

## James A. Winker

Winker, James A., age 88, of Burnsville, formerly of Sioux Falls, SD for 61 years, passed away on April 3, 2017, surrounded by his loving family.

James Anthony Winker was born on December 16, 1928 in Randall, MN to Lewis and Cecelia (Feuerstein) Winker. He graduated from Little Falls High School and then attended the University of Minnesota where he completed degrees in Aeronautical Engineering and Business Administration. During his first year at the U of MN he served as a crewmember for the successful launch of a converted Japanese Paper Bombing Balloon by Don Piccard, foreshadowing his long career, avocation and interest in both scientific and sport hot air ballooning. While in school, he worked part-time at General Mills on their scientific balloon programs. He joined General Mills full time after graduation in 1952 where he helped design scientific balloons and took part in a project that distributed pro-democracy leaflets behind the Iron Curtain.

Jim and Marlene met at the U of M Newman Club in 1951 and married in May of 1953.

Jim was called into the Air Force in 1954 and during his 2-year military service, he was assigned to their balloon research group at the U.S. Air Force Cambridge Research Center in Bedford, MA. He attained the rank of Major.

From 1956 until he retired as company vice president in 1991, he worked for Raven Industries, Inc., in Sioux Falls, SD. His achievements include assisting with the flight test of the first modern hot air balloon, designing high-altitude scientific balloons, and managing the manufacturing and sales of sport and scientific balloons. He also worked with the Federal Aviation Administration to develop hot air balloon regulations for the fledgling sport and became an FAA Balloon Pilot Examiner. He holds thirteen balloon related patents. After retiring, his historical research and archiving efforts lead to the creation of the Balloon Technology Collection currently managed by NASA.

A lifetime involved in ballooning took Jim on many great adventures. Highlights include flying over the Swiss Alps in a gas balloon, serving as an official at the first USSR International Balloon Championship, and

launching an experimental balloon made from ancient materials over the Nazca Lines in Peru. He also flew his balloon, "My Blue Heaven," over the opening ceremony of the 1980 Lake Placid Olympics and attended all 21 World Hot Air Balloon Championships that took place from 1973 through 2014 in locations around the globe. In 2009, he was inducted into the U.S. National Ballooning Hall of Fame.



Jim managed to enjoy other hobbies over the years as well. Beer collecting brought an "ornate" touch to his home. He and Marlene were members of the Shirts and Skirts Square Dancing Club for 30 years. They also belonged to several local wine clubs. He was a long-time advocate for urban renewal and green way improvements and bicycle routes along the Big Sioux River. Photography, bicycling and travel were also favorite past times. He instilled the love of travel in his children through family road trips in childhood and many international family trips as adults. Jim was also a generous patron to many charitable causes.

He is preceded in death by his parents, Lewis and Cecelia; siblings, Kevin, Daniel, Lewis, Cecilia Foley, and Thomas Winker. He is survived by his loving wife of 63+ years, Marlene; children, Dave (Brooke), Jeff (Marie), Greg (Molly), Ted (Alice), and Jenny (Mike Popehn) Winker; grandchildren, Gabrielle, Alexandra, Zoe, Daniel, Rebecca, Rachel, Molly, and Austin; brother, Fredrick (Pat) Winker; sisters-in-law, Vanita, Eileen, Marguerite, and Susan Winker; brother-in-law, Bill Foley; many nieces, nephews, other relatives, and friends. Mass of Christian Burial will be held 10:30 AM Wednesday, April 12, 2017 at the Mary, Mother of the Church, 3333 E. Cliff Rd., Burnsville, MN with a visitation on Tuesday (4/11) from 5-8 PM (prayer service 7-7:15 PM) at the White Funeral Home, 12804 Nicollet Ave. S., Burnsville, (952-894-5080) also 1 hr. prior to Mass at Church. Private interment, Fort Snelling National Cemetery. In lieu of flowers memorials will be donated to the Alzheimer's Association. A Memorial Service will also take place in Sioux Falls at a later date. Condolences at: [www.whitefuneral-homes.com](http://www.whitefuneral-homes.com)