

Michael Thorpe Bennett

July 12, 1948 ~ January 22, 2026

Our beloved Michael Thorpe Bennett, age 77, passed away unexpectedly in his home on January 22, 2026. Mike was an extraordinary husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, brother, uncle and friend. In Mike's eyes, nobody was a stranger, and he will be deeply missed not only by his family but by the countless people whose lives he touched, lifted, and changed.

Mike was born July 12, 1948 in Salt Lake City, Utah, to Fred (Lefty) and Elaine Bennett. He was the second of four children and was raised in a home filled with love, laughter, and a deep faith in Jesus Christ. A lifelong member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Mike gained a powerful and defining testimony at age 12 while gazing at the Salt Lake Temple through a hospital window prior to surgery. That sacred reassurance that he was a son of God from the Spirit anchored his faith and guided the rest of his life.

He graduated from Highland High School, where he was an accomplished athlete, competing in football and state wrestling. During these years, Mike also developed a lifelong love for music—singing and playing the guitar—something that would later become a profound source of connection, healing, and ministry throughout his life. Mike served a mission for the church in the Cumorah Mission in upstate New York, where he performed in the famous Hill Cumorah Pageant as Captain Moroni. He also had the privilege of serving as an assistant to two mission presidents whom he loved and admired deeply.

Following his mission, Mike attended the University of Utah, where he met his beautiful wife, Marlene, on a blind date at Elder Ashton's home. He often joked that he fell in love with her when she was the only one who stayed to help Sister Ashton with the dishes. They were married in the Salt Lake Temple on July 10, 1970 for time and eternity. Ten months later, they welcomed the first of their six daughters. Mike joined the Army Reserve and later the Air National Guard for a total of 8 years of military service. Throughout his life, he remained a true patriot; he loved this great nation established under God with all his heart. During the early years of raising their family, Mike was called to serve as bishop of their ward with five of their six children in tow—balancing young parenthood with demanding service, always with devotion and love. In his free time, he and his friends formed Quintessence, a professional band they shared with their wives.

Mike dedicated his professional life to education and to seeing potential where others saw problems. At the University of Utah he earned a bachelor's degree in psychology, and a master's degree in social work. He remained an avid Utah football fan throughout his life...Go Utes! He began his career as a social worker at Granite Park Junior High and Granite High School, where he co-wrote the Granite School District's truancy program—still in use today. This marked the beginning of a career defined by innovation and courage to do things differently.

Determined to understand every role within the school system, Mike taught remedial math and physical education before becoming principal of Granite District's Alternative High School. While there, he completed his second master's degree in educational administration. After three years, Mike was transferred to Brockbank Junior High, which had the reputation as the hardest school in the district—and absolutely loved it. He continued to change the lives of young students, especially the most troubled.

He was later appointed principal of Cottonwood High School, where he served for eight years and was affectionately known as Mr. B. Three of his own daughters chose to attend here, outside their school boundary, to spend more time with their dad. It was during this time that their 6th daughter was born and Mike was simultaneously called to serve as a stake president for eight years. At Cottonwood High School, he pioneered block scheduling, concurrent enrollment, differentiated diplomas and the ABC No Credit program. In 1994, he received the Jon Huntsman Outstanding Educator Award for his exceptional leadership. At the awards banquet, the family fondly remembered meeting Howard W. Hunter, who smiled and said, "I'll race you," as he walked with his walker.

Mike later worked as Director of Curriculum at the district level before applying to become superintendent of Iron County School District. Despite Marlene's initial reluctance about this potential position, as the family sang "I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go" in church the Sunday before his interview, she felt a strong impression that a move was coming . Mike was offered the position as superintendent, where he continued his visionary leadership. He had a gift for inspiring educators through his legendary video/music presentations. In Iron County, he enhanced the community greatly: he passed bonds for a new high school, introduced concurrent enrollment and created partnerships with Southern Utah University and the Shakespearean festival, where his oldest daughter performed for 2 seasons.

