



## Donald G. O'Connell

January 7, 1948 - April 7, 2026

Donald G. O'Connell January 7, 1948 - April 7, 2026.

Donald "Don" O'Connell passed away on April 7, 2026. A proud Chicagoan, Don was born on January 7, 1948, to Anita and George O'Connell. From his earliest days on the South Side of Chicago, he was shaped by the values that would define his life: faith, service, loyalty, and a warmth and humor that made everyone around him feel at home.

Don's Catholic faith and its call to social justice were the quiet foundation of everything he did. He attended Quigley South, a Catholic preparatory seminary, and later pursued graduate studies in theology and counseling at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary in Mundelein, a formation that, while it ultimately led him toward family life rather than the priesthood, never left him. He earned his undergraduate degree in English from Loyola University Chicago, an institution he remained deeply proud of throughout his life. His favorite prayer was the Prayer of St. Francis, and those who knew him will recognize why. Through his humor he often helped turn sadness into joy, and through his work he sought to bring more love over hatred and light from darkness. In his final hours, Don received the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, surrounded by family. Those present felt strongly that he had been waiting for that moment, and that the faith which had carried him his whole life carried him home to God.

Don's career was a fifty-year act of service to the city he loved. Early in his career he was a teacher before spending decades in public service across some of Chicago's most important institutions, including the Austin Business Council, Olive-Harvey College, Illinois House of Representatives, the Circuit Court of Cook County, and Stroger Hospital of Cook County. After his retirement from full time work he continued to serve as a Commissioner on the Illinois Liquor Control Commission. He was recognized with the President's Medallion for Service from Loyola University and the Distinguished Service Award from the Austin Business Council.

Don's commitment to his community extended beyond his professional life. For many years he served as a volunteer precinct captain, canvassing his neighborhood and working the polls on Election Day with the same conviction he brought to everything else. He believed deeply that civic participation mattered, and he made sure the people around him believed it too.

Don served his city because he genuinely believed that what you do every day matters, and that every person, regardless of their title or the neighborhood they were born into, deserved to be treated with kindness and dignity. He had a gift for making people feel truly seen, and he taught his daughters and grandchildren to do the same.

Everything Don believed about showing up for others started with the family he and his wife Sheila built together. Theirs was a fifty-year marriage defined not by grand gestures but by quiet, steady, fierce loyalty to each other, their children, and to everyone lucky enough to be in their world. They showed up quietly and consistently, on the good days and the hard ones alike. Don celebrated his fiftieth anniversary with Sheila on March 7, 2026, and passed away exactly one month later. Those who loved him find a quiet grace in that.

Don held many titles over a lifetime of service, but none meant more to him than Papa. His six grandchildren knew him as a constant, warm, and generous presence, always with time, always with love, always with room at the table. The lake house he and Sheila purchased thirteen years ago and spent years building into a beloved family retreat became one of his greatest joys, a place where the whole family could gather, the game nights ran long, and the rounds of spades seemed to never quite end.

Don loved to cook, and he did so with the same spirit he brought to everything else: more was always better, and everyone was always welcome. There was, by all accounts, always too much food, and that was exactly how he wanted it. Whether it was at the kitchen table, a neighborhood block party, or the lake house, his instinct was always to build a bigger table and invite everyone to join him. Nobody who walked through his door left without feeling welcomed, fed, and cared for. That hospitality was simply an expression of who he was.

The table he built will never feel the same without him. But everything it stood for will endure, and his legacy will continue through his daughters and grandchildren.

Don is survived by his wife Sheila O'Connell; daughters Kellie O'Connell, Kerry O'Connell, and Maggie O'Connell; grandchildren Hailey O'Connell, Reilly Browning, Brennan O'Connell-Miller, Jameson Browning, Miley Leato, and Jayce Leato; siblings Terry (Marcia) O'Connell, Mike (Dawn) O'Connell, Jo Anne (Joe) Aikens, Pat (Phil) Kaiser, Jim (Cathy) O'Connell, and Rene (Mark, deceased) Breit; and sisters and brothers-in-law Kathleen (Jim) Thompkins, Noreen (Jim) Pecyna, Anne Brennan, Mary Margaret Brennan, Dan (Grace) Brennan, Peggy Brennan, Debbie Brennan, and Marty (PJ Iraca) Brennan, along with dozens of nieces and nephews who knew him as their favorite Uncle Don.

Don was preceded in death by his parents Anita and George O'Connell, siblings Tom and John O'Connell, and brother-in-law John Brennan. He was also reunited with Dickens, the family's beloved dog, who no doubt greeted him at the door.

