



Joseph L. Accongio

June 15, 1946 - April 18, 2026

Joseph Lawrence Accongio, 79, of Easton, Maryland, died at home in his own bed—as he wished—at 8:18 on the evening of April 18, 2026.

Joe was born in Rochester, New York, the son of Lawrence Angelo Accongio and Stefania Zazinski Accongio. He grew up on Warehouse Street, part of a hard-working Italian-American family. Polio struck him at the age of seven, leaving him with a paralyzed leg, and three qualities that would define the rest of his life: compassion, stubborn determination, and a sense of humor. He was a handyman par excellence and a born inventor, devising Rube Goldberg-style contraptions to work around every obstacle the world put in his way. He was also a lifelong prankster who kept family, colleagues, and unsuspecting bystanders on their toes.

He graduated from Jefferson High School in 1964 and earned a Bachelor of Science from the University of Rochester in 1968. His first job was teaching science back at Jefferson—where he took pride in coaching the chess team, and in his special qualification certificate to handle lunar rocks. It was also at Jefferson that he met the love of his life, Sheila Lippa, a fellow science teacher whose classroom shared an adjoining greenhouse with his own. For Joe, it was love at first sight. They married on March 21, 1969.

In those early years, on top of his teaching, Joe worked nights and summers

to provide for his young family, doing auto repair and playing saxophone in his band, Arion 70. Joe went on to earn a master's degree, and a Certificate of Advanced Study from SUNY Brockport, followed by a doctorate in education from SUNY Buffalo in 1986. The doctorate led him to the job he loved most: school principal.

He was an award-winning educator who loved his students as much as they loved him. He founded a charter school and received a certificate of commendation from the New York State Board of Regents and the State Education Department for reforms that made "a significant, positive impact on the lives and education of young adolescents in his own community and across New York State." His work also took him, for a time, to New York City, where he served as a consultant for the Children's Television Workshop on the Emmy-winning Square One TV--which, to the delight of his daughters, more than once put him face-to-face with Big Bird.

Joe retired in 2001 and moved permanently to Easton in 2014, where he and Sheila could be closer to their daughters and enjoy the shore weather and close friendships in a community of neighbors who quickly learned what a jokester he was. In his final years, post-polio syndrome gradually took back the independence he had spent a lifetime fighting for. He met this challenge the way he had met everything else: with determination, optimism and strength, to the very end.

Joe is survived by his wife Sheila, his daughters Stephanie Dray and Jennifer Thomas, and his sons-in-law Adam Dray and Christopher Thomas.

A funeral mass will be held at Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church, 1214 S Washington St, Easton, MD 21601 on May 1, 2026 at 11 a.m., followed by a reception.

In lieu of flowers, please consider a memorial contribution in memory of Joseph to the Tunnel to Towers Foundation (<https://t2t.org/>), in support of catastrophically injured veterans and first responders, or to the charity of your choice.

Previous Events

Funeral Mass

MAY 1. 11:00 AM (ET)

Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church
1210 S Washington Street
Easton, MD 21601

Tribute Wall

DF

“ Joe was my boss, mentor, and beloved friend. Our frequent special trips to Canada discussing life and job will never be forgotten. No matter what he did in life, he touched people's lives. He was an amazing person who loved his family deeply. He'll be missed, especially by me.

Dennis Francione - May 06 at 02:36 PM

SH

Dennis, you and Sue were a special friends to Joe and me throughout his Rochester adventures. Thank you for your kind words.

sheila - May 08 at 07:19 AM

FA

“ Frank A. purchased a sympathy card for the family of Joseph L. Accongio.



Frank A. - May 02 at 05:17 PM

WG

“ My condolences to the family., As a RCSD colleague of Joe, I admired his passion for educating our children, his firm belief in acquiring more opportunities to promote learning for both children and adults. Joe's effervescent smile and sense of humor was shared with all he encountered. When you talked with him for a few minutes, he would definitely share jokes illustrating his love of family. May your fond memories be as unending ripples in a pond during this season.
Wilhelmina Glover

Wilhelmina Glover - April 29 at 03:10 PM

JS

“ Jean, Paul and Ryan Slattery planted a grove of 5 [Memorial Trees](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Joseph L. Accongio.

Jean, Paul and Ryan Slattery - April 29 at 12:50 PM

MS

“ 3 files added to the tribute wall



Mark Spall - April 29 at 10:29 AM

SD

Oh, you are so kind to post these!!! The memories you have brought back help dispel some of the grief. Thank you.

