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Sterling Ruffin Collett III

July 23, 1957 - April 2, 2014

Sterling Ruffin Collett III, son of Sterling Ruffin Collett jr and Margaret Carr Collett, died Wednesday April 2, 2014 after a courageous two year battle with cancer. He was 56 years old.

Sterling was born on July 23, 1957 in Morganton. He graduated from the McCallie School and received his BS in Economics from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He returned to Morganton to work in the furniture industry like his father and uncle before him. Beginning as a sales rep for Frederick Edwards he became Vice President of Drexel Heritage Furnishings. He left Drexel to become a real estate developer. Sterling founded Ruffin Properties, a real estate development firm, with his cousin Robert Collett in 2000 where he was managing partner. On October 26, 1991 he married the love and strength of his life, Martha Anne Smith of Clarksville Virginia. She was his greatest friend and partner.Sterling, like generations of his family before him, believed in civic responsibility and served his community in many ways both anonymously and in leadership roles. Following in the footsteps of his father, uncle and grandmother, he served on the Burke County Library Board of trustees for many years then became the founding Chairman of the Board of the Library Foundation of Burke County. He was a founding director of the Community Foundation of Burke County where he chaired the investment committee. At Western Piedmont Community College, honoring his father's lifelong commitment to the college, Sterling served as President of the Western Piedmont Community College

Foundation. He was an active member of First Presbyterian Church of Morganton where he served for many years on the finance committee.Sterling's greatest joy was his family. He was happiest on the golf course with his boys, Ruffin and Smith and delighted in daughter, Toddy's companionship and zest for life. He dearly loved his sisters and was devoted to them. His commitment to family extended to all his aunts, uncles and cousins as well as to Martha's family who he loved like his own. In the same way, his friendships, many dating from childhood, were among the blessings he valued most. He was a loyal and unwavering friend.Sterling is survived by his wife, Martha Smith Collett, and their children: Sterling Ruffin Collett IV, Graham Smith Collett and Ann Tod Collett. He is also survived by his three sisters: Mary Ruffin Collett, Margaret Elizabeth Collett and Martha Rountree Collett Mellon and husband Frank Mellon; as well as brother in law William Jeffry Smith and wife Sherri Gillespie Smith, sister in law Margaret Smith Johnson and husband Erik Johnson and father in law William Edward Smith. Sterling leaves nine nieces and nephews: Margot Rountree Mellon, Henry Alexander Mellon, Isabelle Collett Mellon, Evan Sterling Mellon, Caroline Elizabeth Smith, Elliot Wilhelm Johnson, Clark Edward Johnson, Louis Steven Johnson and Mattie Lee Johnson.

The last years of Sterling's life were particularly blessed by the love and support of Dr. Mark Brazinski and the Rev. David Doster as well as the love and care of the doctors and staff of the Duke Raleigh Cancer Center.The family will receive friends on Friday, April 4, 2014 from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. in the Parlor of First Presbyterian Church Morganton. A celebration of life will be held on Saturday April 5 at 2:00 at First Presbyterian Church.In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to the Library Foundation of Burke County, the Community Foundation of Burke County or First Presbyterian Church Morganton. Sossoman Funeral Home and Crematory Center is assisting the family.

Tribute Wall

No tributes added yet.