



Joseph Paul Gardner

October 19, 1944 - January 6, 2026

Joseph Paul Gardner, 81, a resident of Prattville, Alabama, passed away on Tuesday, January 6, 2026, after a brief illness.

Paul was born October 19, 1944 and raised in Savannah, Georgia, by his loving parents, Mary and Joseph Gardner, and alongside his younger sister, Ruthi Seward. He formed a lifelong bond with his best friend, Charles Goldsmith; the two met as babies and remained close for nearly 81 years. Paul graduated from Savannah High School in 1962 and went on to attend Georgia Military College.

Paul spent his early career in retail management, but his true passion was aviation. From an early age, he was fascinated by aircraft and flight. As a young man, he earned his pilot's license and continued flying as a hobby for decades.

In the early 1980s, Paul welcomed two sons, and his family relocated several times, living in Alabama, North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee. He was deeply devoted to teaching his sons, John and Jason, everything he knew. He shared his love of aviation and boating and worked tirelessly to provide for his family. No matter how long his day had been, he always made time to play catch or teach the boys how to fix something—often a toy they had broken! He was a devoted father, loyal friend, and a good man who will be deeply

missed.

In 2011, Paul married the love of his life, Elisabeth Norman Gardner, in St. Simons Island. Together, they built a life centered on family, community, and aviation. They owned Cloud 9 Aviation and managed the Prattville Airport, where Paul found great joy working with fellow pilots each day. He and Elisabeth formed lifelong friendships with the many people who flew in and out of the airport. Aviation was more than a career—it was a lifestyle.

Paul and Elisabeth hosted numerous charity events, including holiday fly-ins that brought joy to local children. Special guests arrived by plane, including Santa and Mrs. Claus, the Easter Bunny, and even zombie passengers for Halloween. Cloud 9 Aviation was recently honored with the Emerging Small Business of the Year award at the 2025 Alabama Small Business Awards.

Paul's blended family included his sons, John Gardner (Sovy) and Jason Gardner; Elisabeth's daughters, Katy Pate (Phillip), Jessi Davis (Michael), and Molly Belle (Leon); and his daughter-in-law, Kim Parrish. He was a proud grandfather to eight grandchildren: Michael Davis, Logan Davis, Sam Pate, Layton Caldwell, Lori Parrish, Lily Parrish, Camille Pate, and Jack Gardner. Paul also remained very close to his sister, Ruthi, and her family of Winter Garden, Florida.

A passionate supporter of animal rescue, Paul volunteered with Pilots N Paws, frequently flying animals in need to their "forever" homes. He and Elisabeth fostered and adopted countless dogs and cats over the years. On any given evening, Paul could be found relaxing in his recliner at the end of the workday, with a pup or two curled up safely beside him.

Paul was preceded in death by his parents, Joseph and Mary Gardner, and his brother-in-law, Charles Seward.

Paul will always be remembered as a true Southern gentleman—calm, kind, and selfless—who never met a stranger, whether they walked on two feet or four.

A celebration of life will be held on Saturday, January 24 at 2:00 PM at the Prattville Airfield. The family sincerely thanks you for your thoughts and prayers during this difficult time. In lieu of flowers, donations in Paul's memory may be made to Little Star Chihuahua Rescue (littlestarchis@gmail.com).