



James A. Erdman, II

January 21, 1939 - May 31, 2025

James A. Erdman, II, of Mount Gretna, Pennsylvania, passed away on Saturday, May 31, 2025, with his loving family at his side. Born on January 21st, 1939, he was the son of the late Frederick and Catherine (Schubert) Erdman and beloved husband of Katharine (Koons) Erdman. On June 9th he and Kathie would have celebrated their 63rd wedding anniversary. In addition to his wife, he is survived by a daughter, Kirsten Erdman McClain; a son, James Erdman III; one grandson, Jack McClain; two brothers, Timothy Erdman, husband of Carolyn, and Michael Erdman, husband of Nancy; and two sisters-in-law, Mina Hankins (wife of James), and Frederica Bair (wife of Richard). He was preceded in death in 2023 by an older brother, Fredric Erdman.

From an early age, Jim was exposed to a rich musical upbringing. His father played trumpet for vaudeville shows and was a private cornet and trumpet instructor of students throughout Lebanon County. After experimenting with the drums and other musical instruments during his childhood, Jim settled on the trombone and became a prodigy trombonist. He graduated from Lebanon High School in 1956 after meeting his future wife, Kathie, a clarinetist in the high school band.

Shortly after graduation and at age 17, Jim auditioned for and was accepted into "The President's Own" United States Marine Band. To date, he was the second youngest-ever member of the prestigious Marine Band, second only to the famous American composer and former conductor of the band, John Philip

Sousa. Until his retirement in 1976, Jim served as the band's principal trombonist as well as its soloist, playing well over 1,000 solos throughout his 20 years of service. His career in the Marine Band was marked by annual national tours; weekly concerts on the steps of the Capitol and the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.; countless military funerals for fallen Marines at Arlington Cemetery; and White House functions and social events, including Presidential inaugurations and parades. He soloed regularly with the band, and for ten consecutive years during the band's annual 63-day cross-country national tours, he was the band's featured evening soloist, the only Marine Bandsman to have ever achieved that accomplishment. He retired from the band in 1976 as a master gunnery sergeant and was promoted to that rank while still in his late twenties, making him the youngest to hold that rank in the U.S. Marine Corps. He was decorated with the Marine Corps' medals for meritorious service and good conduct. The renditions and style of his many recorded trombone solos both in and outside of the band have been studied by amateur and professional musicians alike.

During his career with the Marine Band, Jim was also trained as a piano tuner and tuned pianos at the White House. Following his retirement from the band in 1976, Jim's musical accomplishments continued to flourish. After establishing his own private piano tuning business, he soon found new fulfillment as a low brass instructor at Lebanon Valley College, where he taught for 35 years until retiring in 2018. During his career at LVC, Jim founded Die Posaunen, the first trombone quartet in-residence at a U.S. college or university. A true mentor, "Prof Erdman" formed trusting, long-lasting relationships with his students and provided not only music instruction, but life lessons and a safe, judgement-free space for everyone. In May 2019, Jim was presented with an honorary doctoral degree from LVC for his invaluable contributions to the music department and the positive impact he had on so many students and faculty.

Jim collaborated with his two other brothers, Fredric and Timothy, on a memoir called "Guaranteed Notes: The Demand for Perfection," detailing the

three brothers' years together in the Marine Band, another unique distinction. Away from the music world, however, Jim was also a multifaceted and empathetic person with many different interests. He was a reader of classical literature and was known to be deeply philosophical and spiritual. From a young age, he was an avid fan of the Green Bay Packers, and during his time in the Marine Band, he became friends with the Packers' legendary quarterback, Bart Starr, even accepting an invitation to Starr's home while touring with the band in Wisconsin. Whenever possible, Jim loved to play golf with his many friends, his son, and grandson, and explore different parts of the country with his family. He was never afraid to try new adventures.

To keep his trombone "chops" in shape, Jim performed regularly in the Central Pennsylvania Brass Ensemble and with the Lancaster British Brass Band. He was also a long-time member of the International Trombone Association and participated in various music events and workshops, where he conducted numerous master's classes for thousands of musicians. He was awarded LVC's "Nevelyn Nisely Award" for being recognized by the college as its outstanding adjunct faculty member, and was named "Distinguished Alumnus" by the Lebanon School District. In 2013 Jim was inducted by the Harmonia Music Association as a member of its Lebanon County Musicians Hall of Fame.

