

## Ronald E. Matthies

**Ron Matthies, a former Minnesota State University Moorhead vice president of university relations,** died Friday, Sept. 17, 2021, in Florida. He was 81. Ron was born in Albert Lea, Minnesota, on April 13, 1940. He graduated from Albert Lea High School in 1958, and with a bachelor of arts degree from St. Olaf College in 1962. As a young man he joined Augsburg Publishing in Minneapolis as a writer and editor of Lutheran-themed works. He specialized in writing for children. Augsburg published his book, *The Unopened Door: Christianity Facing the Occult*, in 1971.



Ron moved to Moorhead in the late 1960s to finish a master of arts degree at Moorhead State College, now Minnesota State University Moorhead. In 1970 he joined Moorhead State's faculty as an instructor of English and humanities.

In November 1975, shortly after the college became Moorhead State University, Ron moved from teaching to university promotion as editor and director of the university relations office. He inaugurated a new magazine-format publication that appeared monthly, serving as editor. Ron's writing captured the spirit of university growth in the post-Vietnam War period of the 1970s. In his introduction to the issue of January 1978 mailed to prospective students he wrote:

"We tell you that a university is people. An inference might be that people outside the university are not. By no means do we consider beyond the gates of Moorhead State University lurks a different species. We do mean a university is little more and no better than the people who teach, administer and study at it.

"But, for all the people outside the university there is a need to communicate as clearly and effectively as possible just what our university is all about. This need led to some lengthy, late night thoughts about the best way to serve you in this publication. It is always tempting to present the gloss and glamor of college life. It is easy to lapse into words of excellence, outstanding, and best. Temptations and ease laid to rest, we decided you were best served by informative articles that would help you in coming to this university. More important, we will attempt in this issue and future ones to present considerations not just for knowing Moorhead State University, but also for making better decisions about any college or university. It would be untrue to say we do not want you to choose MSU; it would be unfair not to help you in making the best decision and realizing that your new design might exclude Moorhead State from your plans."

From this position Ron advanced to become Moorhead State's vice president of public affairs, retiring in 1995. In this and his former role he became an enthusiastic advocate of student overseas travel and study. Ron directed the university's popular Eurospring program through the 1980s and early 1990s, planning trips and travelling overseas to discover educational opportunities for students. At home, he directed for a number of years the university's beloved community July 4th celebration that became one of Moorhead's summer treasures.

Ron decided to reinvent himself in 1992, beginning coursework toward a master's degree in counseling. Graduating in 1995, he worked a short time in the field, but a love of international travel lured him into retirement. He spent the next two decades roaming extensively, often alone, to places as different as Albania and Machu Picchu. Ron brought passion and skill to planning his overseas trips, perhaps a legacy from his Eurospring years. He saw all seven continents. At one point Ron guessed he certainly would be eligible for the Travelers' Century Club, an organization open to Americans who have visited at least 100 countries and territories. Ron spent many winters in Torremolinos, Spain, where he welcomed friends and former colleagues from Fargo-Moorhead to his eclectic group of expats. He loved to play bridge, a game he picked up after retirement. He could prepare feasts of extraordinary complexity, often paired with elaborate theme parties at his south Fargo home that featured costumes and even large centerpiece ice sculptures.

Ron married Janet Ringdahl in 1962. The couple had no children, and Janet died in 1981. In 2014 he married longtime friend Patricia Sacry. Pat and Ron moved to Florida in 2012, but continued to travel on cruises overseas, including an 111-day world cruise.

Ron's strength and determination made it possible for him to overcome a lifetime smoking habit, to lose more than 100 pounds, and with a new exercise regime to enjoy active years in his early 70s. He sometimes said he considered those years to be his best. Friends remember his optimistic view of life, his easy-going, affable nature, and his generous and kind spirit. He usually had a good word (and occasional barbed wit) for people from every walk of life. Ron helped friends in difficulty and supported many organizations through his retirement years. His courage and honesty led to his decision during his counseling studies to publicly come out as a gay man, and he remained a strong supporter of LGBT rights and the programs of AA.

Ron is survived by his wife, Pat, Pat's son Chris and daughter-in-law Sim Childers, grandchildren Cole and Jade, and cousin Barbara Hamberg. A memorial service will be planned for a later date.