



Donald J.L. Coppedge Sr.

January 23, 1934 - January 7, 2021

*FUNERAL SERVICE LIVE-STREAM: As the service for Mr. Coppedge is PRIVATE, the family has requested a live-stream of the service for those unable to attend in-person. A link will be posted on Mr. Coppedge's "Tribute Wall", and will be active starting just before 10:30 AM on Saturday, January 16th.

Donald J. L. Coppedge Sr., age 86, husband of the late Redonia O. (Barr) Coppedge, lifelong resident and champion of Phoenixville, PA, passed away on Thursday, January 7, 2021 in the ManorCare Health Services of King of Prussia. Born on January 23, 1934 in Phoenixville, PA, he was a son of the late Charles and Margaret (Cobert) Coppedge.

Donald grew up in downtown Phoenixville and attended elementary school at the Church Street and Gay Street Schools. He went on to Memorial Junior High School and then graduated from Phoenixville High School. Growing up poor, he helped his parents financially by shining shoes to make extra money at the Pennsylvania Railroad station. He also delivered newspapers for the Daily Republican, earning one penny per paper delivered, and set pins at the local bowling alley. Because he lived near French Creek he learned to swim and fish as his favorite childhood activities. He spent a lot of time with his friends playing baseball, which was his true passion. He realized that he was a natural athlete and organized games with his friends. He set his sights on becoming a baseball superstar. During his junior year of high school, he was disappointedly and unexpectedly rejected from the team. Donald faced subtle racism but he did not realize the implications of how it affected his life. For example, he was not allowed to swim in a local pool, and was not allowed to eat at a café. The first time he truly experienced racism was during his class bus trip to Washington D.C., when he was not allowed to eat in the restaurant where his classmates were having lunch. He did not know whether racism was the reason he was rejected from the high school baseball team; however, later in the season, he was asked to rejoin the team and he became the starting pitcher. He graduated high school in 1951. After graduation he became certified as a baseball and basketball official which allowed him to manage and referee games.

At a very early age, Donald's mother insisted that he goes to church every Sunday. Reluctantly, he obeyed his mother which resulted in him becoming a faithful member and Trustee of Grimes AME Church for the rest of his life. His dedication and funds management kept the church solvent through very difficult times. Grimes has thrived for over 100 years.

Following graduation from high school, Donald did not have the resources or opportunity to attend college. He tried to find work, but racism impeded his ability to get a job. He took the civil service test yet he was not hired even by the Post Office. He took a job in a factory; but he wanted to succeed in the white collar world. He became interested in working for the Phoenixville YMCA; however, before he could apply, he was drafted into the United States Army. He served at Ft. Jackson, South Carolina, Fort Hood, Texas, and in Germany. While abroad, a highlight of his tour was to attend the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels, Belgium. During his tour in Germany, Donald incurred a leg injury while performing army maneuvers. At that time, his commanding officers were having problems with the GIs who would become intoxicated and got into trouble with the local authorities. While Donald was laid up during his injury, his commanders realized he was certified to manage sports activities; therefore, he was tasked with organizing activities for the GIs to keep them on base and out of trouble. After serving his three year term, Donald was transferred stateside, and honorably discharged.

Upon his return home, Donald met the love of his life, Redonia Barr. She was handpicked for him by his sister Debbie Mitchel. They married and Redonia became pregnant, which meant his dreams to go to the west coast were put on hold. Around 1960, Donald had a Christian mentor who guided him to take a position in the Youth Program of the YMCA in Phoenixville. His first position was as the Aquatic and Physical Director. With only two children in the program, he realized he had to build up the program and recruit participants. He was excited to form a game plan to increase participation. He realized that in order to sign up children, he had to get parents to buy into the program. Donald's natural charm and sincerity enabled him to convince parents to observe his program. It was not long before the program grew to include swimming lessons, sports events, dances, etc. He was amazed how the parents entrusted him with their children, in spite of the negative racial climate of those days. However, while he was building his program, misfortune struck about a year later. Not feeling well, he was told he needed his tonsils out. Urged to get a second opinion he was diagnosed that he had a brain tumor. It was a miracle that he survived the operation. Because he could not work he could not earn a salary and his wife was pregnant with their second child. What became a defining moment of his life was when the families and members of the YMCA had a "Dollars for Don Dance" and raised \$1,000.00 to help his family and pay the medical bills. This generous gesture

taught the meaning of community, humanity and self-sacrifice. It started him on the path of charitable giving.

