"We shouldn't be stuck on this rock forever. I believe it's in our human nature to try to go somewhere else, and we've almost worn this world out. I think now is the time to reach out and go somewhere else to start with a clean slate. There is no reason not to try." - Jim McLane

James Calvin McLane III
June 23, 1945 - September 22, 2015
A visionary’s memorial and photos

HOUSTON - James Calvin McLane III, a licensed professional aerospace engineer in Houston, Texas, died suddenly of a heart attack on Tuesday, September 22, 2015. James (known as "Jim" by friends) was born in Tallahassee, Florida, on June 23, 1945 to Dorothy Dean McLane and James Calvin McLane Jr., both of whom preceded him in death. Jim is survived by his devoted daughter, Krystal McLane (Darren Cox); grandchildren, Patrick McLane-Ertl (Adrian Ertl) and Lachlan McLane-Cox; loving sister, Patti Campbell (Buck) of Tullahoma, Tenn.; nephew, Jay Campbell of Louisville, Ky.; uncle, Harold Dean (Sadie) of Myrtle Beach, S.C.; and his companion, Jennifer Beegle of Houston.

As a young boy, Jim was brought up in a home with strong religious beliefs, and his parents helped charter Lutheran churches in Tullahoma, Tenn.; La Porte, Texas, and Clear Lake City, Texas. He is also a long time member of the First Evangelical Lutheran Church in downtown Houston.

In 1962, Jim's parents moved to Houston when his father took a job with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), spearheading the Lunar Receiving Laboratory. McLane was a senior in high school at the time of his father's transfer and wished to remain behind and finish school with his friends. He lived with his pastor for the remainder of his senior year and graduated from Tullahoma High School in 1963. After high school, he followed his parents to Texas to attend Texas A&M University and graduated in 1969 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Aeronautical Engineering. Soon afterward, Jim obtained his P.E. license, an accomplishment allowing him to stand out among his peers, along with his vast areas of expertise and inventions. While attending TAMU, Jim discovered some of his life's passions, including caving and photography. He was a member of the A&M photo club where he fine-tuned his darkroom skills. Jim had an excellent eye for photography which flowed over into other areas of his life. In the1980s, Jim and his family traveled to Bolivia and on up to Lake Titicaca, the highest navigable lake in the world. He took the reed boats onto the lake to visit the indigenous people who live on the Uros. Crossing over to Peru, he traveled by train to the top of Machu Picchu, the most familiar icon of Inca civilization. Jim would, later in life, return to South America several times to photograph eclipses of the sun. He was a founding member of the Rice University Grotto of the National Speleological Society (NSS) in 1969, now the Greater Houston Grotto of the NSS. He faithfully attended monthly meetings and was always engaged in lively discussions of archaeology, caving, exploration, and science. His cave pictures are still sought after by caving publications. An
example of his cave photography is found in the frontispiece for the now famous cave publication “Caves of the Inter-American Highway, Bulletin 1,” of the Association for Mexican Cave Studies (1967). Jim was also a longtime member of the Association of Mexican Cave Studies (AMCS). Motorcycle mountaineering was another of his loves. Jim was one of the first to find the Rio Purification caving area in Northeastern Mexico. These mountains produced the longest and deepest cave in North America during the 1970's.

Upon graduation, Jim went to work for Mooney Aircraft as an Associate Engineer focusing on engine installations. A year later, he transitioned into the oil and gas industry, beginning with Brown & Root in Houston, before advancing his career at Gulf Interstate Engineering as a senior engineer in 1980. Hired for his experience with insulated pipelines, he helped design one of the world's most ambitious construction and engineering projects: a 48-inch pipeline built in the Alaskan permafrost to bring North Slope natural gas to the lower continental United States. During the entirety of this intense project, he was away from his family for more than a month at a time. Jim adored his daughter, who was then a young girl, and being the doting dad that he was, brought native Alaskan and Canadian dolls home to her.