Stephanie H Dray - April 29 at 05:14 PM

MS

“ Mark Spall purchased the Lavender Reflections S
pray for the family of Joseph L. Accongio.



Mark Spall - April 29 at 10:02 AM

MS

“ Mark Spall planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Joseph L.
Accongio.

Mark Spall - April 29 at 10:02 AM

KL

“ To preface, Mr. A and Sheila had been on my mind for the last two
weeks, so I decided to see if I could find a phone number to check
in and found this. It's taken me a couple of days to even respond
because it just comes as a shock, and saddens me so as well.

As we live our life stories, there are times we reflect and certain
people get a chapter in our book of life. Mr. A and Sheila were that
for me. And yes, it all started with Mr. A being a mentor and
amazing teacher. Then I was fortunate enough to get to know
Sheila, babysit the girls some, treated like family. In my teen years,
that is one chapter I realized, for my story, I needed. They became
family in my heart then and have remained all these years.

Sheila, Stephanie, and Jennifer I am deeply sorry for your loss of
Joe/Dad. I would echo all of the beautiful sentiments people are
sharing about him. What a wonderful spirit he was!!

Much love, Kim L'Amoreaux, Charlotte NC, Class of '78

Kim L'Amoreaux - April 27 at 08:03 PM

SH

Thank you Kim. I always remember you as a loving heart. Joe and I hope you are well and happy.

Sheila - May 07 at 10:12 PM

AM

“ I was a college friend of Steph’s. When we graduated, we had a group dinner for our friends and family. I must have made a toast or a speech - my memory is fuzzy on those details - but what I do remember is that afterwards, Mr. Accongio came up to me and complimented me. He said he was impressed by what I’d said and that he could tell I was someone who had a bright future ahead of me. It was a small moment of encouragement but it gave me a boost of confidence as I launched my job search. I’ve never forgotten that moment of kindness. I can only imagine his impact on those who were blessed to be in his orbit regularly, when I was so touched by just a moment. I’m very sorry to learn of his passing. My heart goes out to you, Steph, and your family.

Aimee Moss - April 26 at 09:38 PM

SD

Aimee how kind of you to share this. I didn’t know or maybe didn’t remember that he did this, though it was very much in character. This memory is a blessing to us. Xoxox

Steph Dray - April 27 at 07:49 AM

FD

“ Fred & Lisa DeNunzio purchased the Peaceful White Lilies Basket for the family of Joseph L. Accongio.



Fred & Lisa DeNunzio - April 26 at 06:35 PM

FD

“ Fred & Lisa DeNunzio planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Joseph L. Accongio.

Fred & Lisa DeNunzio - April 26 at 06:35 PM

JC

“ Saddened to learn of Joe’s passing. Always enjoyed our encounters through the years. My prayers to my cousin Sheila and to Stephanie, Jennifer and families
Jaime Ciaccia

Jaime Ciaccia - April 26 at 05:43 PM

SH

thank you Jaime- time comes for us all

Sheila - May 07 at 10:15 PM

AL

“ On behalf of my late husband, Douglas Llewellyn, I am sending my sympathy to Joe’s family and friends. I hope Joe and Doug are still talking Science Education in Heaven.
Ann Llewellyn

Ann Llewellyn - April 26 at 10:25 AM

CM

“ *Mr. Accongio was my 10th grade biology teacher back at Jefferson in 1974. The kindest and most encouraging teacher I ever had. As far as he was concerned no student was beyond help and he never gave up on anyone. When I was in 11th and 12th grade, he wasn't my teacher but he was always there to talk and listen, you could go to him for anything.*

Rest in peace Me. Accongio, you made a big difference in a lot of students lives

Cindy Mull (nee Raguso)

Cynthia Mull - April 26 at 08:59 AM



“ *I first met Joe in September of 1967. We were both heading to careers as science teachers, he, a senior at UofR, and I a first year grad student. Since I had no education courses yet, he and I shared matching schedules and Joe, and his pal Dave Taylor, helped me to adapt to life at the land of Meliora. It was Joe who suggested that we take microbiology rather than the "cattle call" Bio 101 to satisfy part of our certification requirements. I'm pretty sure that the fact that the class was largely made up of student nurses had something to do with that choice!*

I would see Joe at science teacher meetings (until he got into administration) and I always enjoyed reminiscing about the good old days. I will treasure those memories. He was a great guy! God bless Joe and his family

David Crane - April 25 at 04:46 PM

SK

“ Scott and Patricia Kreiger purchased the Florist Choice Bouquet for the family of Joseph L. Accongio.