Donald worked at the Phoenixville YMCA from 1957 to 1976. True to his spirit, the YMCA enabled him to bring people together and lived to show how to treat others as you want to be treated. Beginning in 1960, he spearheaded a building campaign and served as the main fundraiser for a new pool at Baker Park, the current location of the YMCA on Pothouse Rd. He became so good at fundraising that everyone would affectionately say “when you see Don coming, just take out your wallet and write a check”. From 1970 through 1988, after many years of hard work and dedication, he served as the first African American President, Chief Executive Officer of an independent YMCA. After he retired in 1988, Donald stayed active with the YMCA as a member of their Corporate Board of Directors. Because of his dedication, the YMCA, commemorated Donald by naming the gymnasium the “COPPEDGE GYM”.

During his tenure at the YMCA, Donald launched “The Foundations for Growth”, which expanded recreation, health and physical programs for families which focused on growth of volunteer service through community organizations. He also established and expanded affordable housing for low income families, seniors and persons with disabilities originally called “Phoenixville Homes”. Now known as “Petra Community Housing”, the organization was created by the Phoenixville Area Council of Churches in 1994 to provide solutions to the lack of affordable housing in the region. Donald served as President and helped to establish an endowment to ensure continued success for Petra Community Housing.

Donald continued to be an ever present force in Phoenixville. It is impossible to acknowledge all his achievements and struggles to service his beloved Phoenixville. But to achieve his goals of inclusion and equity, he became a member of the following boards and community organizations:

Chester County Housing Authority (Chairman); Social Concerns (Chairman); New Century Bank;

National Association of Colored People (NAACP); Diversity in Action: Habitat for Humanity; Phoenixville Area Interfaith Council; 52 year member of the Kiwanis Club (served as President); Phoenixville Area Progressive Club (Founder/President).

As a result of his efforts, Donald was the recipient of the following awards:

2007 Champion of the Community (unsung Hero Award); Phoenixville Area Chamber of Commerce (Citizen of the Year); Phoenixville Area Non-Violence Network (Peacemaker’s

Award); Phoenixville Inter-Service Club (Ambassadorship Award); Chester County Community Foundation (Thanks for Caring Award); Springford Rotary Club "Service Above Self" (Don Nelson Memorial Award); Phoenixville YMCA (Humanitarian Award); B'nai B'rith (Citizens Award); Martin Luther King Jr. Award.

Donald was a true crusader for the betterment of all Phoenixville citizens, no matter ones race, creed or color. Although he did not care about the color of one's skin, he acknowledged that Phoenixville was not diverse and sought to bring equity to African Americans to attain fair housing and employment. He also fought tirelessly to bridge the gaps between the haves and have nots.

Donald made lifelong, generous friends and confidants who entrusted him and to whom he would give the credit for his successes. However, with all his accomplishments, clearly, his greatest achievement was the love and devotion to his immediate and extended family. He tirelessly cared for Redonia during a most difficult illness and disability. Fittingly his middle name is "Joe Lewis", a true fighter for the people.

Donald is survived by one son, Daniel L. Coppedge of Phoenixville, PA; two grandchildren, Dayon Smith of Brinesville, DE and Jaylyn Lopez of Allentown, PA; his Godchildren, Donna Lynn Harrison of Spring City, PA, Jeffery Coppedge of Jeffersonville, PA, Mary Jane Hemming of Mount Royal, NJ, Ashley Wood of Limerick, PA, Michael Bellamy of King of Prussia, PA and Tim Barr of Norristown, PA; his sister-in-law Joan Coppedge and his brother-in-law Kenneth Mitchell; his wife's siblings, Ellen Bellamy of Phoenixville, PA, Nelson, husband of Louise Barr of Pottsgrove, PA, Judie Keys of Phoenixville, PA, Judy Barr of Phoenixville, and Henry Barr of Bethlehem, PA; and a host of nieces and nephews. Donald was preceded in death by one son, Donald J.L. Coppedge, Jr., and four siblings, Charles Coppedge, Margaret Banks, Richard Coppedge, and Debbie Mitchell.

