



John C. Peterson

April 15, 1948 - January 8, 2025

John C. Peterson was born in Topeka, Kansas, on April 15, 1948, the only son of Cecil and Helen Peterson.

He attended Randolph Grade School, Boswell Jr High and was a proud graduate of Topeka High School. He was President of the Student Council and active in debate and golf. He won state debate, placing 3rd in the National American Legion Oratory, was elected Governor of Boys State and attended Boys Nation.

John received a degree in political science from Stanford University where he was also active in debate. He was selected top orator at Stanford and received the Joffree award for outstanding debater between Stanford and Cal-Berkeley. In 1974, he received a JD from Washburn School of Law.

John was elected to the Kansas Legislature at age 22 where he served two terms. During that time, he chaired the House Public Health and Welfare Committee and was one of the youngest committee chairpersons. He ran for 2nd District Congress in 1974, in which he won the primary and lost the general to sitting Congresswoman Martha Keys. After the loss, he began the practice of law. He practiced for 25 years with Jan Hamilton and Bob Keeshan but his personal practice grew primarily in the government relations area. In 2000, he established Capitol Strategies, LLC, which exclusively worked for

associations and companies before the Kansas Legislature. He retired from being CEO in 2021 but remained active with the company.

He married Debra Mahoney in 1980, they divorced in 1990. He married Michelle Liester in 1993, she survives as does son, Vinnie Murphy (Melissa); three grandchildren; and stepsister Sandra Hughes of Dallas, Texas. Predeceasing him were his father Cecil "Pete" Peterson (2003), mother Helen Lyon Peterson (1967), his stepmother Marvel Bowlus Peterson (2009), and grandchildren Sophia and Noah Murphy.

He was a lifetime member of the First United Methodist Church, served as Chair of the Shawnee County Heart Association, was a former Chair of the Topeka Country Club Board and was Co-President of the Diversified Investment Club.

He and Michelle enjoyed their summer home at Council Grove Lake and traveling to all parts of the globe, visiting over 50 countries. He continued his interest in golf, attending eight British Senior Opens, shooting his age on occasion, and generally completing 100+ rounds of golf a year.

John was a fixture in the Kansas Statehouse for over 50 years. A few years ago, he had an idea of placing Kansas artwork in the Capitol committee rooms. A fund has been set up to honor John's vision and wish to see art displayed on the walls of the Statehouse, a place dear to his heart. Memorial contributions may be made to ArtsConnect at the request of John's family and friends, so those gifts may be used to purchase works of Kansas artists for the State Capitol. You may contribute to the fund at ArtsConnect online <https://arts.topeka.org/petersonfund> or contributions may be mailed to 909 N. Kansas Avenue, Topeka, Kansas 66608, please write "Peterson Memorial" in the memo line.

A celebration of life will be held at 5 p.m. Wednesday, April 9, 2025, at Topeka Country Club, 2700 SW Buchanan Street, Topeka, Kansas 66611.

Condolences may be sent online at www.kevinbrennanfamily.com

Previous Events

A Celebration of Life

APR **9**. 5:00 PM (CT)

Topeka Country Club
2700 SW Buchanan Street
Topeka, KS 66611

Tribute Wall



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of John C. Peterson.

April 09, 2025 at 12:28 PM



“ Country Basket Blooms was purchased for the family of John C. Peterson.



April 09, 2025 at 12:28 PM



“ Scott and Michele Schwab purchased the Beautiful in Blue for the family of John C. Peterson.



Scott and Michele Schwab - April 09, 2025 at 11:04 AM

BJ

“ A favorite (lighter) memory of mine with John is when my wife Becky and I unexpectedly found ourselves in St. Croix with him and Michelle to attend the National Lt. Governors Conference in St. Croix (someone had to go)! We were accustomed to supporting members of the Kansas Legislature together at annual legislative conferences around the country, including the memorable "Kansas Night" celebrations. But the opportunity to support Lt. Governor Gary Sherrer and his wife Judy during this event gave the four of us extended time together to enjoy our already strong friendship in this beautiful setting. Over the years, John and I spent many hours together in meetings, strategy sessions, and conversations regarding Kansas business issues, but it will always be his infectious smile and laugh that I remember the most (including in St. Croix)!

Bill Jarrell - April 09, 2025 at 07:40 AM



“ Serene Retreat was purchased for the family of John C. Peterson.