Scott and Patricia Kreiger - April 25 at 02:44 PM

AR

“ One of the best! I met him at Douglas in 1990! Always classy and a great sense of humor. Sending love and prayers to his familia!

Armando Ramirez - April 25 at 10:43 AM

CC

“ Joe hired me at Frederick Douglass right out of college. During the interview he asked if I was related to Joe Caluorie, “that’s my dad!” Joe had worked with my father during his time at Kodak. He started to tell me about all of the times they played chess together. Over the next few years, I learned so much about teaching from Joe. His door was always open to listen or offer advice! When he became Principal at Jefferson, I moved to the school and was fortunate to be able to continue working with Joe! He was an amazing person. He was kind, compassionate, funny, and committed to “doing right by kids.” Prayers to his family and friends. Christine Caluorie-Poles

Christine Caluorie-Poles - April 25 at 10:28 AM

LG

“ Lynn and Richard Gatto purchased the Sweet Comfort Gift Crate for the family of Joseph L. Accongio.



Lynn and Richard Gatto - April 25 at 10:24 AM

LG

“ Lynn and Richard Gatto planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Joseph L. Accongio.

Lynn and Richard Gatto - April 25 at 10:24 AM

RG

“ Joe was a mentor to me in my science education as a teacher. He showed me unique ways to present science concepts to middle school students, His dedication to education was an inspiration to me. I will miss his guidance. My condolences to his loving and supportive family. Richard Gatto

Richard Gatto - April 25 at 10:12 AM

SH

Dick thank you for your kind remembrance and condolences. Joe 's calling was children and he loved people who helped them.

Sheila - May 07 at 10:22 PM

CD

“ He was loved by so many. I really enjoyed knowing him and having him as a teacher and a great one at that at Jefferson. Deepest sympathy with or thoughts and prayers to the family.

Cindy Hart Dellavilla - April 25 at 09:23 AM

JB

“ Joe was a hero to many younger students and my hero at Jefferson HS. In college Joe often visited and played his tenor sax in the Band and Dance Band. As I was a young tenor sax player, he was a joy to know. Before I graduated Joe came back to do his student teaching at Jefferson. He would teach at Jefferson and rise to Principle. Joe could have been a bitter person, contracting lifetime disabling polio just a short time before the polio vaccine. He was just the opposite. I and many younger students looked up to him. To his family and friends my sincere condolences. Rest In Peace to the person I will never forget and always admire.
Jim Bertolone

James Bertolone - April 25 at 09:20 AM

MB

“ Dear Sheila--I was saddened to read of Joe's death in this morning's Democrat & Chronicle. My deepest condolences to you and your family.
Mary Boyd

Mary C Boyd - April 25 at 08:54 AM

SH

Mary, how kind of you to post. It has been a long time since we worked together. Hope you are well and happy. Joe was the my light and my center. My only consolation is that he is now at peace.

Sheila - May 07 at 10:30 PM

FF

“ Joe rest In Peace



Frank Fedele - April 25 at 08:52 AM

NC

“ My sincere condolences to your family. Joe was a darling. Always had time for a laugh and hug. Everyone loved him. I'm sure he will be remembered for his smile. A fellow Jefferson HS student,
Noreen Walsh Carlson 💕💕

Noreen Carlson - April 25 at 08:45 AM

IK

“ I knew Joe from the Rochester City School District (NY), and he indeed was fun to be around and a great educator. I'm sure he will be missed by all who knew him. My condolences to Sheila and the girls. Irene (Miller-Holleran) Knights

Irene Knights - April 24 at 08:15 AM

SC

I attended number 5 school with Joe when we were kids. Actually assigned to help him down stairs during fire drills. Even at that young age he was fun and humerus. Condolences to his wonderful family.

sal Cipparuolo - April 24 at 04:23 PM

AB

“ Mr. Accongio you were a very nice person who cared for his students at Jefferson High School. You were a person a student could trust and know that if you were told something, it was taken care of. May you Rest in Peace forever. From a student who was always talking and you never turned her away. Thank you.

Angela Brienza - April 23 at 08:07 PM

NL

“ *Of all the Principals I worked for in my years at RCSD Dr. Joe was my all time favorite. I always knew what kind of day it would be by the music coming from Joe’s office. (Chuck Mangione was his fave!). To say he cared about our kids would be an understatement. He had a brilliant mind and a big heart. Thanks for our years at Jefferson, the laughs and always our friendship.*

Nikki LoRe - April 23 at 07:48 PM

SD

Oh Nikki. Thank you so much for this. My father had you on his list of people near to his heart that he wanted me to reach out to. I had been trying to find you. I'm so very relieved that word got to you. You've helped me fulfill a promise to him. Know that every warm feeling you have for him was returned. And he did, indeed, love his Chuck Mangione.

