



## Clayton Eugene Sheesley

April 19, 1934 - May 15, 2025

Gene Sheesley, loving husband, father, brother, uncle, grandfather, farmer, leader, volunteer, and educator to countless students passed away peacefully at home surrounded by family after a long productive life on May 15, 2025. He was born Clayton Eugene Sheesley to Clayton and Mary Sheesley on April 19, 1934 in Tulare, CA and died at the age of 91. He grew up in Visalia where he spent his first 2 years at Visalia Union High School, which later became Redwood and his latter 2 years at the new Visalia Senior High School, which soon became Mt. Whitney. Gene was elected senior class president of the first graduating class of Mt. Whitney, was the school's Future Farmers of America chapter president, and was later rewarded with the highest honor possible in that organization- State Farmer.

Gene graduated from The College of the Sequoias in 1954 and served as student body president 1953- 54. COS is where he and his future wife, Anna, continued to grow their relationship when they both were involved in student government. During that year, Gene and Anna put together a small committee who traveled above Three Rivers, and found the sequoia tree for artist Carroll Barnes to carve the GIANT statue that still proudly stands in front of COS today. They married in 1956 and became inseparable with 68+ years of happiness, love, honor and commitment for life. After COS, Gene obtained a Bachelor degree at The University of California Davis and a Masters degree at Fresno State while serving in the U.S. Army 1957- 1963.

Specializing in secondary education, Gene returned to Mt. Whitney High and started his career in 1959 as the vocational agriculture teacher. For the next 29 years, he climbed the administration ladder serving as counselor, dean, vice principal and principal. From 1988-1992 Gene moved into the district office as the District Supervisor of secondary education. After retiring in 1992 from education, he continued to serve and love his family, friends, and the community he grew up in.

Gene was the last remaining of the original 33 charter members of the Sequoia Visalia Kiwanis Club that officially began on August 7, 1968. He was a past president from 1970- 71 and was a past Lt. Governor of Division 18 from 1989- 90. Gene was gracious with his time, the consummate volunteer, always wanting to help within the community especially when the calling involved children. He embodied the Kiwanis mission; empowering communities by being a positive influence and making lasting differences in the lives of children.... so that one day, all children will wake up in communities that believe in them, nurture them and provide the support they need to thrive.

Being a natural leader, Gene sat on many Board of Directors throughout Tulare County which includes: The Salvation Army, Sequoia's for Youth, Avenue of the Flags, Miracle Mile of Quarters for Children's Hospital, Mooney Grove Arbor, Inter Club, Voting Polls, Food and Clothing Drives, Adopt-a-Highway, Christmas Parade, High Schools Agriculture Departments, Farm/City Youth Exchange, Supporter of FFA & 4-H, Key Clubs, Ag Expo/ Antique Farm Equipment Kiwanis concessions and Happy Trails Riding Academy. When it came to the community, Gene was most proud of helping and teaching others who can continue his journey serving the community in a positive manner.

Gene's face would always light up when he talked about Happy Trails Riding

Academy. It is the only fully accredited therapeutic riding center in the Valley enriching the lives of children and adults with physical, cognitive, and emotional disabilities through equine-assisted services. He led the design and building of the Sensory Trail which earned him the title as "Mr Sensory Trail" at the complex. He was so impressed with the confidence and joy he saw in the riders. Sequoia Kiwanis retains the responsibility for the maintenance for the Sensory Trail. So travel with a shovel and a rake in each hand as Gene did to preserve this beautiful land; that he so dearly loved.

Over the years Gene was never one to put the spotlight towards himself, but rather to others needing some positive encouragement. He was inducted into The College of Sequoias 2009 Hall of Fame. He has been honored so many times over his lifetime with awards and accolades that they fill an entire room in the home that he built in 1968, on the property of the old family farm where he raised his championship pigs as a boy.

Gene's life was full of love, good deeds, a firm handshake that really meant something, smiles, laughter, detailed organization, an unbelievably hard work ethic, and a compassionate focus with Anna on teaching their 3 sons and 4 granddaughters of becoming the kind and caring people with the last name Sheesley.

