



James "Ray" Bearden

December 26, 1938 - August 30, 2023

James "Ray" Bearden, age 84, of Holland (formerly of Flint), passed away on Wednesday, August 30, 2023.

Loving husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather, Ray touched hundreds of lives as a dedicated teacher at Flint Central High School and Mott Community College. His career at Flint Central spanned almost 40 years before he retired in 1998. As Chairman of the English department, teacher of German, and originator of the Humanities program in Flint, he shared his love of knowledge and learning with students and colleagues alike. Ray played keyboards, flute and piccolo and participated in numerous bands, orchestras and vocal performances over the years. A lover of music, photography, literature, and of nature, Ray was a lifelong learner and a deep thinker.

Ray is survived by his wife of 64 years, Barbara; his sons: Tim (Jamie) Bearden, Scott (Wendy) Bearden; grandchildren: Ashley (Austin) Jackson, Cole Bearden, Kennedy Bearden, Calihan Bearden; great grand-daughter, Eliza; sister-in-law, Angie Bearden; sister-in-law and brother-in-law Rachel and Mel Evans, sister-in-law and brother-in-law Barb and Don Evans, and many nieces and nephews.

He was preceded in death by his parents: James C. & Verla (Ray) Bearden; sister, Elaine Bearden; and brother, Larry Bearden.

Per Ray's wishes, cremation has taken place, and a Celebration of Life Open House will be held. Family will welcome visitors from 4:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, September 5, 2023 at Langeland-Sterenbergh Funeral Home, 315 E. 16th St., Holland. Memorial contributions may be given to the Alzheimer's Association (<https://act.alz.org/donate>).

Previous Events

Visitation

SEP 5. 4:00 PM - 7:00 PM (ET)

Langeland-Sterenberg Funeral Home

315 E 16th St

Holland, MI 49423

(616) 392-2306

info@langelandsterenberg.com

<http://langelandsterenberg.com/>

Tribute Wall



“ *Langeland-Sterenberg Yntema Funeral Homes created a Tribute Video in memory of James "Ray" Bearden*



Langeland-Sterenberg Yntema Funeral Homes - September 01, 2023 at 10:58 AM

MC

Like so many students at Flint Central High school, I benefited from Mr. Bearden's humanities class. What I learned from him, has shaped the way I see the world these last 40 years. Thank you, Mr. Bearden, for creating a welcoming and engaging classroom for thousands of us through the years. You will be missed.

-Mary (née Mazarakis) Carlson

Mary R Carlson - September 02, 2023 at 06:22 PM

MJ

The quintessential example of one of the finest high school and college educators among the ranks! I can recall feeling like I was learning from Mr. Bearden while I was teaching downstairs on the 1st floor with echos of his brilliance descending from the 3rd floor many a day during the 16 years we were colleagues with similar goals for students. Students would come to class or rehearsals FULL of stories about what Mr. Bearden was teaching that day...and of course who could forget his inquisitive interrogation during the "Meeting of the Minds?" every spring among the seniors in the program. I have and will always respect with dignity a man who knew a lot about everything. His respect for what I did "downstairs" inspiring theatre students in productions and in the classroom was something I cherish to this day. May he rest in peace with gratification for what he taught so many about the world, literature and the importance of understanding people of all cultures who can make a difference. God Bless Ray Bearden, a true academic legend in his time and a legacy forever, for many.

Martin W Jennings - September 02, 2023 at 09:44 PM

BW

I am very sorry for your loss. Mr. Bearden was my home room and German teacher, 1968-1971. He helped me to believe in myself. His positive impact on my life blossomed after high school. While discussing my dismal grades, Mr. Bearden chose not to focus on the obvious root cause for my poor performance (lack of effort). Instead, he wisely chose to look forward by providing only positive feedback—my potential to do better if I tried harder. I fondly remember that Mr. Bearden seemed quite pleased to award a high grade when I occasionally did the homework necessary to successfully complete a class exercise—you can't fake it, to make it in German! He even went out on a limb by sharing my IQ test results (forbidden at the time, for some reason) which proved my underperformance was solely on me. While at the time it appeared Mr. Bearden's efforts had been squandered, his positive influence actually provided a spark necessary for me to succeed in college, law school, and my career. I am blessed to be one of thousands of students Mr. Bearden positively impacted over his long career. A life well lived. Thank you. Brian Wheeler