Relatives and friends are invited to attend a public viewing at the Campbell-Ennis-Klotzbach Funeral Home, Inc, 610 South Main Street, Phoenixville, PA on Friday, January 15, 2021 from 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM. Masks and social distancing will be required. The public is invited and encouraged to attend. A private service and burial in the Morris Cemetery will take place. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made in her name to the "Margaret Coppedge Endowment Fund" c/o Grimes AME Church, 338 Morris Street, Phoenixville, PA 19460. Condolences may be made by visiting www.PhoenixvilleFuneralHome.com. Arrangements are being handled by the Campbell - Ennis - Klotzbach Funeral Home, Inc., Phoenixville.

Cemetery

Events

Private

JAN **Visitation** 06:00PM - 08:00PM

15

PA,

Campbell-Ennis-Klotzbach Funeral Home, Inc
610 South Main Street, Phoenixville, PA, US, 19460

Comments



“ A webcast video has been added.



Campbell-Ennis-Klotzbach Funeral Home - January 12 at 10:36 AM



“ Wonderful testaments to my brother-in-law. Joan A Coppedge

Joan A Coppedge - January 16 at 12:17 PM



“ Beautiful

Rashonda - January 16 at 12:37 PM



“ I just learned of Don' s passing, which came as a shock. Don always seemed to be a permanent fixture and trying to imagine our community without him will not come easily.I could relate stories about the many kindnesses Don performed for my family and friends, but I prefer to mention how much I looked forward to Don's visits to my office where we exchanged stories and Don shook me down for contributions to his favorite charity. Throughout the decades I knew Don and heard his pleas for help; those requests were always for the benefit of others, never once for himself. I have always been proud to think of myself as a friend of Don's, but that would not distinguish me from everyone who knew him.

Ron Graham

Ron Graham - February 19 at 01:29 PM



“ My deepest condolences on your family's loss of one of my first and finest mentors, Don Coppedge....an incredibly giving, loving and productive man with a mammoth heart and generous soul. Of course, Don is remembered fondly and mourned by a much larger family... the countless lives he touched and nurtured throughout his lifetime of service in Phoenixville. May his memory forever be for a blessing to his family, friends and to all who knew and loved him.

Harold Cherashore (Harris Shore) PAHS '64

Harris Shore - February 04 at 06:11 PM



“ Donald Coppedge, what a privilege to know such a great man and huge personality. He touched so many lives and together he and Redonia shared a beautiful life with their sons. He was truly the one and only "MR. PHOENIXVILLE". There was no one like him and the people person he was. He made the YMCA what it should have been....for, of and by the people. I can still hear his resounding "Susie Q" and big smile coming clear across a room. Thank you Don for getting to know you. My family will always remember your great warmth and genuine love for life. Rest in peace.
Susie Q



Susan Palcko - February 04 at 03:39 PM



“ Mr Coppedge was a role model during my childhood into adulthood. He taught me and my sisters how to swim at Desanos outdoors. At the Y in town and Baker Park he was a leader to all of us and always smiling and positive. He worked with my mom, Helen Manney for many years and they had a long friendship. He even spoke at my mom's funeral many kind words to help us through that day. Mr. Coppedge will be so missed.. I'm glad he was a big part of our lives during our childhood and a friend to my mom.

Patti Bianco

Patti Bianco - February 03 at 05:31 PM



“ Uncle Donnie, You have been a true blessing in many lives, a positive role model and mentor to many, you lead the way for many to receive open doors of opportunities.. Your heart is a true heart of God, loving and caring for the community.. Your legacy is one that is great.. Your words to spread Love, and know God, are a key element of your purpose of LIFE.. You made it over and now you are with your lovely wife, and other family members.. Gone but Never forgotten, always in our thoughts and hearts.. Much Love to the family...

