

Sam Wilson - April 15, 2017 at 01:42 PM

RH

“ *Reading Jim's obituary for me was reading the History of Springdale. I moved here June 1966 from Little Rock and subscribed to the SPRINGDALE NEWS. Our community paper was the glue that kept our community together and informed. The Sanders family along with Jim and Charles Bickford as the photographer working together, made all of us feel a part of a very special family. Prayers today for the extended families and friends.*

Ron Harrison - April 15, 2017 at 03:39 AM