Brian Wheeler - September 04, 2023 at 04:05 PM

OF

Although my home school was Flint Northern, I benefited from Mr. Bearden's humanities class during my 5th and 6th hours at Flint Central '89. I always will appreciate the feedback he provided on writing assignments which discouraged mediocrity. I'm certain he played a positive role in thousands of students careers and contributions to society. Thank you!
Oren Flynn

Oren Flynn - September 04, 2023 at 08:32 PM

HF

“ *Some of my best undergraduate students at The University of Michigan-Flint were veterans of Ray's honors program at Flint Central High School. The centerpiece of the photographs on our living room wall is a photo of our matriarch timber wolf that Ray took when he brought his class out to our UM canid research site in Flushing Township.*

Harry Frank - March 07 at 12:32 PM

KQ

“ *Mr Bearden, thank you for the belief that you had in me and for the kindness and love you always showed me. I remember knowing that your retirement was on the horizon and being worried that I might not get to take your Humanities class. Thankfully, I got that chance my senior year in 1998. You were everything and more. A million thanks for all that you gave to us and for opening up our minds in so many new ways. You are simply the best. Sending my love and prayers of comfort and peace to all of your family.*

Rest in paradise.

All my love,

Kim Boven

Kim Quigley - September 06, 2023 at 01:10 PM

“ One of the memories I come back to repeatedly, was when Uncle Ray took their Bouvier des Flandres, Chaucer, to a dog show and I wandered away and got lost. I don't remember much more about that, but I had never been to a dog show before and it was just one of the examples of how Uncle Ray pushed himself to try new experiences. As a kid, he intimidated me a little. He was so smart and you wanted to impress him as a result. While he held himself and others to a high standard, there was no doubt he was proud of us and loved us.

I used to love listening when he and Dad bantered back and forth pretty much every time we got together. Almost always, Dad (little brother until the end) would push Uncle Ray's buttons on purpose. Not a huge surprise to those who knew them both, but Dad would love getting him riled up. Two of the smartest men I know, battling it out, with one of them gleefully baiting the other, was pretty entertaining.

We were blessed to have so much music, art and literature in our lives which primarily came from Uncle Ray and Dad. On one of the many visits we made to Aunt Barbara and him when they lived in Florida, he was playing a jazz CD. That night, Uncle Ray introduced us to Diana Krall who became one of our favorite artists and for which I'm eternally thankful.

While Uncle Ray was serious about a lot of things, Aunt Barbara, Dad and Mom would bring out the silly side of him whether he wanted it to come out or not. They vacationed together, and stories came out of those vacations that I'm sure he didn't always find amusing, but we did. He was co-pilot when Dad drove in England with the end result being a "slightly damaged", parallel parked rental car. There were plenty of wild and crazy stories from Vegas, much laughter at the mention of the hula girls of Hawaii and one mysterious encounter with a hotel radiator.

The Bearden Brothers, left us too quickly, but they left this world a

better place with their appreciation for education, the arts and the love of family.

Tim, Scott and Aunt Barbara - Thank you for the support and love you have given to Mom, Kathleen, Jacquelynn and me over the past couple months. We are here for you. Love you all.

Amy Brailey - September 05, 2023 at 11:21 PM

TB

This is beautiful Amy. Thanks so much - made me happy to read this.

Timothy J Bearden - September 06, 2023 at 10:51 AM

PS

“ *Paul S. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of James "Ray" Bearden.*

Paul S. - September 05, 2023 at 11:06 PM

PL

“ *Dear Barb and family. Ray was my very favorite teacher while at Central and turned into a mentor and friend. I absolutely loved him to death and mourn him along with you. He was an outstanding human being with an amazing sense of humor and I was in awe of him. Please accept my sincere condolences. His passing is truly a great loss. I will love and remember him always! Peggy Lawrence*

Peggy Lawrence - September 05, 2023 at 09:31 PM

MJ

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Martin W Jennings - September 05, 2023 at 08:31 PM

GO

“ Gott im Himmel, ich bin traurig! He taught me German and I loved his humanities class even if I doodled in the margins a little much. Now you get to have an actual meeting with all those minds you had us channel.