Pamela Beasley - January 16 at 11:28 PM



“ Uncle Donnie was a remarkable man. His energy, kindness, and love was infectious. I will miss his big bear hugs, and hearing him call me “hunny bunny.” I will cherish the memories I have of him. I love you Uncle D



Rashonda Saunders - January 16 at 10:32 AM



“ Latice Ingram lit a candle in memory of Donald J.L. Coppedge Sr.



Latice Ingram - January 15 at 07:20 PM



“ Danny and family,
Uncle Donnie was a great man and the tributes to him were so touching. Sorry I could not be there physically, but I watched on line and the service was beautiful. Sending all my love and prayers from Georgia.

Cathy Barr-Wright - January 16 at 01:01 PM



“ This is but a modest tribute to a remarkable man who exemplified, in so many ways, 'a life well lived.' Phoenixville has lost a hero in Don Coppedge whose phone message, for years repeated his life-long philosophy, 'Love God and love others, nothing else matters.'

Don did it exceptionally well for which we are all grateful. He is now home where, we are told, things are as they were originally intended: No more goodbyes, no more sorrow, no more sickness, no more suffering, no more injustice and even the quiet tyranny of time itself, is no more.

Because Don loved others so thoroughly, he was thoroughly loved.... and will be thoroughly missed.

Rest In Peace,

Greg Porter

Greg Porter - January 15 at 07:01 PM



“ Joan Kolar lit a candle in memory of Donald J.L. Coppedge Sr.



Joan Kolar - January 15 at 06:22 PM



“ Mr Coppedge was the nicest man you ever wanted to meet, I often saw him at Dunkin Donuts talking with someone, sharing his knowledge and praise! He will be greatly missed and the people of Phoenixville will be left with some cherished memories!

Joan Kolar - January 15 at 06:27 PM



“ Words cannot express the love I have for my Uncle Donnie and how much he will be missed. He always had a positive nugget to share with whom ever he came in contact with. We all have learned that from you and will try to continue to lift up each other as the example you have left us with. Well done, Rest and be at peace. Love Always
Barr-Wright Family.

Catherine Wright - January 15 at 06:01 PM



“ 2 files added to the album VIDEO TRIBUTE



Campbell-Ennis-Klotzbach Funeral Home - January 14 at 08:11 PM



“ Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Donald J.L. Coppedge Sr..



January 14 at 03:54 PM



“ Thurmond Cameron & Family purchased the Treasured Lilies Spray for the family of Donald J.L. Coppedge Sr..



Thurmond Cameron & Family - January 14 at 03:20 PM



“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



Mark King Exley - January 14 at 12:42 PM



“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Donald J.L. Coppedge Sr..



January 14 at 08:28 AM



“ The Treadwells lit a candle in memory of Donald J.L. Coppedge Sr.



The Treadwells - January 13 at 04:57 PM



“ To Danny,

We're really going to miss our buddy Mr. Coppedge. It was so much fun being on the Grimes Men's Choir singing with him.

We also missed going out to chat and chew at the Downingtown Old Country Buffet. His unique voice and hardy laugh will always be remembered. Also, we shared many meals together in the Grimes Fellowship Hall.

We called him a few times while he was at Powerback in Exton. He was very surprised when we went to his window to visit with him. He asked, "Where did you all come from?" We told him we tracked him down so we could see him. He was talking and laughing with us about old times at Grimes A.M.E. Church.

May God bless and comfort you and Jaylen.

With much love,
The Treadwells (Maurice and Brenda)

The Treadwells - January 13 at 04:54 PM



“ Mr. Goppedge was a inspiration and mentor to us as kids. Color had no meaning in his life for us kids. Always had a hello,handshake,and a how are ya every time we crossed paths. RIP my friend.

Mark Ceschan - January 13 at 12:16 PM



“ Daniel so sorry for your loss. You and your family are all in our thoughts and Prayers during this difficult time. The obituary was beautiful. Your dad sure lived a full life.

Love your Fedex family at PNEA.

Fedex - January 13 at 12:15 PM



“ When Donald was a little boy and I a little girl, he lived near my grandfather, and we were playmates--he and brothers and sisters would come to my grandfathers and we would play. Donald also taught some of my children how to swim at the YMCA he surely was a very great man and did so much for Phoenixville.

