



## Willard William "Frenchie" LaJoie

February 12, 1935 - March 14, 2026

Willard William "Frenchie" LaJoie, age 91, of Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, passed away peacefully, leaving behind a legacy of leadership, community service, and dedication to the people he served. Frenchie devoted over five decades of his life to Central Savings Bank, beginning as a teller in 1957 and rising to serve as President, CEO, and later Chairman. Under his guidance, the bank expanded its presence throughout the Eastern Upper Peninsula, with branches in DeTour, Kinross, Pickford, Rudyard, Cedarville, St. Ignace, and Mackinac Island. He retired in 2010 after 52 years of transformative service.

Frenchie pursued excellence in banking education, completing advanced programs at the University of Michigan Graduate School of Banking and the University of Chicago National Installment Credit School, and was recognized by his peers with a three-year term as a Director of the Federal Reserve Board under the leadership of Chairman Alan Greenspan.

Beyond his professional accomplishments, he was a tireless community leader, supporting economic growth and civic initiatives in Sault Ste. Marie. He chaired United Way campaigns, contributed to the Sault Ste. Marie Historical Sites, the Kiwanis Club, and the Chippewa County War Memorial Hospital board. In 2002, he was honored as Citizen of the Year by Elks Lodge #552, and in 2004 he was appointed to the Lake Superior State University Board of Trustees, championing higher education and scholarship programs.

Frenchie's commitment to the community included establishing and sustaining scholarships through Central Savings Bank at Lake Superior State University for students pursuing careers in finance and banking, as well as supporting local health and community programs such as the "Road to Recovery" initiative.

Frenchie lived his life guided by the words he shared during a commencement address to the graduates of Lake Superior State University in the spring of 2003: "Keep in mind the important things in your life—family, friends, and the satisfaction of a job well done."

He will be remembered not only for his professional achievements but for his mentorship, generosity, and unwavering dedication to his community. Frenchie's legacy is one of service, integrity, and a life well-lived.

Frenchie LaJoie is survived by his children, Lawrence (Sharilynn and Ann) LaJoie, Ann (Bob) Atkin, Lindsay (Rob) Murphy, and Gerald (Renee) LaJoie; his grandchildren, Anthony LaJoie, Kelly (Darin) Bills, Andrea (JC) Fischer, Bobby Atkin, Nathan Atkin, Kyle Murphy, Sean Murphy, Brandon Mikolowski, Kaylor (Mike) Taubitz, Dominic LaJoie, and Chayse LaJoie; five great grandchildren and his sibling, Bernie (Ruth) LaJoie, who will miss his guidance, laughter, and the wisdom he shared so freely.

Frenchie was preceded in death by his wife, Elizabeth "Betty" (Yates) LaJoie; his parents, George and Laura (Bergeron) LaJoie; and his siblings, Nelson (Victoria) LaJoie, Eva (Bill Harju) (Carl Peterson) Harju/Peterson, George Jr. (Earla) LaJoie, Oliver LaJoie, Madeline (Kenneth) Heinzen, Raymond (Mary Lou) LaJoie, and Leon (Judy and Juanita) LaJoie.

Funeral Mass will be held on Monday, March 23, 2026, at 5:00 pm, at St.

Mary's Catholic Church, 377 Maple St, Sault Ste. Marie, MI 49783.

Final resting place will be at Oaklawn Chapel Gardens in Bruce Township, Michigan.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be sent to the Hospice House of the EUP 308 W. 12th Ave., Sault Ste. Marie, MI 49783 or the Compassionate Care Fund MyMichigan Health Cancer Infusion Center.

Family Life Funeral Homes – Sault Ste. Marie assisted the family with arrangements. Condolences may be given to the family at [www.familylifefh.com](http://www.familylifefh.com).

Obituary as submitted by family.

# Cemetery Details

## Oaklawn Chapel Gardens

Sault Ste. Marie, MI 49783

# Previous Events

## Mass of Christian Burial

MAR 23. 5:00 PM (ET)

St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral  
377 Maple St  
Sault Ste. Marie, MI 49783-2067

# Tribute Wall

JF

“ *Mr Atkin was my teacher at Lagrange prison KSR. He was a husband to Frenchie LaJoie's daughter. If she loved him I know Mr. LaJoie loved him and I know WHY I loved him. RIP Mr. LaJoie !*

jenny Rae Frazier - March 25 at 01:05 PM

FP

“ *I only knew Frenchie a short while but he made a big impression. I enjoyed talking with him when he visited his family in Florida. I had hoped we could make him a Floridian but he was a man of Michigan. I wish I could have known him much earlier but will remember him always.*

frank patrick - March 23 at 09:32 AM

SK

“ *Sincerely, Ryan Kennedy purchased the Dreams From the Heart Bouquet for the family of Willard William "Frenchie" LaJoie.*



Sincerely, Ryan Kennedy - March 22 at 05:21 AM

MK

“ *Melanie Kelloniemi purchased the Peaceful White Lilies Basket for the family of Willard William "Frenchie" LaJoie.*



Melanie Kelloniemi - March 21 at 10:15 AM

FF

“ From The Reid Family purchased the Large Basket Garden for the family of Willard William "Frenchie" LaJoie.