Gary Oshust - September 05, 2023 at 10:20 AM

DO

“ So very sorry for you loss. I took his German class, for only a few weeks in 1967. Had trouble speaking in front of people so needed to drop his class. For the rest of my high school years he called me his little German dropout. I did end up doing paperwork filing for him. This has stayed with me all these years. RIP Mr. Bearden. You touched May lives.

Donna - September 05, 2023 at 09:41 AM

AK

“ Mr. Bearden's Humanities class was transformative. It was the best class I took in high school and beyond and its scope and ambition have always made me think about how to be a better teacher. Ray Bearden made an impact with his teaching life and as someone who experienced that I am so grateful. Very many condolences to his loved ones.

Anne Kugler - September 04, 2023 at 08:23 PM



“ *Serene Retreat was purchased for the family of James "Ray" Bearden.*



September 04, 2023 at 02:40 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of James "Ray" Bearden.

September 04, 2023 at 02:40 PM



“ *My condolences to Ray's family...he was remembered by his fellow band members of Lake Concert Band! So very sorry for your loss.*
Betsy Chandler, President of Lake Concert Band, Leesburg, FL

Betsy Chandler - September 04, 2023 at 02:34 PM



“ *Mr. Bearden, I hope you know how deeply you touched so many of your students, myself included. You inspired young minds to see connections in the world, through history, culture, and music, and to see how everything, and everyone, touches and affects those around them, forward and backward in time. You remain the instructor who had the most lasting impact on my education, and indeed I often think Humanities was more challenging than most college courses I took. When I took German in college, the professor often complimented my accent as being the best in class, and that is all due to you. I hope you are sitting at the great round table in the sky with other greats, discussing the secrets of the universe. Love you Mr. Bearden.*

E. Katie Holm - September 04, 2023 at 01:11 PM

VC

“ My condolences to the family. I was his secretary at Mott and he was a great boss. Last year at the dealership I ran into a young man Bearden but he didn't know him.

verna vanessa cobb - September 04, 2023 at 12:04 PM

EJ

“ I am so sorry to hear of Mr. Bearden's passing. He was my favorite teacher at Flint Central. I took three years of German with him. While I had difficulty with the language, I wouldn't quit thanks to his kind encouragement. I learned so much, and not just about the language and culture, but how to be a better person thanks to his example. When I finally got to spend time in Germany I thought of him the entire trip. And when I achieved some professional accolades, he sent me a note congratulating me. I still cherish it. My deepest sympathies to the family in the loss of this fine man.

Ellen Jones - September 04, 2023 at 11:13 AM

SW

“ My condolences to his family. I had him as my German and English teacher in 1972-1975. He was the only teacher who treated me like I was smart and I excelled in his classes. He made them interesting and made us want to learn. But mostly he was kind and compassionate and just a good person overall. Rest in peace Mr Bearden. You made a positive impact on many lives during your time on earth.

Susan (Laskowski) Wolfe - September 04, 2023 at 10:58 AM

HH

“ When I read the many praises of Mr.Bearden, I am happy he positively affected so many students and teachers. I was perhaps one of his failures. My fault or his ,I do not know. The 1965-66 school year at Central,I was in two classes taught by him and his advice was I did not attend college. I have carried that remark with me since that day. My mistake, but it motivated me to survive the time in the army and my continuing education that prepared me to serve as a professional in medicine for 42 years.

Harry Helcher - September 04, 2023 at 10:53 AM

JH

“ Ray's parents and mine were close friends since they were very young and he and his brother, Larry, are among the first people that I remember. He began teaching at Central when I was a student there. My prayers are with his family.

Jerry Ham - September 04, 2023 at 10:05 AM

SA

“ I learned German in Mr Bearden's classes in 1970-72. More importantly, he inspired a life-long love of the language, people and culture. I was fortunate to be an exchange student in Hannover before my senior year. To this day I continue to spend Christmas with my German "sister's" family, albeit now in Berlin. Without the passion and excellence of those years with Mr Bearden, I would have missed out on this truly deep connection in the wider world. I owe him a great debt.