He deeply loved his family, friends, country, state, community and anyone willing to learn.

Gene is survived by his wife Anna of Visalia, brother Bob (Vicky) of Sequim, Washington; sister in-law Carol Jones of Depot Bay, Oregon; sons Steven of Visalia, Scott (Lianna) of Fresno, Brian (Joni) of Valencia; 4 granddaughters known as his blessings Kayla, Karly, Samantha, Jenna; 3 nieces and

nephews David, Dana Rethwisch (Michael), Donald and countless grand nieces, nephews, in-laws, cousins and a multitude of friends who have become like family along Gene's lifetime.

In addition to his parents, he was preceded in passing by his sister Lois and his cousins Frank Selover (Bonnie) of Lindsay, and Mary Waterman of Bakersfield.

Gene's wife, sons, daughters in-law and granddaughters love him with all their hearts and souls, and will miss him very much. They ask God to bless Gene's spirit with everlasting life.

A Celebration of Life Service honoring Gene's life will be held at Salser & Dillard Funeral Chapel, 127 East Caldwell Ave, Visalia CA at 2:30pm on Saturday, June 7th. Reception dinner to follow.

In lieu of flowers the family suggests making a contribution to The Gene Sheesley Memorial Scholarship at the Sequoia Visalia Kiwanis Club, Happy Trails Riding Academy, or the Alzheimer's Association.

Services have been entrusted to Salser & Dillard Funeral Chapel. Memorial Tributes and condolences may be offered by logging onto [www.salseranddillard.com](http://www.salseranddillard.com).

# Previous Events

## Funeral

JUN 7. 2:30 PM - 3:30 PM (PT)

Salser & Dillard Funeral Chapel  
127 E. Caldwell Ave.  
Visalia, CA 93277

# Tribute Wall



“ *Salser & Dillard Funeral Chapel created a Tribute Video in memory of Clayton Eugene Sheesley*



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**Salser & Dillard Funeral Chapel** - June 04, 2025 at 10:56 AM



“ *Salser & Dillard Funeral Chapel created a Webcast in memory of Clayton Eugene Sheesley*



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**Salser & Dillard Funeral Chapel** - June 03, 2025 at 12:07 PM

BB

“ *I am so sorry to hear about Gene’s passing. I have many fond memories of him as we worked together at Mt Whitney for many years as we were on the administrative career path. We had many wonderful discussions as we rode together working on Master Degree at Fresno State. He was a wonderful person and so supportive to me and countless others.*

*Bill Bettencourt*

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**Bill Bettencourt** - June 10, 2025 at 02:11 PM

KE

“ Oh my beloved Gene, it's Kenadee, Mike and Patti's granddaughter. I am so deeply saddened to hear of your passing. I remember seeing you at farm shows, Happy Trails, key club events, Kiwanis meetings, and more. You are such a sweet soul. I love you dearly. Farm shows will never be the same without you. I wish I could be there today, but I have moved far away to Tennessee. You are such a light and love. I will forever miss you dearly and love you equally. Give Papa a hug for me. Love you lots,  
Kena

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**Kenadee** - June 07, 2025 at 12:31 PM



“ Gene was truly my brother, not by blood, but by Spirit! I Love he & Ana, & the whole Sheesly daily with all my heart! I praise GOD everyday for their sister Lois for bringing Tito this AAZIG FAMILY! Gee & I would often tease Lois about doe thug silly to get us all laughing(( including Lois) !! Rest in peace Gene. Lois & your Mom & Dad are with you now!! YOU WERE A GREAT EXAMPLE OF A TRUE MAN OF GOD!!! Your sis, carol

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**Carol Jones** - May 30, 2025 at 07:39 PM



“ The Legacy of service that Gene has instilled in all of us will impact our community for generations. Many of us accomplished goals beyond are believes, but not his believe in us. He was always there to inspire and encourage in his own quite way.

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**Bert West** - May 28, 2025 at 02:54 PM