From The Reid Family - March 20 at 12:25 PM

B7

“ Bartenders of Moose 717 purchased the Divine Peace Bouquet for the family of Willard William "Frenchie" LaJoie.



Bartenders of Moose 717 - March 18 at 04:12 PM

ED

“ Elks Lodge 552 Board of Directors purchased the Peaceful White Lilies Basket for the family of Willard William "Frenchie" LaJoie.



Elks Lodge 552 Board of Directors - March 18 at 04:09 PM

ED

“ Elks Lodge 552 Board of Directors planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Willard William "Frenchie" LaJoie.

Elks Lodge 552 Board of Directors - March 18 at 04:09 PM

JM

“ I met Frenchie in the mid 1990`s. I have had a wonderful friendship with him for over 30 years. He was a friend, mentor, leader, visionary, and had the ability to take the most difficult situations and figure our a simple but yet good solution. Many people`s lifes were change for the better from his efforts. We will miss you Frenchie. Hope there is a cribbage board and a deck of cards in heaven.

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**John Madigan** - March 18 at 08:42 AM

MS

“ In 2015 I had the unique experience and pleasure of getting to know Frenchie in a very vulnerable way. What started out as an in-home support role to give his kids peace of mind, evolved into a much deeper connection. Frenchie quickly became a friend & mentor I could count on. There were several ups and downs during his recovery in 2015. No matter how much pain he was in, he always had the energy to crack a joke or make someone smile. During one of his extended hospital stays, the hospital brought in a special, more comfortable chair, which Frenchie often referred to as the “Chander Chair” (thank you, Dr. Chander!) He loved bragging about this and sharing with anyone he talked to. We would get a chuckle at this photo often when reflecting back on those times.

As a college student, agreeing to be an at-home caregiver for someone I had never met was a bit of a risk. It was an unusual pairing, most people would agree. Many of my senior year weekends were spent watching football (or FoxNews) at Frenchie's. My role was to keep good company and assist him during the challenging health moments. Little did I know how deeply I would be rewarded by his knowledge, advice, humor, and experience. Once he returned to better health, Frenchie and I remained friends. He was often the first person I would call with big news, good or bad. I could always count on him to cheer me on or offer advice. He was stubborn as could be a lot of the time- especially once he got back to his garden! His tenacious spirit didn't bode well with the decline in health he was facing. Frenchie had a profound impact on me in a short amount of time, as he did with the greater community. I am grateful for the relationship that was built with Frenchie, and his own kids / grandkids. I will cherish the days where we shared deep conversation and Budweisers. He's a true legend!

Much love to the Lajoie family in this healing process.

-Morgan



**Morgan Skeet** - March 17 at 11:52 PM

SL

“ So many sweet memories of my Uncle but the one that always will make me smile is getting to put the University of Michigan Hail to the Victors on his each of his new phones! He was always interested in learning new things, something many of us forget to do as we get older. I will so miss that smirk and that chuckle! He was a straight shooter that had a heart filled with generosity and kindness. I will miss him dearly. Suzette

**Suzette LaJoie** - March 17 at 08:26 PM

FE

Sincerest condolences to Frenchies extended family and friends. I didn't know him personally but admire the tenacity he had for serving the community. May he Rest In Eternal Peace for all his selfless contributions to the area. Fly high with the angels Sir Frenchie!

**Fern** - March 18 at 09:37 AM

SA

I went to work for Frenchie 38 years ago and he scared me to death! Little did I know he would become one of the biggest influences and best friends I have ever had in my life. When my Dad passed away 24 years ago he became that stand in. Just like Morgan he was who I called when I needed advice or something big in my life happened, or when I just wanted to shoot the shit. I know I am a better person because of him. He and I became really close in 2015 when he was in Freighter View and even though he hate his time there I am thankful for all the time and memories that we had during his stay. Its not goodbye my friend but see you later! Your time on earth was well spent. Sandee

**sandee amble** - March 18 at 10:43 AM

MK

*Even though we moved away at a young age one thing I remember about Uncle Frenchie - We went to family cookouts to his house and those were memories and moments that will never be forgotten. Our family is amazing ! There was always lots of laughter and jokes between all of my GREAT Uncles. My Dad had stories upon stories but I am forever grateful that I have the memory of the family gatherings that Uncle Frenchie hosted - his smile - his humor and his love for family. Aunt Madeline would always update myself and my Dad of his RV adventures . RIP Uncle Frenchie*

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**Melanie (LaJoie) Kelloniemi** - March 21 at 09:51 AM

BR

*Rest in eternal peace Mr.Frenchie LaJoie. I will always remember your great chili recipe that you loved to make for your beautiful daughters. My sincere condolences to the LaJoie Family . Love always, Brian*

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**Brian** - April 21 at 09:17 PM