Susan Ash - September 04, 2023 at 12:56 AM

BA

“*Mr. Bearden was one of the reasons I went into education. He was an awesome teacher. I took everyone of his classes I could take. I cannot hear the words Humanities without my thoughts going straight to him. He had us read books off a list he gave us. There were so many books on the list I was sure he could not have read them all. After we read the book he would give us his reflection on the book and then would give us back note cards with questions and comments about the books. I spent a very long time finding a civil war book called Andersonville. It was 760 pages long and I was sure he would not have read it. My note card came back with so many insights and questions about the book, I knew he had read it. I can say I loved him as a teacher his loss saddens me, but having had the chance to learn from his has made me a better person throughout my life. He was what all of us who taught tried to be for our students. Thank you Ray!*”

Bob Acre - September 04, 2023 at 12:20 AM

BT

I had Mr Bearden for German 1968 and 69. He was a wonderful teacher. Fair and made you fill good about your progress. Fly high Mr Bearden. See you in Heaven one day. Thanks for all you did for Me. I was Karin in Class. Brenda Rouse.

Brenda Lee Taylor - September 04, 2023 at 09:35 AM

ES

“*I will always remember being in Mr. Bearden’s humanities class as a senior at Flint Central in 1995. He was such a kind, thoughtful, and thorough teacher. Just being in his presence helped us all to tap into our own developing wisdom. We always knew we were so lucky to have him at our school—he could have been anywhere, and he chose to be with us. I will be forever grateful.*”

Erica Eufinger Steinweg - September 03, 2023 at 05:08 PM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of James "Ray" Bearden.*



September 02, 2023 at 09:23 PM



“ *Mr Bearden touched the lives of so many of us. His class was the only class my senior year I took seriously. I hope he knows how highly regarded he was to all.*

Kate Borowski - September 02, 2023 at 08:53 PM



“ *Mr. Bearden opened the minds of many students over the years. I was lucky to have experienced his humanities class. He helped an engineer find a love for reading. I always enjoyed going back to chat with him after I left Flint for college. He will be missed by many and his family can be proud that he positively influenced countless students over the years.*

Antwan Edson - September 02, 2023 at 02:29 PM



“ *Thank you for dedicating your teaching career to Flint Central High School. I was fortunate to be apart of your last year of teaching at our high school - 1998. You made a lifelong impact on so many of us who were fortunate to have learned from you! Your 2 hour Humanities class wasn't long enough...you always left us wanting more of your knowledge; you made it seem effortless. Glad to have known you. Thank you, Mr. Bearden.*

Destiny Saucedo-AIJallad - September 02, 2023 at 12:27 PM

BM

“ We remember “uncle Ray” was always interested in others. Our wonderful family
Get together’s at his home. Our trip to Shakespeare festival. We appreciated his love of learning. And we appreciated his love of dogs. And most of all we appreciated his
Pride and love of his wife, Barbara, and their
Family.

Barbara Mclane - September 02, 2023 at 11:50 AM

EJ

“ Mr. Bearden was legendary at Flint Central. He retired the year before I would have had him, but the Humanities Program he helped create was something I and many others benefitted from.

Elizabeth Jordan - September 02, 2023 at 11:25 AM

JW

“ I played in orchestra and band with Ray in Florida for several years, sitting beside him. He was a good friend, always complimentary and supportive. When I was contemplating purchasing a piccolo, he gave me expert advice and even lent me his piccolo for a week so I could see how I liked that model. I have often spoken of him when another flute player is about to purchase a piccolo, and I share his advice. In addition to his excellent musicianship, he had a beautiful singing voice which I am thankful to have heard on occasion. I will continue to think of him as I continue to make music!

Judy Winston - September 01, 2023 at 12:13 PM

LN

“ Ray was a dedicated and valued flute and piccolo player in the Lake Concert Band of central Florida for a number of years. I had the privilege of playing in the flute section with him, and we shared many wonderful musical memories. It was sad when he was no longer able to be in the band, and he will be greatly missed.