Stephanie Dray - April 24 at 09:47 AM

KE

“ Joe and I were Best Buddies as we would say. We met 67 years ago, 8th Grade, Jefferson High School, and I have, from that time on, always admired him....his kindness, intelligence, determination, positive attitude and his wonderful sense of humor. Joe grabbed onto life and made the very best of it, there were no boundaries. The last time we talked I asked how he was doing, knowing full well that his health issues were rapidly increasing. He said in typical Joe fashion, “I’m doing great, the very best I can with the cards that have been dealt.” The best he can had turned into a life of accomplishments in everything he chose to pursue as well as a life of positively influencing everyone who was lucky enough to have known him.

I loved getting together through the years and reminiscing, laughing at all the shenanigans from our student days at the University of Rochester and afterwards when he began teaching. I have hundreds of stories, from our classes at Jefferson, hanging out with our gang at the U of R, meeting at his parents’ house where his mom, Estelle, fed all of us all of the time, Joe’s confiding in me that he had met Sheila, the girl of his dreams who he was certain he was going to marry, standing up at their wedding ceremony, gushing over his beautiful baby girls, visiting their home and loving how happy he and Sheila were. Later in life we would catch up by phone, and we would always pick up where we had left off as if no time had passed.

I am and will be forever grateful that Joe was an important part of my life. Thank you for all of our years of friendship, my Best Buddy.

Kathy (McLean) Everson

Kathy Everson - April 23 at 03:15 PM

SH

Kathy, what a lovely note. You always have a special place in our heart and are a special part of our life -Love Sheila

Sheila - May 07 at 10:38 PM

SA

“ *I am so sorry to hear of Mr. A's passing. He was truly an amazing teacher and a wonderful person. He had a special way of making sure everyone felt engaged, included, and excited to learn. His sense of humor brought so much joy to the classroom, and his kindness left a lasting impression on all of us.*

*He was deeply loved and respected, and his impact will not be forgotten. I feel grateful to have had the chance to learn from him. He will be greatly missed
RIP*

Sandee - April 22 at 08:20 PM

LA

“ *Dear Sheila, I am so sorry to hear of Joe's passing. I hope you have peace in the memories that you and he shared. God bless you. I hope we can get together in the near future. I am sorry I cannot attend the funeral. Love, Lana*

lana - April 22 at 08:04 PM

SH

thank you Lana- those lovely memories of Joe sustain me- Sheila

Sheila - May 07 at 10:41 PM



“ Never really had him as a teacher other than first thing in the morning for homeroom, sorry to his family for the loss he was a good guy may he rest in peace

Pete DiGennaro - April 22 at 06:34 PM



“ Joe Accongio was one of a kind. He was an awesome teacher. I really enjoyed having him at Jefferson. And I certainly remember his wife Sheila what a great lady she is. He's now running in heaven and there's no stopping him. May he rest in peace it was my pleasure to have known you, Joe.

janice Gammariello Barnum - April 22 at 05:53 PM



“ Scott W Kreiger lit a candle in memory of Joseph L. Accongio



Scott W Kreiger - April 22 at 05:24 PM



“ Joe was not only a fantastic teacher, but a dear friend to our family, my sisters and brother, growing up with him in our neighborhood. His mother was our crossing guard while we attended #5 school. Such lovely parents and family. The Ferrigno family offers you our sincere condolences and prayers 🙏

Carol Ferrigno Gerber - April 22 at 02:48 PM

LW

Absolutely my favorite teacher Kind, funny and a great guy . And Sheila was my science teacher and I loved her as well❤️Prayers sent to the family. RIP

Linda SanFilippo Whelehan

Linda SanFilippo Whelehan - April 22 at 03:17 PM

C1

My most best respected teacher ever. There was never another like him. He taught me early on how to be a better person.

Mr. A,

May you rest peacefully in heaven and your memory be eternal! You will be missed by all who knew you. 🙏

Cindy Roides - Class of 1980 - April 22 at 04:00 PM

SK

May you rest in peace knowing just how many lives you touched. You challenged me, taught me chess, and made my life better for knowing you. Of all the people I have known throughout my life, you were the most influential.

