



Joseph John Blum

February 26, 1934 - December 23, 2025

Joseph John Blum passed away peacefully on Tuesday, December 23, 2025, at Warm Hearth Village in Blacksburg, Virginia at the age of 91. He was born on February 26, 1934, on a tenant farm in Shelby County, Iowa, the ninth and final child of Joseph Peter and Mayme Kobold Blum.

Joe graduated from Iowa State University in 1956 with a degree in Electrical Engineering. It was while attending Iowa State that he met the love of his life, Janet Rairigh and the two were married in June 1956. This union would last nearly sixty years until Jan's passing on October 29, 2015. Surviving are the couple's five children: Catherine Blum of Philadelphia, PA, Christine (Paul) Vaughan of Bowie, MD, Joseph (Esther) Blum of Bonne Terre, MO, Robert (Ingrid) Blum of Decatur, IL and Thomas (Stephanie) Blum of Phoenix, AZ. Also, surviving are eleven grandchildren and fourteen great-grandchildren.

In 1956 Joe was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the United States Air Force. He would serve his country proudly for thirty years, attaining the rank of Colonel before retiring in 1986. He served as a Combat Air Crew member in Vietnam and as an instructor of Electrical Engineering at the U.S. Air Force Academy. Later he would be assigned to the U.S. Naval Academy as a professor on the Systems Engineering faculty, where he was eventually promoted to Department Chairman.

After his Air Force years Joe joined the faculty at Virginia Tech as a professor and Assistant Department Head in the Electrical Engineering Department. He retired from his final post in 1996 after ten years of service.

Joe filled his retirement years enjoying several of his life-long hobbies. He was an excellent woodworker, building heirloom-quality furniture for his family. He also enjoyed tinkering with anything mechanical, especially his classic Volkswagen Beetle. Joe was also a physical fitness enthusiast, especially jogging and eventually walking as the years went on.

For nearly twenty years Joe and Jan lived at Warm Hearth Village together and these he regarded as the happiest years of his life. Special thanks go out to all of the staff at Warm Hearth for keeping Joe comfortable during his final days.

The family will receive friends for a memorial service at McCoy Funeral Home, 150 Country Club Drive, Blacksburg on Friday, February 27, 2026, from 2:00 to 4:00pm. In lieu of flowers, the family respectfully requests that any condolences be offered in the form of donations in Joe's name to any of the several veteran organizations around the country. Following the reception Joe's ashes will be interred beside Jan's in a private ceremony at Westview Cemetery, Blacksburg.

Cemetery Details

Westview Cemetery

723 E. Roanoke Street
Blacksburg, VA

Previous Events

Memorial Service

FEB 27. 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM (ET)

McCoy Funeral Home Chapel
150 Country Club Dr S.W.
Blacksburg, VA 24060

Tribute Wall

HS

“ I want to offer my sincere condolences to the family of Joe Blum. He was a special person and friend.

It was a special privilege to have worked for Col. Joe as an engineering instructor when he was the Weapon Systems Engineering Department Chair at the Naval Academy. In addition to being my boss, he became a personal friend. We kept in touch after he moved to Scott AFB and after my tour at USNA I arranged to stop at Scott to visit and stayed at his home on the Base. I remember getting up early the next morning and going for a several mile jog around the base.

My next duty station was on the USS Kitty Hawk (CVA-63) as the Catapult and Arresting Gear Officer. I was responsible for launching and recovering all the aircraft on the flight deck. I'm sure many have heard this story, but I arranged for him to have a visit to the ship for two days at sea as a VIP guest of the ship's Captain which included having breakfast and lunch with the Captain in his private dining compartment. I personally gave Joe tours of all the catapult and arresting gear spaces culminating in taking him up on the flight deck, between the catapults during an actual launch and landing evolution. He got the complete VIP tour of the ship. When he left the ship he departed by being catapulted off on the COD (Carrier Onboard Delivery) aircraft! For me his visit was as thrilling as I'm sure it was for him being able to host him for the two days. Sometime after this, Joe was transferred to Hickam AFB in Hawaii.

