



## Davis "Gene" Eugene Rochester Sr.

October 23, 1941 - February 21, 2024

Davis Eugene "Gene" Rochester, Sr., 82, of Walhalla, South Carolina, husband of Louise Oates Rochester and beloved father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, died peacefully on February 21 in the care of Prisma Health Hospice of the Foothills at Greenville Memorial Hospital.

Born in Seneca and raised in Upstate South Carolina, Gene was an entrepreneur; a self-taught master of automotive, aeronautics and electrical systems; a legendary motorsports competitor, builder, innovator and mentor; and a generous storyteller and teacher.

Creative, competitive, and curious, Gene was a lifelong learner and hands-on problem solver. His career was building and repairing automotive starters and alternators for area mechanics, repair shops, and the public. His customers often gathered in his shop for advice or troubleshooting, as he was widely known for his expertise and happy to share his knowledge.

Over the years, Gene built several successful businesses in North and South Carolina, including Southern Eagle Manufacturing, which produced remanufactured automotive electrical equipment. He sold many of these businesses when he was ready to tackle new opportunities. He invented a lightweight starter for small aircraft, which is still standard equipment in planes around the world. And he held several patents for automotive and aircraft parts.

Whether under the hood, changing the tires, or trackside spotting on the radio, automotive racing was in Gene's blood, from NASCAR to truck racing, to Quarter Midget and U.S. Legend Cars. He built cars driven by NASCAR greats like Johnny Allen and Bill Dennis, as well as, for local short-track racers Aaron Gailey and Mike Adams. He also helped outfit and coach his own grandson, Davis Rochester, through Quarter Midgets to an eventual Legends championship at Atlanta Motor Speedway.

While crew chief for Mike Adams, they won two national Great American Truck Racing

(GATR) series championships in the #97 “Junk Yard Dog,” a modified and customized big-rig bobtail truck that was featured in the 1980 movie, Smokey and the Bandit II, which starred Burt Reynolds, Sally Field, and Jerry Reed. He also built, drove, and later sold custom road trucks, including three Macks and one Peterbilt model.

In his basement workshop, Gene built a Glasair “experimental amateur-built aircraft,” which he upgraded to reach cruise speeds over 300 mph. He was fearless!

He was active in Eagles International, a chapter of the Family Motor Coach Association made up of Eagle Bus enthusiasts who convert buses into motor coaches. Gene converted several Eagles, which he and Louise drove to Eagle rallies all over the US.

From the day he graduated Seneca High School in 1960, Gene served in the U.S. Army National Guard Seneca. For more than 40 years, he was a member of Seneca Lodge No.185 AFM and was inducted into Shriners International in November 1978. In his later years, he was a consultant and mentor for several local vocational school Automotive programs.

Gene first met Louise via a series of CB radio transmissions, then soon called on her at home one Sunday afternoon. After nearly a year of dating, they “ran off” in June 1961 and got married. They were together nearly 63 years.

In addition to his wife, Gene is survived by his son David Rochester (Bonnie Lake); daughters Vicki Rochester (Kevin Evatt) and Jodi Rochester (Felipe Lugo); grandchildren Samantha Rochester, Andie (Adam) Macomber, Jaime Rochester, Davis Rochester, Taylor Bright, Felipe Lugo and Sebastian Lugo; and great-grandchildren Kaiden Martin, Rosalie Macomber, Raelyn Bright, and Bowen Bright.

He is also survived by a brother Cecil McCurry, a sister Christine (Davis) Oliver, and many nieces, nephews and cousins. He was predeceased by his mother Irene Rochester, stepfather Henry Rochester, father H.C. McCurry, and sisters Deborah Dickard and Kathy Rochester.

Please join family and friends from 2:00pm-5:00pm on Saturday, March 16th at Seneca Baptist Church Activity Center, 1080 S Oak St, Seneca, SC. A remembrance presentation will begin at 2:30pm, followed by a celebration of the life and times of Gene Rochester.

In lieu of flowers, please donate to St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, [www.stjude.org](http://www.stjude.org) or Shriners Hospitals for Children, [donate.lovetotherescue.org](http://donate.lovetotherescue.org).