In true Don fashion, his generosity did not end with his passing. In accordance with his wishes, Don's body has been donated to science, one final act of service to others. A memorial Mass will be celebrated by his longtime friend Fr. Bob Rizzo on Saturday, May 16, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. at St. Albert the Great Parish, followed by a luncheon to celebrate his life.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that you honor Don's legacy of service with a donation to the American Red Cross <https://americanredcross.donordrive.com/campaigns/Don-OConnell> or your favorite charity. And, if the spirit moves you, do what Don would have done: make a big meal and enjoy it with those you love.

Arrangements by Inclusive Funeral Care, 773-318-1305 or [www.InclusiveFuneralCare.com](http://www.InclusiveFuneralCare.com).

# Previous Events

## Memorial Mass

MAY **16**. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (CT)

St. Albert the Great Parish  
8000 Linder Avenue  
Burbank, IL 60459  
<https://stalbertgreat.com/>

*Followed by a luncheon to celebrate his life.*

# Tribute Wall



“ *The McWherter Family purchased the Enchanted Cottage for the family of Donald G. O'Connell.* ”



---

**The McWherter Family** - May 03 at 01:20 PM



“ *Love, Anne Matt Rob Tara Keira & Una purchased the Emerald Garden Basket for the family of Donald G. O'Connell.* ”



---

**Love, Anne Matt Rob Tara Keira & Una** - April 29 at 02:04 PM



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Donald G. O'Connell.* ”



---

April 23 at 03:55 PM

DM

“ Our family met Don so many years ago. I'll always remember Don's kindness & smile. When our mother passed Don made sure to take care of our family. We will always remember Don he had stories to share, always a smile on his face. When we visited my sister Gail & Phil we were fortunate to visit with Don Sheila & their daughters. Don you will never be forgotten. Rest peacefully dear friend.

Debbie McWherter - April 15 at 03:13 PM

CM

“ I will miss Dons smile and little chuckle when we were sitting on Gail and Phil's patio. He always had something nice or funny to say. I know he will be greatly missed by so many but always remember the joy he brought to so many. God bless you Don. Carl McWherter

Carl McWherter - April 13 at 01:21 PM

CB

“ Prayers for you and your family Pat.

Cathy Bornell - April 10 at 06:12 PM

RE

“ Many years ago when we were all so very young, Don had his tall dresser draped with religious items that looked exactly like a real altar.  
And Don provided us with Holy Communion (Necco wafers)  
Brings a smile to my face every time I think of it.

Rene - April 10 at 03:33 PM

LR

Sheila, my heart goes out to you and your family. May cherished memories bring you comfort. Sending you love and prayers 🙏❤️

Liddy & Sheron. R - April 10 at 03:55 PM

RE

*One more tale. When Don was driving back from Oklahoma, and a huge, huge turtle was crossing the road, he thought he would save its life and bring it home. So they drove all that way home with a very smelly, extremely large turtle in the car. When they arrived at 8159 LeClaire, Don placed the Turtle in a fenced in area of the fabulous garden to keep him safe.*

*Regretfully, waking up the next morning, Turtle dug his way out of the garden underneath the fencing. Although Don was disappointed, he continued to mention he couldn't believe they drove all that way in the stench filled car, only to have their road trip "passenger" for less than 24 hours.*

*So many stories, look forward to hearing some of everyone else's too.  
Helps us through our overwhelming loss 💔*

---

**Rene** - April 10 at 04:00 PM

GC

*How do I fit 36 years of friendship in this small space? Don and I were buddies. We both loved to garden and started working on them as soon as the Chicago winter was behind us and the daffodils started peaking out. We both loved to cook and so many times we'd share meals contributing dishes to pass. Always way too much food. Our yards were our meeting place. We put a gate between them because we were always at each others houses, either in the back yard or in each others basements. It was "The Compound". We tipped a few (I always had stuff for manhattens but never really knew how to make one) and Talked about anything and everything. But, around mid-term or general elections well that's where it always landed. Don was passionate about politics and was a dedicated servant as our Precinct Captain in the 13th ward. In addition, we worked hard together on our LaCrosse Street Blockparty Washing spuns, soaking corn, cutting green peppers the day before in prep for the feast that was prepared for the entire block. Beef sandwiches, polish sausage, baked potatoes with all the fixings and of course grilled corn on the cob. Of course Don was the grillmaster. It got so big that people from The hotels down the Street thought it was a festival. Nothing small for Don. So many many more stories to tell but I will end by saying this, When Don moved in next door he gave me a gift. I got my dear friend Sheila who I love dearly, (all of her family) three beautiful girls who feel like my own daughters, 6 beautiful Grandkids who I will always have cookies for, His Mom, and all of his brothers and sisters and their families. I loved my dear friend and will miss him. Thank you Don for the wonderful memories and the gifts you unknowingly gave me. Rest in peace my friend.*

---

**Gail Conwell** - April 11 at 12:55 AM