During this season, Mike was also called as bishop of a young single adult ward, a calling he treasured deeply. He loved young adults and frequently welcomed them into his home for ward prayer and activities. During his time as superintendent, Mike endured numerous surgeries and serious health challenges that led to chronic pain and a dependence on pain medication. This ultimately resulted in an early retirement—a heartbreaking transition for a man whose identity and joy were deeply tied to meaningful work and service.

After retirement (with the help of his angel wife Marlene who carried him through his darkest times) Mike found renewed purpose by returning to education as a consultant. He worked with the Utah School for the Deaf and the Blind in Ogden and other schools, where he implemented the "Earning for Learning" program, a highly successful motivational initiative for struggling students. He recruited students from Weber State University to tutor those in need—once again using his gift for networking and inspiring others to join a noble cause. He later conducted a feasibility study for a school district split and completed his final education assignments as principal of Roy Elementary and North Star Academy.

Turning years of pain and recovery into profound purpose, Mike served for 15 years as an Addiction Recovery Program facilitator. During this time, he created a music therapy program to be used in rehabilitation settings. Mike believed deeply that music heals—and that when it testifies of Christ, it can become a turning point in someone's darkest moment. Mike and Marlene served a beautiful mission together in the Salt Lake Granite Stake, blessing countless lives with their combined gifts. Mike also served as a missionary at the LDS employment center for 12 years as a career counselor and resume specialist to the very end. In fact, he called to let them know he wouldn't be able to make it in due to chest pain, just moments before he passed.

Though Mike achieved remarkable success as a leader, innovator, and educator, his greatest joy was always his family. Together, Mike and Marlene raised six daughters and cherished their growing posterity of 33 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren, with two more soon to arrive. They have filled their home with music and the gospel, having frequent family gatherings with meals, games, dancing, singing and laughter. Lovingly referred to as "Bop" by his family, he cheered his heart out at every game, performance, spelling bee, award ceremony and graduation of his children and grandchildren. Everyone knows Bop as their most avid supporter and biggest fan. One of our most cherished memories is singing as a family while Bop played his guitar and he loved nothing more than spontaneous family concerts in the living room that broke out in 6 part harmony.

Mike knew how to have fun! His youthful spirit, contagious laugh and dance moves were often present at the annual family reunion at Bear Lake, where the Bennetts have attended for 50+ years. He was the beloved DJ at the family dance and made priceless video presentations of these reunions for decades. Mike was a master fly-fisherman, taught by his sweet father, an excellent golfer, and he taught all of his daughters to ski.

Mike was a spiritual giant—deeply compassionate, nonjudgmental, and drawn to the lonely, lost, and wounded. He had an extraordinary gift for helping others recognize their worth and instilled in them his belief that no one is beyond rescue. He constantly testified of Jesus Christ as a humble instrument in God’s hands and spent his life seeking out "the one". He will be most remembered for his heart--he embodied Christlike love for everyone, he had the most glorious laugh, and the best smile and hugs imaginable. There is no one quite like Mike.

Mike lives on continuing his mission on the other side of the veil using his extraordinary gifts to bless God’s children, and though our hearts are broken, it gives us great comfort to know that we will see him again.

Mike is survived by his beloved wife, Marlene; his six daughters and their spouses: Kristin Bennett; Kim (Lincoln) Steenblik; Keri (Greg) Christensen; Michelle (Steve) Armstrong; Melissa (Afton) Lambson; and Megan (Tim) Curtis; 33 grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren, with two more expected. He is also survived by his siblings, Don (Kriste) Bennett and Betsy (Van) Pilkington.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Fred (Lefty) and Elaine Bennett, his brother, Fred Bennett, one infant grandchild, Zach Steenblik, 3 sisters in law and 2 beloved nieces.

Viewings will be held Sunday, February 1, 2026, from 6:00–8:00 p.m., and Monday, February 2, 2026, from 9:30–10:45 a.m., followed by funeral services at 11:00 a.m. at the Cottonwood Creek Stake Center, 1250 East Murray Holladay Road, Murray, Utah. Internment will be at Mount Olivet Cemetery.