A Celebration of Jim's life will be held in the Miller Chapel on the campus of Lebanon Valley College, on Saturday, July 19th at 11:00 a.m.

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to the Lebanon Valley College Music Dept. where a scholarship will be established in Jim's name.

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

JUL 19. 11:00 AM (ET)

Miller Chapel at Lebanon Valley College
E. Sheridan Avenue
Annville, PA 17003

Tribute Wall

JZ

“ I met Jim in August of 1963 when I auditioned for the Marine Band on euphonium and trombone. Jim conducted the trombone portion and Arthur Leaman the euphonium side. Col Albert F Schoepper, Director, accepted me on euphonium.

There are hundreds of memories regarding my respect and admiration for Jim. In particular, the 1968 national tour by the Marine Band featured Jim as the evening soloist playing Annie Laurie by Arthur Pryor, the fabulous trombone soloist with the The Sousa Band. It was a west coast tour of some 66 days. Jim never missed a note for 66 days of performing a matinee concert, principle trombone during the evening concert and being the featured soloist. Absolutely amazing.

Jim was an inspiration to everyone in the Marine Band. And his laughter was infectious.

May you rest in peace.

John R Zimmerman

John R Zimmerman - August 27, 2025 at 08:52 PM

SM

“ I met Jim and his wife when their son was in Lebanon Catholic high school with my daughters. We all sat in the bleachers cheering on the kids when the band performed. He would buy a bag of popcorn and pretend he didn't notice when my young son would “share” the bag with him. I truly enjoyed spending time with such a wonderful couple. I remember he once told me that designed special mouthpiece for trombone players that to my knowledge is now being used by many musicians.

I am sorry that he has passed, the world has lost a wonderful person.

My thoughts and prayers are with his family.

Susie Miller - July 01, 2025 at 06:34 PM

MW

“ *Condolences to Jim's family. I had the pleasure of getting to know Jim during my daughter's flute lessons at LVC. Timing was such that he had a break while she had her lesson. He came to our home to tune our piano a time or two. Jim was a rare individual, positively impacting the lives of others. Peace to his family. M. Walker*

Michelle Walker - June 30, 2025 at 11:17 PM

RL

“ *Jim was a great friend and a great musician. It was a pleasure to have him as a faculty member a Lebanon Valley College. My condolences to his wife and his family.*
Dr. Robert C. Lau

Robert Lau - June 30, 2025 at 03:58 PM

JW

“ Sometimes chance works in your favor. As a high school kid tagging along with my older sister with college visits, we toured LVC. Beautiful campus, charming in a way, with a small town feel that makes you not feel like a "number". Upon getting in for music ed. I had no idea the significance of Mr. Erdman as an instructor at this little private school. Young and ignorant me, didn't think to research the instructors, after all, college is college. Wow... how could a man of this talent be hiding in such a small place? He called me "a big fish in a small pond" when we got to know each other. The reality is, he was the big fish in a small pond! The memories of his little studio will last as long as my memories last. From calling Dr. Brian Bowman at North Texas and letting me play for him over the phone, to contacting the Marine band to send a recital piece up for me to play. All of this in the little town of Annville PA. He was an incredible human, let alone the teaching side of things. I find myself incredibly lucky to happen upon LVC and Mr. Erdman "by chance". He will be missed by many, and the many who never got to know him truly missed out on an incredible talent, person, and musician.

James Walter - June 30, 2025 at 08:58 AM

RC

“ I pastored Christ Church UCC in Annville in the 1990's and became friends with Jim then. We shared many lunches together and chattered away about everything. He generously shared his musical talents with the church and I had the pleasure of confirming his son Jimmy. He was a great guy who will be missed by all those whose lives he touched—Rev Russ Clark

Rev Russ Clark - June 28, 2025 at 03:22 AM

RN

“ *Dear Kathie and Family,
My deepest sympathy to you and yours with the passing of Jim. The
lives of many have been made better for having known him, mine
included. What a talented and accomplished man.*

Rachel Noll - June 27, 2025 at 12:12 PM