Scott W Kreiger - April 22 at 05:28 PM

VP

Mr Accongio (always how i remember him) was a great teacher and very encouraging. I too had leg problems and walked with a crutch and his abilities and determinism gave me courage that I could do anything. I remember he helped a few of us dissect a human brain in the back little room of his class. His teaching made me go into Biology and then I got a PhD in Pharmacology from Northwestern University. I regret I didn't look him up when I returned to Rochester. He was loved by his students and friends. Vicky Stathopoulos, PhD (1976)

Vicky Stathopoulos, PhD - April 22 at 05:43 PM

PE

So sorry to hear of Mr Accongio passing. I had him for 10 grade biology,made learning so much fun, dissecting so many things! I was also on the chess team and sometimes would have an ongoing game during class amazing he was only nine years older than we were at the time. We were all fortunate to have had him in our lives Pete Eberhardt class of 74.

Peter Eberhardt - April 25 at 08:54 AM

CR

*I loved having Mr. Accongio for 10th grade biology. He was one of my favorite teachers ever. Great guy, great teacher and just a great example to all of us. A lot of what he taught really stuck with me. Some of it was even biology! He was a tribute to the profession.
Craig Dupra Class of '76*

Craig - April 29 at 10:00 AM

MC

“*Joe was a wonderful man and we always enjoyed every opportunity to see both him and Sheila. We admired his spirit, resilience and determination. He was truly an inspiration!
Our prayers and condolences are with you all. May he rest in eternal peace.
Jim & Mary-Jo Ciaccia*

Mary-Jo Ciaccia - April 21 at 09:19 PM

SH

Mary-Jo thank you for the note. Time has its way with us all. The fond memories of friends and family sustain me. I've been a long time away from Rochester, hoping you and Jimmy are happy and well.

Sheila - May 07 at 10:50 PM

WS

“ Mr. Accongio would sometimes stop on his way home from work and pick up some groceries at Tops, where I worked as a cashier when I was in high school. He would come through my line and chat. I was always amazed that he could handle a basket of groceries with crutches, and manage to get them onto the cart and pay....all things that usually require both arms. He was always kind and friendly to me and my husband Mark. He took an interest in Jen and Steph's friends and was genuinely curious about how everyone was doing.

Wendy L Sarney - April 21 at 04:37 PM

SD

Thank you for reminding us of that :) He was a Wegmans guy so he went to tops just for a good sale and to say hi to you. Xxoxox

Steph Dray - April 22 at 01:00 PM

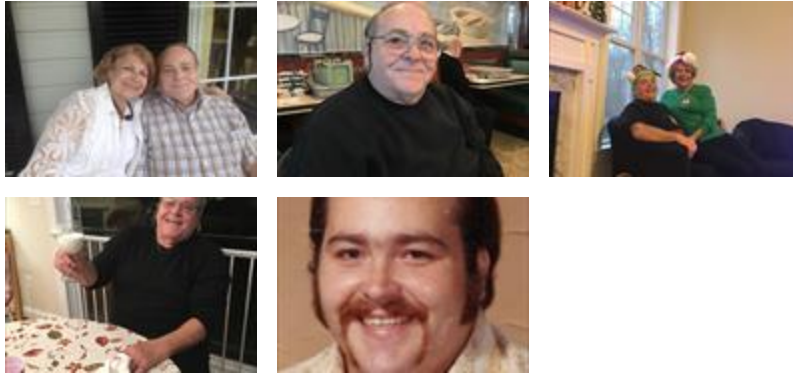
LR

I went to Jefferson High with Joe and then to the U of R where he was my mentor and protector. We enjoyed many hours at the student union. We were later re acquainted when our daughters were at Athena High School. Joe was one of the nicest persons I knew. His laughter and sunny disposition were contagious. Rest in peace, dear friend. Linda Ricigliano/Madonia

Linda Ricigliano - April 24 at 08:31 PM

SD

“ 38 files added to the album Family Photos



Stephanie H Dray - April 21 at 04:06 PM

TF

“ Joe Accongio was one of the best people I have ever met, and I am so happy he came into my life. He had an incredible impact on thousands of students and hundreds of educators.

I worked with Joe at Jefferson Middle School in Rochester, NY as well as the Charter School of Science and Technology. He has had such an indelible impact on my career as an educator and the lessons he shared will never be forgotten.

My heart goes out to Sheila and his family.

Those of us lucky enough to have been a friend of Joe are all the better for it - when you were of friend of Joe's he made sure you knew how important you were - he was one of the most important people in my life.

Tom Foster - April 21 at 01:24 PM

SH

Tom you and Elizabeth are a loving friends, etched in our hearts. - Thank you sweet soul, -Sheila

Sheila - May 07 at 11:10 PM