John Warren Williams

December 24, 1944 ~ May 22, 2016

With tremendous sadness, we unexpectedly say goodbye to an extraordinary man, John W. Williams. Restaurateur, restoration developer, architect, designer, gourmet cook, and beloved brother, uncle, and friend, John died May 22, 2016 at the age of 72.

Born December 24, 1944 in Franklin, Idaho to Homer and Ruby (Palmer) Williams, John was later raised in Grace, Idaho where he was recently inducted into the first Grace High School Hall of Fame. John studied mechanical engineering at Utah State University, later transferring to the University of Utah to study architecture and business finance. As a true Aggie fan and supporter, he was thrilled when USU later awarded him an honorary doctorate degree. While there, John was a proud member of the Sigma Chi fraternity, often singing fraternity songs. John also served an LDS mission in Birmingham, England, where he made lifelong friends among the other missionaries.

Beginning in 1978 with his first project, the New Yorker, John helped change the face of Salt Lake City. Over the last almost 40 years, John transformed local dining and the appearance of our downtown with a fusion of renovated properties and contemporary dining. John made a tremendous impact on fine dining, bringing fresh seafood beautifully prepared and served in stunning surroundings. Gastronomy Inc., which John co-founded, opened 10 restaurants including The New Yorker, Market Street Grill, Market Street Oyster Bar, Market Street Broiler, Baci Trattoria, Caf√© Pierpont, and China Star. John loved and cherished his Gastronomy family. He was respected for his talent in restoring historical buildings with tremendous modern design, bringing new energy and beauty to downtown. His most well-known restoration projects are Salt Lake Hardware building, Ford Motor Co., Fire House No. 8, the Pierpont building and the New Yorker building. He helped found the Downtown Alliance 25 years ago to build up and revitalize downtown, and was the recipient of many awards to honor his accomplishments, including the National Trust Honor Award, the highest award from The National Trust for Historic Preservation, Utah Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, Entrepreneur of the Year, and Salt Lake City Magazine's 10 Most Influential People of the Year, and many others.

John was a champion for social issues and local community concerns. Nearly every arts, cultural, and charitable organization in Salt Lake County lists Gastronomy as one of its best benefactors. John was a quiet, strong ambassador for the LGBT community, and Gastronomy was one of the first companies to provide a safe working environment and spousal benefits to same-sex individuals. John also supported local culture and fine arts, currently serving on the board of the Utah Symphony and Utah Opera. He was passionate about attending and supporting our symphony, opera and theatre events, and generously shared his tickets with those he loved.

The finest example of kindness, compassion and altruism, his generosity was legendary. From quietly paying his parking attendant's tuition to helping support a server who needed to take care of her ill mother, he never sought recognition, praise or attention. He enjoyed making people happy and making a difference in people's lives. John made life beautiful to all who knew him.

In addition to John's community influence, he tremendously impacted his family. An enormously generous and devoted son, brother, uncle and godfather, he was like a father to his nieces, nephews, and their children. His charisma, energy and vision always made life a wild, amazing adventure. From trips to Paris on the Concord to Santa visits and gifts, to a Harley Davidson motorcycle gift, John had unmatched passion and enthusiasm for everything he did. John's belief that everything should have incredible "wow factor" meant every party, vacation and event was spectacular and unforgettable. He lived by the motto "if one is enough, ten is better." No gathering took place without live music, dancing, singing around the piano, gifts and fine food. His passion and zest for life was infectious. We couldn't keep up with John, but while we were with him, we experienced life to its fullest. Life with John was a dream come true.

John is survived by his siblings Deworth Williams (Alice), Gary Williams, David Williams (Bonnie), Suzanne Larsen (Gary) and many nieces and nephews who love him dearly. He is preceded in death by his father and mother, Homer and Ruby Williams, and by his sister Sandra Wilkins.

Funeral services will be held Tuesday, May 31 at 11 a.m. at Abravanel Hall, 123 South Temple, Salt Lake City, UT preceded by visitation at 9:30 am. A short burial will follow for family and close friends at the Salt Lake City cemetery located at 1002 E. 11th Avenue.

To know him was to love him. John's absence will leave a large hole in our hearts, lives, and community.

In lieu of flowers, please leave an extra generous tip for your restaurant server.