



George Edward Conner

JUN 26, 1941 - FEB 8, 2026



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FLORAL HAVEN

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George Edward Conner passed away peacefully early Sunday, February 8, 2026 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He was born June 26, 1941. As an infant he joined a loving family in McAlester, Oklahoma. He is preceded in death by his father Richard Lee Conner, his mother, Betty O’Neal Conner and his brother, Richard Neal Conner. His Parents had the Coca Cola bottling plant in McAlester. It was in that bottling facility that George learned about business, hard work and how important quality was in everything. He was a life long Coca Cola devote. Only the “Real Thing” for George.

George’s mother came to Oklahoma in a covered wagon from Missouri. His Great Grandfather, for whom he was named, George Washington O’Neal, was a member of the first Oklahoma Legislature and helped write the Oklahoma Constitution.

As a young boy his mother insisted that he take piano lessons. George always had his baseball and glove next to him on the piano bench and would run out the door with them the second piano practice was over. Soon his mother gave in to the fact George was more interested in sports than music. As a member of the high school Golf Team he could tee off from his backyard, on to the McAlester Country Club golf course which was built on land that his family donated. George was also president of the high school Key Club. He graduated McAlester High in 1959.

George’s favorite childhood memories were of the summers he spent in White Deer, Texas, on the farm with his cousins. He learned to drive their tractor and do chores at a very young age. Those times created fun and confidence for a young boy.

George was a business major at Tulsa University and a member of Kappa Sigma Fraternity. After Graduation in 1964 from TU, he was expected to run the Coca Cola family business, But Skelly Oil made George an offer he couldn't refuse. He became an auditor and began to travel the USA for Skelly. Skelly was eventually acquired by Getty Oil. George moved to the California headquarters for Getty and held numerous financial positions including Executive Assistant to the



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Treasurer, Corporate Credit Manager, Manager of Internal Audit, Finance Manager and head of Diversified operations. His department was in charge of vineyards, plywood and the Getty Museum. George loved the ocean, beach and excitement of Los Angeles. He learned to love seafood at the Black Whale Restaurant and he enjoyed lots of things McAlester didn't have.

One day George was asked to evaluate a new investment opportunity for Getty. Bill and Scott Rasmussen had the then "wild" idea of showing sports on television 24 hours a day! They needed funding to start this huge venture. They tried 7 other companies before pitching the idea to Getty. George thought it was interesting and studied the potential success/failure possibilities non stop for weeks. He did much of this study in Tulsa. He also found out all he could about the new ideas of cable and satellite transmission of television. He recommended that Getty fund ESPN...this exciting and risky venture was turned into a reality. ESPN launched on September 7, 1979 at 7 pm.. George worked tirelessly for almost four years in Bristol Connecticut getting ESPN off the ground. He never wavered on his conviction that ESPN would be a success! "Unquestionably George's contribution was essential to the successful launch of ESPN," said Bill Rasmussen. "He was the epitome of a gentleman — kind, smart, modest and liked by everyone. I will miss my good friend."

While still an employee of Getty Oil, George was also ESPN Vice President, Financial Management and Administration and worked at ESPN's Connecticut headquarters. He held the title until Getty Oil sold ESPN in 1984.

"George was one of a handful of people who can honestly say ESPN wouldn't have happened without him," said Scott Rasmussen, Bill's son. "He was a good friend and a wonderful man whom I will miss. The last time we spoke, George just wanted to reminisce about all the fun we had during the founding of the network. It was a special time for all of us filled with memories that will never die."

Before coming back to Tulsa in the 1990's George spent 5 glorious years as a "Professional Beach Bum" in Marina Del Ray, CA, after recovering from a life threatening car accident in the 1980's. He was lured back to Tulsa by his good friend and fraternity brother, Bob McGreggor, to co-purchase Mid Continent Medical Corporation and Merkel X-Ray in Tulsa and OKC. George was President and CEO. George and Bob had owned an Arnold Palmer dry cleaners together in their early adult years.



