



## J Richard Bell

August 10, 1929 - April 18, 2026

J Richard (JR) Bell passed away on Saturday, April 18, 2026, at Samaritan Evergreen Hospice House in Albany, OR, he was 96 years old. He passed peacefully in his sleep with family at his bedside. He will be greatly missed. He was a shining light to our family, deeply loved, and remembered for his stories and unique sense of humor.

Born at home in Spring Ranch, Nebraska—not far from where a marker for the Oregon

Trail is now located—to Forrest Bell, who ran a grocery store, and Sara (Hopfer) Bell, who managed the house and later became a dental technician and avid oil painter. Due to the Great Depression and the relocation of a railroad, Spring Ranch declined into a ghost town, resulting in the family moving to Hastings, Nebraska, where he graduated from high school and attended Hastings College briefly. Having heard the engineering department at Purdue University spoken of highly, he decided to transfer to Purdue, where he obtained a B. S. degree in Civil Engineering.

While attending Purdue University, he became involved with the Purdue Playshop, where he met his future wife, Sally Papenguth, with whom he would raise a family and spend 68 years of his life. Their mutual love of the theater led to many trips, over the years, to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland. They were married after graduation and found themselves moving to

New Jersey because JR had been drafted for the Korean War. He was nearly on the ship to Korea when the cease-fire was announced. He finished his military service teaching radar mechanics at Fort Lewis, his first experience of the Pacific Northwest. It was during this time that he developed his love for teaching.

JR and Sally returned to Purdue to obtain his M. S. in Civil Engineering, specializing in Highway Engineering, and a Ph. D., specializing in Soil Mechanics. Upon receiving his PhD in 1962 he moved his family, which now included two daughters, across the country, one last time, to Corvallis, Oregon, where he joined the civil engineering faculty of Oregon State University. Throughout his tenure at OSU he was a dedicated teacher, regularly conducted research, and was very active in professional societies, including serving on committees for ASCE, IGC, TRB, and ASTM, he also served as Chairman for ASCE in the mid-80's. In 1973 he received a commendation for Meritorious Service to the Naval Civil Engineering Laboratory for "significant and vital contribution to facilities engineering, ocean engineering and environmental protection research." He is internationally recognized as a pioneer and expert of geosynthetics and has a noteworthy record of publications on geotextiles. In 1993 the North American Geosynthetics Society presented him with the Award of Merit for Outstanding Achievement in his pioneering efforts in geosynthetics, development of new applications, geosynthetics education, and leadership in the advancement of the geosynthetics industry.

Upon retiring after 30 years at OSU in 1993, he commenced traveling extensively with his wife, visiting 47 of 50 states and multiple countries, reaching destinations on 5 continents, including China, Kenya, Australia, New Zealand, and Costa Rica. During his travels, and between trips, he continued his avid interest in bird watching, camping, hunting and fishing. He lived a rich and fulfilling life. He was preceded in death by his wife, Sally and eldest

daughter, Leslie Bell. He is survived by Leslie's husband, John Yochem; his youngest daughter, Cecily Brown; two grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

A memorial gathering will be planned for early summer; the date is still to be determined.

In lieu of flowers, those wishing to honor J Richard Bell's memory may donate to the J R Bell & W L Schroeder Fellowship Endowment Fund, which supports 'support fellowships' for graduate students in the OSU College of Engineering's School of Civil and Construction Engineering. Contributions to this fund can be made at [give.fororegonstate.org](https://give.fororegonstate.org)

Info on other ways to give to the fund can be found here: <https://www.fororegonstate.org/giving/ways-to-make-your-gift>