Larry Nester - August 31, 2023 at 03:12 PM

BB

Thanks, Larry, for your kind comments. Ray loved playing in the band and especially loved playing Stars and Stripes with you.

barbara bearden - August 31, 2023 at 05:15 PM

WW

“ Barbara,
And the extended Bearden family, please accept my deepest sympathy.
Ray was a very good childhood friend
Willie Wood

Willie Wood - August 30, 2023 at 10:33 PM

BB

Thanks, Willie. It was good to hear from you.

barbara bearden - August 31, 2023 at 05:16 PM

J(

“ One of my favorite memories of Uncle Ray was us sitting in the recliner at Grandma and Grandpa Bearden's at Christmas time, while he checked for “potatoes” growing in my ears. He always had a way of making you smile and laugh...and really question if you DID have potatoes growing in your ears! Love you, Uncle Ray. You will be very missed by all ❤️.

Jacquelynn Phillipps (Bearden) - August 30, 2023 at 05:35 PM

BH

Sorry to hear of Ray's passing. He was a nice neighbor to us at The Plantation at Leesburg, FL.

Barbara you are in our thoughts and prayers.

Betty and Jeff Hatle

Kingsport, Tennessee

Betty and Jeff Hatle - August 30, 2023 at 10:22 PM

JP

We were so fortunate to have Ray and Barbara as neighbors in The Plantation at Leesburg, FL. We shared keys to our homes so we would be able to help each other should the need arise. When we were outside, we could hear Ray practicing singing inside his house next to us. He had a lovely voice. We shared our grief when our fur babies passed on. We couldn't have asked for better neighbors. Barbara, you are in our prayers. We send our love to you and the family.

Jean and Frank Pizarro

Jean and Frank Pizarro - August 31, 2023 at 04:42 PM

BB

Love this story, Jackie.

barbara bearden - August 31, 2023 at 05:17 PM

BB

Thanks, Jean and Frank. You were great neighbors and we've missed you.

barbara bearden - August 31, 2023 at 05:18 PM

TB

Thanks Jackie - love that story.

Timothy J Bearden - September 01, 2023 at 12:14 PM

DS

Thank you for dedicating your teaching career to Flint Central High School. I was fortunate to be apart of your last year of teaching at our high school - 1998. You made a lifelong impact on so many of us who were fortunate to have learned from you! Your 2 hour Humanities class wasn't long enough...you always left us wanting more of your knowledge; you made it seem effortless. Glad to have known you. Thank you, Mr. Bearden.

Destiny Saucedo-AJallad - September 02, 2023 at 12:16 PM

AJ

Mr. Bearden was my German teacher....and one of the dearest people ever. He taught me how to be a teacher and I used a conversation we had with my students. I could read and write the language and he knew I studied and tried. It just didn't transfer in my brain to speak it...a major part of our grade. He said to me..if you promise to never tell anyone I was your German teacher, I will give you a B. Great teachers never close doors.

Amy Ballantyne Johnson - September 03, 2023 at 11:00 PM

KK

I was privileged to have him as my German teacher for 3 years. His impact on my life was significant as a person and as a teacher. Teaching and learning were his passion that he demonstrated and modeled for his students every day. His humor, laughter, and honesty kept the class interesting. On many occasions, I came to your home to sit with Tim and Scott while you went out. How I remember the dogs and the books! While students, my future husband and I learned a deep appreciation for our heritage that continues. Jim served as an exchange student while I tried to master the guttural rolled /R/ of the language (still not successful!). Both of you attended our wedding. My deepest sympathy to all of you. Karen Peacock Kennell, Flint Central Class of 1970.

Karen Peacock Kennell - September 04, 2023 at 11:23 AM

WB

I am so sorry sorry to hear about Ray's passing. All of his New Jersey Bearden cousins extend our condolences to his family. William L. Bearden & family

William Bearden - September 26, 2023 at 08:08 AM

RS

I was the physics teacher while he was the German teacher. When I started in 1959, The requirement was to be able to read the original documents in that language after my first year of it at UM. We also played music in the Genesee Concert Band for a few years. RIP, Ray; I will try to look you up when I get there.

Bob Shaw, CHS 1959 - 1992

Robert Shaw - October 09, 2023 at 10:22 AM