



Bill Knowles Jr.

December 24, 2024

William ‘Bill’ Knowles, Jr, 88, was called home on December 24, 2024, where he is reunited with the love of his life, Suzanne, his parents William and Elizabeth and many friends and relatives.

He grew up in Port Norfolk where he made lifelong friends. Bill played football and baseball at Woodrow Wilson High School and graduated in 1954. He proudly served in the U.S. Army Reserves and graduated from the Virginia Military Institute in 1960. At VMI, he played baseball and football, and his classmates became his brothers. He visited VMI often to see football games, socialize with his fellow alumni and even returned to the baseball field for a few of the “Old Timer’s Games.”

A barbershop conversation with the Superintendent of Portsmouth Public Schools set his path to becoming a legend in high school athletics. Bill taught history and coached many sports at Wilson, Deep Creek, and Churchland High Schools. While at Wilson, he met Suzanne, who was also teaching at the high school. In 1968, he transferred to Western Branch High School where he taught U.S. History and coached varsity football. He was athletic director of Western Branch from 1976 until he retired in 1991.

Bill was a masterful storyteller and had the ability to connect with others. Because of his deep roots in the Western Branch and the Churchland area, folks recognized him everywhere! If he encountered someone he did not

know, he would quickly find common ground. It was an amazing gift.

Not only was he good at connecting with people, but he was also loyal to his family and friends. He set the example to be present for the people who mattered in his life, and he lived this way until his last breath. Bill and Sue enjoyed traveling, socializing with friends at the Portsmouth YMCA, the local restaurants, and sports events. Even as his health declined, he continued to meet the gridiron club for breakfast and lunches, went to the YMCA and met friends for dinners on Friday nights. He saw his VMI group as often as he could.

The profession he chose positioned him to advocate for students and athletes. Many of his former students remember him fondly and he maintained close relationships with the athletes he coached. In fact, the day before he passed away, three former players visited him. Bill's vision for high school athletics made it possible for countless students to achieve their dreams. He received many honors, recognitions, and awards, including creating the Southeastern District Athletic Directors Association and Eastern Virginia Athletic Directors Association and was president of the Virginia State High School Athletic Directors Association (which later became the VIAAA). Bill served on the Eastern Region Principal's Council and the VHSL Executive Committee. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Award and Award of Merit from the NIAAA. In 1997, he was inducted into the Virginia High School Hall of Fame; later he was inducted into the Chesapeake Sports Club Legends of Honor in 2019. Bill was a valued member of the Portsmouth Invitational Tournament Committee along with many of his high school friends.

In his free time, Bill golfed, fished, and tended to his yard, where he grew the most beautiful roses and flowers. He loved being outside, watching birds and sitting on the back porch with Sue. Bill was devoted to serving the Lord and was a deacon at Churchland Baptist Church.

We will never know the extent of Bill's positive impact on others. He lived a life filled with compassion, leadership, integrity, and grit. Left to cherish his memory are his son Patrick, his wife Melissa and their daughter Anna, his daughter Susan and her husband Donald, his sister June and her husband Jack and many nieces and nephews. The family would like to thank Westminster Canterbury Hospice for caring for Bill.

The family will receive visitors at Loving Funeral Home on Academy Avenue Friday, January 3rd from 3:30-5:30pm. A celebration of life will be held Saturday, January 4 at 11:00 am at Churchland Baptist Church. Donations can be made to Churchland Baptist Church or to the charity of your choice.

Previous Events

A Visitation Celebrating His Life

JAN 3. 3:30 PM - 5:30 PM (ET)

Loving Funeral Home Churchland Chapel
3225 Academy Ave
Portsmouth, VA 23703

Funeral Service

JAN 4. 11:00 AM (ET)

Churchland Baptist Church
3031 Churchland Blvd
Chesapeake, VA 23321

Tribute Wall

MA

“ I would like to offer my most sincere condolences to the family of Coach Bill Knowles. He was a great teacher, coach and friend from the days back in Deep Creek High school. I will take his good advice with me, I'll miss him.

Mel Atkins - January 04, 2025 at 10:49 PM

BM

“ Condolences to the Knowles family from the Dennis McMurrin family. What a fine man he was.

Betty Jean McMurrin - January 04, 2025 at 02:15 PM

CC

“ Bill and I sent many hours together driving to VIAAA Meetings in Charlottesville. He could always tell a great story whether it about the best fishing spot to catch the "big one" or a great game he watched while serving as AD. He greatly influenced my career and I will always appreciate how he was a driving force for the VIAAA. We will miss his laugh and wonderful smile. May he rest in peace.

Carol Chory - January 02, 2025 at 01:14 PM

DL

“ We knew Mr. Knowles as the friendly, southern gentleman on our street in Silverwood--the one who grew the beautiful flowers! He was always inspirational and fought the good fight! Our sincere condolences to the family. Diane & Jim Liedman.