Helena Deegan - January 13 at 09:04 AM



“ Some shoes cannot be filled, some lives leave a legacy for others to follow. Donald Coppedge has left us the example of a lifetime of service, inspiration and unselfish leadership. We were blessed in our Kiwanis Club to have him as a member for 52 years. We would not be where we are today without him. He brought out the best in us in the only way possible ... he led us to higher ground by his example.
Sincerely,
KIWANIS CLUB OF PHOENIXVILLE

Janice M Swarr - January 12 at 01:36 PM



“ BARBARA BYRUM & FAMILY purchased the Dove Blanket for the family of Donald J.L. Coppedge Sr..



BARBARA BYRUM & FAMILY - January 12 at 07:26 AM



“ FOR A MAN WHO GUIDED AND LED A TOUR OF FAITH
HIS LIGHT WILL FOREVER SHINE AS A LIKE OF GOOD ORKS TO ALL
MANKIND.
EXEMPLIFYING A LAMP UNTO OUR FEET AND A LIGHT UNTO OUR PATHWAY.
HE WAS A SOLDIER IN GOD'S ARMY. GRATITUDE HE BROUGHT WITH ALL HE
WOULD DO.
SO GLAD AND THANKFUL THAT GOD PLACED IN HIM THE LIVES OF THE
BEARDEN AND BYRUM FAMILIES.

EVERLASTING LIFE....AMEN

SOLEMNLY SUBMITTED
BARBARA BYRUM



Barbara E Byrum - January 12 at 07:03 AM



“ Thank you Don Coppedge for your enormous contribution to humanity, esp the less
fortunate. I admired your humility and your constant positive attitude through any
type of adversity. Your loving care for your wife and family was a great example to all
of us.
You are one of those people that made a lasting impression on the lives of many....
and I thank you for that... and for your constant vision to build something from
nothing.
Rest In Peace Don
/Monica Book

Monica R Book - January 11 at 06:13 PM



“ Uncle Donnie was the best God Father and Uncle anyone could ask for. I remember the times he took us to a Phillies game; taught us basketball and swimming and showered us with love. I will miss him deeply but I am comforted to know that he is now in God's arms with the love of his life Aunt Redonia and his parents and siblings. Uncle Donnie was a man of God who continuously gave his time to his family, the Phoenixville Community and his Church. Rest in Peace. Much Love Always. You God Daughter Mary Jane.

Mary Jane Hemmings - January 10 at 07:31 PM



“ Uncle Donnie you will be remembered as a strong, passionate, caring individual, who affectionately touched the lives of many. Your words of wisdom will forever resonate, and your love will forever dwell in our hearts. We love you!
Leticia (Tee-Tee) Rob, Naja, and Sydney

Leticia Barrow - January 10 at 04:33 PM



“ Sympathy to all of the family members of Don's family. I worked with Don under the Phoenixville Council Of Churches as the Director of the Circuit Breaker, coffee house, for young people and remember him as such an energetic and supportive person for the youth of Phoenixville. He was a joy to know and work for. He was such an inspiration to so many. Barbara Brown

Barbara Brown - January 10 at 09:55 AM



“ What a true gentle man who gave of himself to so many people some he never would have known. I am so grateful to have known Mr. Coppedge! Rest in peace dear servant.



Patricia Quinn - January 10 at 08:39 AM



“ There are 33 years of memories with Don that will forever live in our hearts. He earned his wings on Earth and we will miss him greatly.

Debbie, Karl, Matt and Andrew Hohorst

Debbie Hohorst - January 09 at 10:11 PM



“ The greater Phoenixville area has lost a great pillar of the community. Don will be missed by everyone who was fortunate to know him. He was a compassionate and caring person to everyone. I was always appreciative of the support Don gave to me from my first day as President & CEO of the YMCA in 1986 and throughout the next 26 years. We became good friends who shared the privilege of leading our great YMCA for a combined 42 years. I am hopeful that he is at eternal peace.