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George's council was sought by many. He served on the advisory boards of DePauw University and California State university Long Beach.

George has been the best friend anyone could ever wish for. He was loving and honest. He was humble and grateful. He was generous, intelligent and lots of fun. He will be missed by three dear cousins and many many dear friends. George had another adopted family who he influenced, counseled and helped in countless ways- including working in their family business, Niensens Exclusive Gifts, so they could adopt daughters. George didn't realize it would take "that long" to raise daughters - but he loved his "nieces"! He loved being called "Uncle"! He will be deeply missed by this family...Andrea Nielsen Bartlett, Gary Bartlett and "nieces" Faye Bartlett and Annika Bartlett.

John Erling recently interviewed George for Voices of Oklahoma podcast. To hear the story in George's own words please go to <https://VoicesofOklahoma.com> and search George Conner.

George is truly one of the ESPN pioneers who will be featured in the upcoming documentary project "Sports Heaven: The Birth of ESPN" from Tanero Productions about the Rasmussens and the launch of ESPN.

A family internment will take place in McAlester and a future Celebration of George's life is being planned.

In Lieu of flowers consider a donation to the Voice of Oklahoma at <https://voicesofoklahoma.com>, or Tulsa University School of Innovation and Entrepreneurship at <https://sites.utulsa.edu/cie/hurricane-ventures/>, or to a charity of your choice.



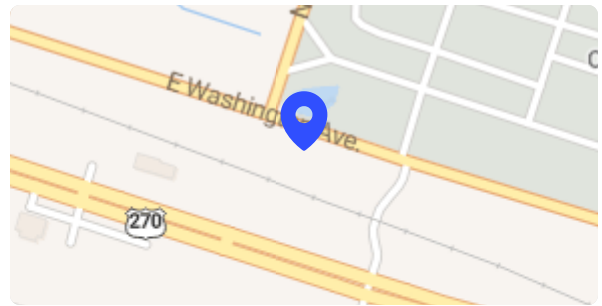
Events

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Cemetery Details

 **Oak Hill Cemetery Cemetery**
1300 E. Washington Ave., McAlester OK 74501





Tribute Wall

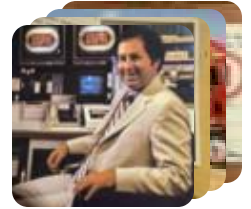
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Faye Bartlett shared 6 photos to the **Tribute Wall** album.

February 11 at 4:44 PM





Media

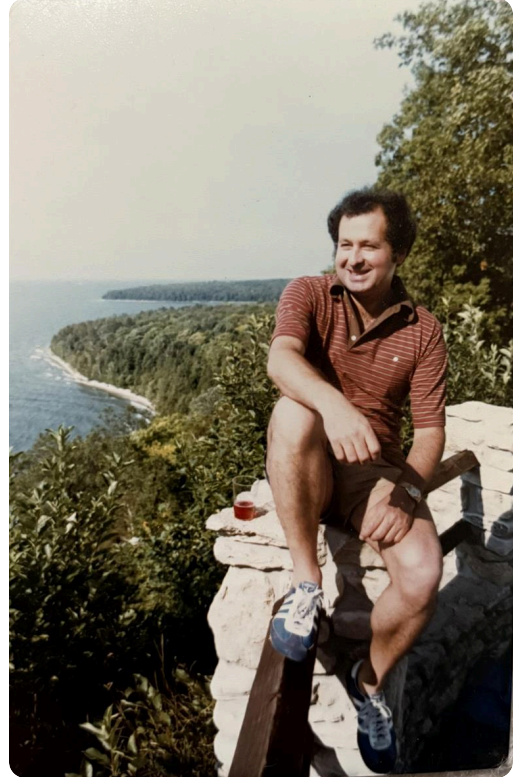
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Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring George by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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