Ronald Nelson

May 28, 1942 - September 6, 2025

Ronald Nelson, a respected public servant, environmental leader, and devoted husband, father, and grandfather, passed away peacefully on September 6, 2025 at the age of 83.

Born May 28, 1942, in Salisbury, Maryland, Ron was the son of Margaret Bertels and John Nelson. He grew up in Wicomico County and graduated from Wicomico Senior High School, Class of 1960, where he played football and excelled in gymnastics — especially the pommel horse, a skill he proudly mastered.

He earned a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Health from East Tennessee State University in 1966, launching a lifelong career in public service and environmental protection. In 1971, Ron married Hazel (Montgomery) Nelson, after being introduced by her mother. They celebrated 54 years of marriage filled with love, family, and mutual devotion.

Ron devoted more than 30 years to environmental leadership in Maryland. He served as Deputy Secretary of the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) from 1991 to 1995, helping lead the state's efforts in pollution control, water and air quality, waste management, and Chesapeake Bay restoration. Prior to that, he was the first Director of MDE's Hazardous and Solid Waste Management Administration, overseeing statewide programs in hazardous

waste, recycling, site remediation, and emergency response.

Earlier in his career, Ron held key roles in the Maryland State Health Department, including Director of the Solid Waste Program and Director of Consumer Health Protection. He played a central role in drafting and advocating for major environmental laws and served on numerous state and federal advisory committees. In recognition of his contributions to Chesapeake Bay conservation, he was named Admiral of the Chesapeake by Maryland Governor Marvin Mandel in 1977.

After retiring from state service, Ron continued his advocacy as Director of Environmental Law for the Maryland Chamber of Commerce, where he helped pass Maryland's Brownfields and Voluntary Cleanup Law. He later served as Land Use and Environment Officer for Anne Arundel County and eventually returned to consulting as President of Nelson & Associates, helping businesses navigate regulatory and compliance matters.

Outside of work, Ron was involved in his community. When his children were young, he was an active volunteer in local recreation leagues, coaching youth softball and soccer in Anne Arundel County, MD. He was a passionate fan of the Baltimore Ravens, an avid reader — especially of Stephen King novels — and enjoyed spending time on the golf course.

In their retirement years, Ron and Hazel became residents of Bonita Beach, Florida, where they split their time seasonally to visit family and enjoy retirement.

Ron is survived by his beloved wife of 54 years, Hazel; daughter Heather Wigglesworth (Ed); son Kyle Nelson; four cherished grandchildren — Noah, Lauren, Ava, and Emily; and extended family. He will be remembered for his leadership, sharp mind and wit, and love for his family and the natural world.

A gathering will be held on October 18, 2025, from 1:00–4:00 PM at the Cove Creek Clubhouse, 114 N Creek Ct, Stevensville, MD 21666. Guests are welcome to join at any time during these hours to share food, refreshments, and memories.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that memorial contributions be made in Ron’s honor to the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, reflecting his lifelong dedication to preserving the Bay and its surrounding environment.

Tribute Wall

BS

It hurt to hear of the recent passing of Ron, a great environmental leader and Director that I admired and respected. His leadership style and integrity commanded respect and loyalty. In my 49 yrs of State service I can't think of a single person that did more for me than Ron. In the early 1980s He selected me as one of 6 inspectors to be part of a new inspection team known as the as the Hazardous Waste investigation team (HIT) that was responsible for regulatory inspections and investigations at hazardous waste generators and facilities. I was always proud to be a part of this team. Later he selected me to be the Eastern Shore Regional Manager for the Hazardous and Solid Waste Mgt Administration that he Directed. I will always remember Ron with the highest respect and regards. Bill Schmidt.

Bill Schmidt - October 14, 2025 at 08:20 AM

TG

I was particularly saddened to hear of Ron's passing. I have a great deal of respect for Ron. As a young government attorney, having the opportunity to work with and learn from Ron was a privilege. He was an astute master of government affairs. His combined ability to draft and implement legislation and regulations to accomplish big-picture environmental objectives and understand the economic realities of regulated businesses and their employees was unparalleled. He was direct, never shy, and had a sharp wit that was ready to deliver - funny, or barbed when his target earned it. Ron oversaw the establishment and implementation of substantial environmental regulatory programs which continue to work to protect and improve our environment.

My condolences to Mrs. Nelson, Heather, Kyle and their families. Tony Gorski

Tony Gorski - October 03, 2025 at 12:26 PM

EP

I am so sorry to hear of his passing, I worked under Ron for many years at MDE, and with him for more after he left. He was smart, witty, and demanding, but fair. For awhile I was the geologist closest to Ron's office physically, and he got me involved in many projects that would not normally have come my way in the normal course of business, lol - "Dex, quick, take a look at this and see if their arguments are valid, or just hogwash." I had and have enormous respect for him. Condolences to Heather and the rest of the family. - Ned Dexter.

Edward M. Dexter, P.G - September 30, 2025 at 01:51 PM

BD

It is with a profound sense of sadness that I learned of Ron's passing. I came over to the Maryland Department of Health's Waste Management Administration in 1981, when Ron served as the Administration's Director. He was tough and demanding, but his leadership brought out the best in all of us. I learned to respect and admire his leadership during those challenging times facing us in our environmental protection roles. Behind that rough exterior, Ron had a great sense of humor, and I grew to know him not only as a phenomenal leader, but, most importantly, as a friend. He will be missed.
Sincerely,
Butch Dye

Butch Dye - September 30, 2025 at 11:13 AM

JD

Sending my deepest sympathy to Heather and the entire Nelson family. May you be comforted with memories.
Love, June Dwyer

June Dwyer - September 26, 2025 at 03:21 PM

JW

Thank you for all the good times. Ron’s quick Witt, stories, and sense of humor and let’s not forget Ron’s perfectly prepared steaks on the grill. He is one of a kind and we will miss him dearly.. and especially his famous steaks. Jimmy & Karen

Jimmy White - September 26, 2025 at 09:30 AM