April 08, 2025 at 10:22 PM

RK

“ it was a shock to me when I heard from Larrie Ann of John's passing. He was a calming influence in our Hamilton, Peterson, Keeshan law partnership, generous with his time and wisdom. His knowledge of the legislative process was amazing. His loyalty to his friends knew no bounds. Michelle, we will always remember John fondly and miss him.

Robert Keeshan - January 16, 2025 at 10:28 AM

SP

“ John was such a wonderful person, so full of integrity, and always so honest in his work with the legislature. He was always so positive and full of happiness. A true gentleman.

Sandy Praeger - January 15, 2025 at 01:19 PM

WD

“ John was a legendary advocate for his clients in the Kansas Statehouse, a wonderful colleague, and longtime friend to my wife Kathy and me. My condolences to Michelle and John's family.
Whitney Damron

Whitney Blair Damron - January 15, 2025 at 11:00 AM

MM

“ I am John's daughter in law. He is known to us as "Grandpa John." There is simply not enough space to write how much Grandpa John means to us, who he is to us and he amazing, steadfast, faithful love and support to his grandchildren and us. The lake house is one of our fondest memories. 26 years, every summer, the fun at the lake house with Grandpa & grandma! The grandchildren have one fun story after another of boat rides, paddle boats, trampoline, water tube, food, grilling and water balloons at the lake house. And MUCH more. Grandpa is a huge presence in our lives. Majorly. He is the best story teller ever! His patience with the grandchildren is remarkable. When John was in the room, his presence brought a deep sense of calmness and peace. Grandpa John was always thinking about our comfort level and fun level. He never condmen but always supported and loved us where we are in life. Always. How greatly he is missed already and will be each day of our lives until we join him with our Heavenly Father & Lord/Savior Jesus in Heaven.

John taught each grandchildren to drive the golf cart at the lake house. How much they look forward to driving each summer on that golf cart! Grandpa John was very hands on with each of the grandkids. He was an amazing father figure to me and a loving grandpa for me also. He embraced me right away into the family when we met for the 1st time in 1996.

Grandpa John led a very amazing life and wonderful traveling they did all around the world! He had a successful law practice. Yet I feel his greatest accomplishment is his love for his wife, Michelle and his loving commitment to her through everything. And his steadfast love, care, and support to his family, especially his grandchildren and us. His love. Grandpa John loved deeply and always created safe, fun environments for us. How deeply, how great and wide grandpa John is loved, and missed.

Melissa Murphy





Melissa Murphy - January 15, 2025 at 05:22 AM

MB

“ *I became John's pastor in 1972 and knew his Dad and step mother. I always enjoyed greeting John at the 8:15 worship service. His friendship enriched my life and the lives of many.*

Merris Brady - January 14, 2025 at 03:56 PM

HJ

“ I attended Boys State with Mr. Peterson the year that he was elected Governor of the proceedings. He was one of the most persuasive individuals that I have ever met. His speaking and leadership skills were simply outstanding.

I followed his political career and truly believe that he would have had a very illustrious career in that arena had he won his 1974 run for Congress. Unfortunately, he had the misfortune of running during the Watergate Era against an attractive Democrat in Martha Keys.

As it turned out, Ms. Keys had a rather lackluster record in Congress and ironically was defeated for reelection later during the Carter administration.

Another irony is that Ms. Keys recently passed away as well.

I am certain that Mr. Peterson's family has many wonderful memories to comfort them at this time. My deepest condolences to them.

Harlan Hobbs
Tucson, Arizona

Harlan Hobbs Jr - January 13, 2025 at 04:16 PM

KE

John was in my graduating class at Topeka High in 1966. John was one of the smartest and most knowledgeable people I knew at THS. I admired his debating skills, and he certainly was an inspiration for other novice debaters. Debate was my most memorable experience in my 3 years at THS and I met so many amazing people. In a graduating class of 600 students, John definitely left a lasting impression on many people. Karen Branaman Elder

Karen S Elder - January 16, 2025 at 08:38 PM

DB

I was saddened and surprised to hear about John's passing. I attended all public schools with him and in the THS '66 class. Last visited with him at the 75-year old's reunion of THS. My earliest memory was him with a world map in Randolph GS being able with some calculation to tell where Sputnik was over the globe. John was a "Buck" at THS, all of whom would become attorneys.

My sincere condolences to others who will miss him and his times.

Dan Barton - March 23, 2025 at 07:37 AM

CW

I was honored to serve on a Board with John for several years. He was an honorable, committed, intelligent man. His contributions to so many and service were even far greater than I had known!

Catherine Walberg - April 02, 2025 at 02:38 PM