Jay Schaeffer, YMCA President & CEO 1986-2012

Jay Schaeffer - January 09 at 09:15 PM



“ There are no words that can describe such a man as my Uncle Donnie. A life in the eyes of God that was well lived! May others take from his legacy and spread the words that he planted throughout the world, "Love God, love people, nothing else matters!

Lovingly submitted,
Rev Marlene Wood

Rev Marlene Wood/Donald Coppedge's niece - January 09 at 04:28 PM



“ Syl and I share our finest condolences on the passing of this pillar of our community. Our friendship with Donald goes back 7 decades to a time when we had Bridge Club upstairs at the YMCA building in downtown Phoenixville. Don would often stop in to visit with our card players, and eventually got me and our children, Seth and Sarah involved in Indian Guides, which led to Sarah’s lifelong interest in Native American culture. Don also recruited Syl for membership in the Y’s Ladies Auxiliary, where she served as an officer for many years.

We are saddened that COVID-related health issues will keep us from participating in the viewing.



Sal and Sylvia Katz of Phoenixville, PA - January 09 at 03:30 PM



“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



Rick Martin - January 09 at 02:47 PM



“ My godfather was an great man, touched many peoples lives. May you Rest In Peace ! Love your Ashley Lynn



Ashley Wood - January 09 at 11:49 AM



“ It will be so weird visiting Phoenixville and not going to visit two of our long time friends, Donald and Redonia , we moved to FI 8 years ago and the 2nd people we made arrangements to see were those two , I know they're holding hands, our prayers are going out to little Danny their baby son, know we are thinking of the family, love Pat and Waverly McAlister

patricia Mcalister - January 09 at 01:57 PM



“ Danny and Family, Your Father was a mentor to me as far back as I can remember. Even before you and I graduated from high school. And whenever he asked to speak with me, I listened intently. There was always more to what he was saying then just what he said. And no matter how many questions I had, he ALWAYS took the time to answer each one. I would relive the conversation over and over to make sure I caught every point he was making, directly and indirectly. He was always so kind and respectful to my Mom and all of my family. Please know that I am here for you and your family in whatever way you need me to be. Much Love and God's Peace, Theresa Thornton

Theresa Thornton - January 11 at 05:36 PM



“ Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of Donald J.L. Coppedge Sr..



January 09 at 11:38 AM



“ I have been blessed by the best for the past 67 yrs to have had the honor&privilege of being the niece of Donald J.L.Coppedge...the hub of the Coppedge Clan God welcomed "his son" home..saying "job well done Uncle Donny...u are my forever hero..luv u and thank u ...see u on the other side

Joyce Coppedge Brickley - January 09 at 11:19 AM



“ A father like figure to me from the age of nine at the old Phoenixville YMCA on Main Street to my years as a senior citizen. Don never played favorites in any situation and he treated us all as family from those early days through adulthood. My one and only reason to get involved in sports and staying on the straight and narrow was because of Mr. Donald J.L. Coppedge.
'Rest In Peace My Friend'
Rick and Butch Martin and family

Rick Martin - January 09 at 10:05 AM



“ There are no words that can describe such a man as my Uncle Donnie. A life in the eyes of God that was well lived! May others take from his legacy and spread the words that he planted throughout the world, "Love God, love people, nothing else matters!
Lovingly submitted,
Rev Marlene Wood

Rev Marlene Wood/Donald Coppedge s niece - January 09 at 04:20 PM



“ Uncle Donald, you are already truly missed! Thank you for your honesty, integrity, respect but most of all the LOVE you shared to all. I could always count on you to provide advise, that would stand the the test of time. I thank the Lord for the person he allowed you to be. Always a blessing to those you came in contact with. Well done Uncle Donald! May your soul be at rest.

Always remembered in our hearts.

Nephew Cee, Cee /Tina, Devin & Tinera

Nelson Thomas Barr - January 10 at 01:21 PM



“ 5 files added to the album Memories Album



Rick Martin - January 09 at 09:58 AM



“ I had tremendous respect for both Don and Donnie. As their children's teacher, as a summer employee at the "Y", and later as a Parkhouse volunteer I always looked forward to seeing them and sharing memories.
May they rest in peace,
Dick Morgan

Dick Morgan - January 09 at 09:17 AM