



James Luther Oliver

July 10, 1943 - February 7, 2025

James (Jim) Luther Oliver was a father, husband, brother, engineer, entrepreneur, satellite industry pioneer, mentor, philanthropist, and friend to everyone he met. Born on July 10th, 1943, Jim was raised in Atlanta, Georgia – the middle child of Amogene Caldwell Oliver and James Luther (Luke) Oliver. He and his sisters, Jane and Ruth Ann, grew up in a middle-class neighborhood near Buckhead where Jim and his friends spent countless hours exploring, crafting elaborate treehouses, and building wooden hotrods and transistor radios.

By the time Jim was 8, he worked at his father's service station, where he pumped gas, waxed cars, swept floors, and anything else his dad needed help with. Jim learned from his father the value of hard work and the importance of always doing your best.

When Jim was a teen, the family moved to the Druid Hills area, where he attended Druid Hills High School. He did well in school but later joked he could never keep up with his older sister, Jane. He was soft spoken and grew up with a noticeable stutter. Like his father, he had poor vision and wore thick glasses, and at 5'2" tall, was the smallest kid in his graduating class. These early obstacles did not prevent Jim from leading an exceptional life. He had a natural talent for design and after high school he set a course to attend Georgia Tech to study Industrial Design. As a junior, he realized his creative side was flourishing but he needed technical skills, too, so he enrolled in the Mechanical Engineering program and completed his studies at Georgia Tech

with two bachelor's degrees. He was able to do this with the unwavering support of his mother, a secretary who contributed her entire income to Jim's tuition.

Fresh out of Tech, Jim set off on his first big adventure, moving across the country by himself to accept a position with Lockheed, where he designed antenna positioners, sensors, and stabilizers for U.S. Air Force Low Earth Orbit spy satellites. While at Lockheed, Jim won a design award and was encouraged to apply to Stanford University's Design program. He did and completed his master's degree in Design Engineering.

During this time, he married his college girlfriend, Carol Waggle, a beautiful redhead with a big smile, and she joined him in California.

The Olivers welcomed their daughter Esther in 1971. Jim loved California but the stress of work, studies and supporting a growing family took a toll on him. They moved back to Georgia to be closer to family and friends, and Jim worked for the Mead Packaging company as an engineer and program manager. Jim also entered the Ph.D. program in mechanical engineering at Georgia Tech. Jim knew with the job and his young family he would not be able to complete the program, which required a dissertation, but wanted the benefit of taking the coursework.

Daughter Emily was welcomed in 1976, and Jim joined Scientific-Atlanta soon after. As Scientific-Atlanta's engineering manager, Jim designed the antennas that helped get ESPN and CNN on the air. He loved the engineering work but struggled with the corporate drive that focused solely on profits, often at the expense of employees. He left S-A in 1981 and became an entrepreneur with two industrious friends, Marvin Shoemake and David Speed, and together they formed SatCom Technologies. Jim led the engineering efforts and designed and manufactured fixed earth stations for the growing broadcast satellite market, and the business flourished. They sold SatCom Technologies in its fifth year, when Jim was 48, and he planned to spend time consulting before eventually retiring.

Drawn by the peace and beauty of the mountains, the Olivers moved to

Asheville in 1989. One consulting project led Jim to the concept of designing satellite communications antennas that could be mounted onto trucks, creating news-gathering vehicles that could transmit live news feeds from remote locations. He designed and built the first vehicle-mounted antenna in his basement then formed AvL Technologies in 1994. He soon moved his antenna manufacturing to two classrooms at the A-B Tech incubator.

Designing and building antennas with his own hands made Jim feel like a kid again, and plans for retirement flew out the window.

AvL Technologies grew steadily, achieving success in only its third year.

Through happy accidents, Jim found and hired great leaders to help him with the business, while relying on his “seat of my pants” management style and stern commitment to making the best products possible. Today AvL

Technologies is a leader in mobile satellite communications technology with 260 employees and a 110,000 square foot campus in north Asheville.

While standing in line to purchase a hotdog in the Grove Arcade, Jim met his second wife, Kendall. Kendall brought balance to Jim’s life, and they spent the next dozen years enjoying so much they had in common-travel, arts, giving, and the love of the outdoors and their families and community.

Over the past 10 years Jim worked with Georgia Tech to help build a copy of the Stanford program that taught him so much about design philosophy, and the project became a truly rewarding way to give back to the field he loved so much. Jim also worked closely with Georgia Tech’s Schools of Industrial

Design and Engineering to create the James L. Oliver Professorship, which bridges the gap between the two schools, and he sponsored the Hin

Bredendieck Award for students whose projects exhibit Bauhaus design traits.

In 2021 Jim was inducted into the Space and Satellite Hall of Fame. He was

recognized for his “major contributions to freeing satellite ground systems

from fixed locations throughout his career” and technological contributions that

“have greatly expanded the applications for satellite communications in ways

that save lives and provide opportunities for millions.”

Jim was a true ambassador for Asheville. He cared deeply about his community and was committed to giving back to the place that had given him such joy. He established charitable funds through the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina and gave generously both through his company and personally, contributing to many nonprofits each year.

Curious about everything, Jim loved reading, always striving to learn, and he so enjoyed meeting new people, finding a way to connect with everyone. He was soft-spoken, so when he began to tell a story, everyone leaned in to listen. He looked at situations in unique ways and loved finding a solution-the best solution-to every problem. His focus wasn't on winning, but ensuring everyone benefited. Jim was truly an incredible person.

In 2021 Jim was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. It progressed slowly at first and he continued to lead an active life. He especially loved taking walks with Kendall and their dog Katy. Over time Parkinson's robbed Jim of his ability to speak, though his wit and wisdom were always full strength. Jim left this world on February 7, 2025, surrounded by his girls – his wife, Kendall, his daughters Esther and Emily, and his dog Katy.

Jim is survived by his wife, Kendall Wright Oliver; his daughters, Esther Oliver Cartwright (Greg), Emily Oliver (Terrill Schmidt); Stepdaughter, Ryan Murphy Henderson (Scott); Grandchildren, Andrew Cartwright, Alex Cartwright, Mikey Tuck, Ruby Cartwright, Zoe Oliver Tuck, Lexton Henderson, and Lana Henderson. He is also survived by his sisters, Jane Oliver Swafford (Bill), and Ruth Ann Oliver Fleming; and numerous nephews and nieces.

A celebration of Jim's life will take place at the Ferguson Auditorium on the AB Tech campus on Wednesday, February 12, 2025 at 4:00 pm with reception to follow. In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made in Jim's honor to The James L Oliver Charitable Fund at The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina.

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

FEB 12. 4:00 PM (ET)

Ferguson Auditorium at AB-Tech
19 Tech Drive
Asheville, NC 28801