Diane Liedman - January 01, 2025 at 08:47 PM



“ My mother Carol Plant worked at WBHS for years as a volunteer as well knowing him through the years of alumni events. I was privileged to have him as a teacher. He was wonderful and my deepest sympathies to his family.

Victoria Long - January 01, 2025 at 01:59 PM

GE

“ Greg Ergenbright purchased the Serene Retreat for the family of Bill Knowles Jr..



Greg Ergenbright - January 01, 2025 at 09:30 AM

RS

“ It was a pleasure to have worked as a faculty member with Bill. He always had a winning smile and had a warm personality. He was very knowledgeable about history, current events and the world of sports, especially in Hampton Roads, and had many stories about his dealings with many in the world of sports. He was proud to have served in the U.S. military and loved his country. He was a family man and was proud of his wife and children. I am a better person for having known Bill. My prayers are with his family.

Ron Shepard

Ron Shepard - December 30, 2024 at 06:33 PM

AB

“ Bill and I go back a long way. We were friends at VMI, taught and coached together at both at Churchland and Western Branch High Schools and remained friends throughout our retirement. The last several years we remained close working out and socializing at the Portsmouth YMCA. Probably more socializing than working out. I worked with him closely as the Athletic Director at Western Branch High School. He was dedicated and committed to the coaches and athletes, and was directly responsible for developing the program and making it into one of the top in the state of Virginia. We send our condolences to Pat, Susan and their families.

Art and Ginny Brandriff

Art Brandriff - December 30, 2024 at 04:22 PM

BA

Bill was a dear friend. Jojo and I will treasure his memory.

Barbara and JoJo Ardagna - January 01, 2025 at 05:06 PM

BB

“ I have many fond memories of Bill and Sue through the years. My condolences to his family. He will be missed.*

Betty Babb - December 30, 2024 at 07:04 AM

GG

“ I had both Bill and Sue for as teachers at Western Branch with Bill for two different classes. Bill was a very knowledgeable man and was always there to help anyone with anything. Rest easy Mr. Knowles and God bless you and your family.

Greg Guertin - December 29, 2024 at 10:00 AM

DW

“ It was my great honor to have known Bill Knowles and to have considered him a friend. Our lives were very similar. We were both teachers, coaches, and athletic administrators. He was a model to follow in each of those callings. After retiring, we spent many times together at each other's homes and socializing at the YMCA. Bill's wife Sue was a dear lady loved and respected by all who knew her. People will remember Bill as an American patriot who served and loved his country. God Bless Bill and Sue. We will dearly miss them both.
David Willett.

David Willett - December 29, 2024 at 07:00 AM

BC

“ I'm keeping the Knowles family in my prayers. We lived down the street from the Knowles when we were growing up. Very nice family.

Beth Leffler Carmichael - December 28, 2024 at 11:55 AM

JG

“ Our sincere condolences to Bill's family. He was a devoted family man, great roommate, loyal friend and will be happily missed as he joins Sue in their new, wonderful home.

Jeep & Linda Goodwillie, VMI '60

Jeep Goodwillie - December 28, 2024 at 11:45 AM

JM

“ Good friend for over seventy years, WWHS to present. Many good memories through all those years. Sympathy to Pat and Susan and all of Bill's family. He will be greatly missed.

J.P. Moore - December 27, 2024 at 04:25 PM

BR

“ We have been close friends since early youth, and 🏈 teammates from 8 yr olds through WWHS grad n 1954. Faithful and positive is a Friend such as I have been Blessed to know.
God Bless His Family...Billy Ricks

Billy Ricks - December 27, 2024 at 12:36 PM

BK

“ I have known and admired Bill for many years and my sympathy goes out to his family upon learning of his death.

May he rest in eternal peace.

Bernie Kirsch - December 27, 2024 at 11:02 AM

EE

We were blessed when we could call Bill Knowles our friend. I went to school with Bill from 4th grade at Port Norfolk until graduation at Wilson H S in 1954. We reconnected when I moved back to the area in 1991 and met his sweet wife, Sue, for the first time. My husband and I have been privileged to call them close friends for many years. Bill was a fine person, with sterling character and Christian principles to his very core. He will truly be missed by many. Rest in peace together.

Elizabeth Eberwine - January 02, 2025 at 07:16 PM

LD

I feel so fortunate to have come along in a time when we had role models like Coach Knowles. We would all be better to be a little more like him.

Les Davenport - January 03, 2025 at 10:12 AM

OP

A wonderful person and friend. We will surely miss you at the Gridiron Club Luncheons. Otis Parker

Otis Parker - January 03, 2025 at 02:16 PM