Condolences may be sent to the family by visiting [www.blueridgecremationsociety.com](http://www.blueridgecremationsociety.com)

# Previous Events

## Celebration of Life

MAR **16**. 2:00 PM - 5:00 PM (ET)

Seneca Baptist Church  
1080 S Oak St  
Seneca, SC 29678-3832  
(864) 882-2731

# Tribute Wall

PM

“ I also graduated from SHS and always enjoyed talking with Gene during our days at school. Always a pleasure having fun days there! Louise and family you have my love during your days ahead. Pat Palmer McKee❤️

pat palmer mckee - February 27 at 09:36 AM

JB

“ Jimmy Barker lit a candle in memory of Davis "Gene" Eugene Rochester Sr.



Jimmy Barker - February 27 at 04:32 AM

FB

“ Frankie Burrell lit a candle in memory of Davis "Gene" Eugene Rochester Sr.



Frankie Burrell - March 11, 2024 at 04:36 AM

MH

“ Marsha Oates and Richard Houghton planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Davis "Gene" Eugene Rochester Sr..

Marsha Oates and Richard Houghton - March 08, 2024 at 07:03 PM



“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Davis "Gene" Eugene Rochester Sr..



March 08, 2024 at 07:03 PM

DE

“ Louise & Family,

*We are so sorry to hear the news of Gene's passing. What a good friend & example of someone always willing to help others. When I was a young fellow he was really good to me, always willing to spend time and give advice on how to fix things. Later in business, you couldn't ask for a better supplier of parts & repairs. You are in our thoughts & prayers.*

*Danny & Bobby Edwards*

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**Danny Edwards** - March 06, 2024 at 09:48 AM

RH

“ RICKEY HOLDEN lit a candle in memory of Davis "Gene"  
Eugene Rochester Sr.



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**RICKEY HOLDEN** - March 05, 2024 at 12:51 PM

BL

“ Burgess (Bird) Laye lit a candle in memory of Davis "Gene"  
Eugene Rochester Sr.



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**Burgess (Bird) Laye** - March 01, 2024 at 09:34 AM

JL

“ Jess Langston sent a virtual gift in memory of Davis "Gene"  
Eugene Rochester Sr.



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**jess langston** - February 29, 2024 at 10:08 PM

SH

“ Steve & Debbie Harvey lit a candle in memory of Davis "Gene" Eugene Rochester Sr.



Steve & Debbie Harvey - February 29, 2024 at 06:19 PM

PL

“ Phylis E Land lit a candle in memory of Davis "Gene" Eugene Rochester Sr.



Phylis e land - February 29, 2024 at 05:22 PM

TS

“ Louise, David, Vicki, and Jody, we are so sorry to hear of Gene's passing. My parents thought the world of him and of course, we did too. My prayers are for your comfort and peace.

Tina and Terry Stephens - February 29, 2024 at 05:17 PM



“ Kim Eiland lit a candle in memory of Davis "Gene" Eugene Rochester Sr.



Kim Eiland - February 29, 2024 at 02:47 PM

JB

“ Jimmy Barker lit a candle in memory of Davis "Gene" Eugene Rochester Sr.



Jimmy Barker - February 29, 2024 at 02:27 PM

SC

“ Scenic Chevrolet lit a candle in memory of Davis "Gene" Eugene Rochester Sr.



Scenic Chevrolet - February 29, 2024 at 01:46 PM

DS

“ Dave & Donna Stephens lit a candle in memory of Davis "Gene" Eugene Rochester Sr.



Dave & Donna Stephens - February 29, 2024 at 01:45 PM

JL

“ Jess&Marcella Langston sent a virtual gift in memory of Davis "Gene" Eugene Rochester Sr.



Jess&Marcella Langston - February 28, 2024 at 04:17 PM

HA

“ Harold Alexander lit a candle in memory of Davis "Gene" Eugene Rochester Sr.



Harold Alexander - February 28, 2024 at 02:42 PM

DM

“ Louise and Family,  
Gene left us with many special memories that make us smile. You are all in our thoughts and prayers.



Debbie and Steve Morehead - February 28, 2024 at 12:48 PM

RH

“ RICKEY HOLDEN lit a candle in memory of Davis "Gene"  
Eugene Rochester Sr.



RICKEY HOLDEN - February 28, 2024 at 08:12 AM

BL

“ Bobbie Jean Ledford lit a candle in memory of Davis  
"Gene" Eugene Rochester Sr.



Bobbie Jean Ledford - February 27, 2024 at 09:38 PM

OM

“ Thoughts and prayers are with you all in this time of great loss and sorrow. God's  
blessings to you.

Ouida McDow - February 27, 2024 at 05:23 PM

BR

“ Barbara Roach lit a candle in memory of Davis "Gene"  
Eugene Rochester Sr.



Barbara Roach - February 27, 2024 at 02:56 PM