My last encounter with Joe was a big surprise. I left the Kitty Hawk six-months later as I was on my way to Stanford University and switching from active duty to a Naval Reserve billet while in school. I had mentioned in a letter to Joe that I would be coming through Honolulu arriving very early in the morning on my journey to San Francisco. As I came out of Immigration and Customs there standing waiting for me was Colonel Joe Blum waiting to greet a certain Navy Lieutenant Commander. Wow, was I surprised! That was the the essence of Col. Joe Blum!

That was the last time I saw Joe. He was a very special person. In addition to writing my fitness report (evaluation) while I served under him, he wrote an incredible recommendation for my application for the Stanford Business School which I'm sure had something to do with my acceptance. I was the third Weapons Systems Engineering Department officer to have served under Joe at the Naval Academy to be accepted at Stanford.

*Captain Hank Scherf, USNR-Retired
Scottsdale, AZ*

Hank Scherf - May 30 at 05:32 PM

FS

“ It was my privilege to know and work with Joe when I was Department Head of Electrical Engineering (before it became ECE). Joe was Assistant Department Head with responsibility for facilities. In this role, he was highly creative in problem-solving as well as in negotiating with both outside and University contractors. For example, he worked with an external design consultant to effect upgrades to our stark conference rooms. Hitherto barely used by faculty committees, the revitalized rooms became so popular that a booking system had to be initiated.

Joe was also skilled at finding new space for research groups. One example resulted from his ability to convince University Safety Officials that one of the Whittemore Hall emergency exits was not needed. By blocking the exit, a few vital square feet were added to one of our key research areas.

Other successes included the acquisition of temporary space outside our building to house graduate students and, perhaps most unusual, the removal of pigeons from the roof of our building. These birds had hitherto made one of the entrances hazardous due to droppings from above!

Joe was also a gifted teacher, and a friendly, hard-working colleague. I will never forget the privilege of knowing him and relying on his exceptional ability as a problem solver.

My condolences are extended to the Blum family, coupled with regrets that I am unable to attend the memorial gathering in Blacksburg.

Bill Stephenson

EE Department Head 1990-94

Dean of Engineering 1994-2002

Frederick. William Stephenson - February 26 at 12:03 PM

IB

“ Senior Joe, I didn't really knew you, personally; but through my younger sister, Esther, who married your son, Joe Blum, and after your wife Jan, passed away, your true love, your soul mate, I started to send you, Christmas cards, too you, to help you, through the Merry Christmas holidays. To brighten up, your spirits, when all you, could think of was your wife, Jan.. To ❤️ Joe and Esther, your dad will be missed 😞 😔 through your own family, siblings, and all your relatives and so many friends. To Nick and Jessica, Celeste and Cory, and Lucy, and all your siblings children's, please 🙏 accept 🙏 ❤️ ❤️ my condolences 🙏 for the loss of your Dad Joe, Grandpa Joe, and g. Grandpa Joe, and so many more..Believe me, your Father Joe and your Mother Jan, are so happy 😊 to be together ❤️ , again; both are looking down on their entire family and they're very proud of each of YOU.. Love, bless, all of you.. love 🙏 ❤️ Irene Buenemann

Irene Buenemann - February 06 at 08:53 PM

JR

“ Joe was a great guy. He gave me great advice when I was a beginning assistant professor that I still reflect on 34 years later. He will be missed.

Jeff Reed - January 14 at 03:09 PM

MS

“ We spent many lunch hours with Joe at the Huckleberry Cafe, sharing military stories. He will be missed.

Michael Spears - January 01 at 04:57 AM



“ Joe was a wonderful Electrical Engineering colleague at Virginia Tech. He served our nation as an officer in the U.S. Air Force and then served Virginia Tech and its students as an EE faculty member. I extend my sympathies to Joe's family. May he rest in peace and may we all cherish our memories of Joe.

Scott Midkiff - December 30, 2025 at 05:25 PM



“ Mr. Blum came into New River Office Supply every year to purchase his calendar every year. He was such a wonderful person to talk to. He loved to share his memories of his wife and his life and work experiences thru the armed forces to Virginia Tech. We will miss him and send condolences to his family.

Rita Bradbury - December 30, 2025 at 08:08 AM



“ He was such a blessing to be around. It was an honor to care for him. After hearing his war stories I started calling him my Earthly Angel. I love and will miss him.

Tiffany Sherman - December 29, 2025 at 06:34 PM