In 1986, a result of the Space Shuttle Challenger explosion, Jim was hired as a systems engineer with Boeing Aerospace Operations to review the reliability and safety of the vehicle's mechanical systems. During his 12 year-career with Boeing, he wrote requirements/standards documents (JSC 17481, JSC 16994); served on the panel that created NASA STD3000; and refined designs for the Space Station Freedom project, as well as helping define and establish structural goals. After Boeing, Jim was Ground Support Equipment Design Engineer with United Space Alliance through 2006. His list of inventions include NASA lab equipment, service cameras, and machines to recharge astronaut breathing tanks. The Space Suit lab was one of his favorite departments to be a part of and he managed to procure, for his massive collection of oddities, two massive floor to ceiling mirrors, originally used when inspecting the space suits while the astronauts had them on. During his time with USA, Jim wrote the controversial essay "Spirit of the Lone Eagle," in deference to Charles Lindbergh's solo flight from New York to Paris in 1927. His program concept suggests a single, manned, one-way mission to Mars without returning, which Apollo 11 astronaut Buzz Aldrin and noted author and physicist Paul Davies have also advocated. Jim hoped to bring a return of the "get it done" attitude of the 60's during the Apollo era, funding to NASA, fervent efforts in space exploration, swift advances in technology and science, as well as global unity through public support at an international level. He believed this venture and accomplishment would represent a milestone for the entire human race and above all else, mankind's unification would be the greatest result. Lacking in funding, NASA began its layoffs, so Jim revisited Gulf Interstate in 2006 as a continuation of his previous career with them. He was senior principal engineer in the gas and oil pipeline design division, working on a multiple pipeline project for a few years.

Jim's modest disposition allowed him to recognize the outstanding position he maintained, contributing to the world and future generations of space travelers and explorers. He appeared on talk shows which discussed these ideas, in addition to being interviewed by the Public Broadcasting System show NOVA. Some of Jim's writings are in Aviation Week, Los Angeles Times, The Space Review, and Harper's magazine. He also wrote for Wikipedia. During Jim's engineering career, he worked on many of the world's most significant undertakings: the first large crude oil pipeline across Saudi Arabia, where quicksand required the pipe to be installed above ground in an earthen berm; the tanker terminal that made it possible to market Iraq oil, developing the largest oil field in Saudi Arabia; major arctic energy projects; bringing the first natural gas supply to Mumbai India; the space shuttle; and at the time
of his passing, the controversial Keystone pipeline at Wood Group-Mustang Engineering, where he was Pipeline Engineering Technical Consultant.

Jim enjoyed attending technical conferences and writing technical articles. He was a longtime member of the Houston Section of the American Institute of Aeronautics & Astronautics (AIAA). Each spring, Jim delighted in returning to his alma mater to participate in judging student projects, aiding students, and helping the professors in keeping the university courses on track to provide engineers the knowledge they needed in the industry. He received great joy from being around the young upcoming engineers. He was also a judge at the Space Settlement Design Competition at Johnson Space Center every year for the last several years, and he helped team Frednet compete for the Google Lunar X-Prize.

Jim was always ready and willing for the next escapade. All combined, Jim traveled to over 15 countries in his lifetime, including Greece, India, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, and Scotland. Jim became an expert on his family's genealogy and was Scottish Clan Director of the Clan Maclean Associations: Clan Gillean USA. In 1992, he and his family traveled to Duart Castle on the Isle of Mull, Scotland for the International Clan Gathering. While attending the gathering, he met notable world figures including kings, queens, and diplomats.

Jim loved animals as intensely as he did humanity and helped care for Darwin, a 5-foot lizard. He rescued many cats and dogs, and is also survived by his most recent rescue dog, Laika, who resides with his daughter and her family.

Comfortable in any social setting, Jim's inquisitive mind and friendly temperament attracted friends and admirers of all ages, cultures, and religions. His contagious, upbeat spirit crossed barriers and our world and its people are far better since knowing him. We owe a deep gratitude to this man. He lived a sensational life.

"We shouldn't be stuck on this rock forever. I believe it's in our human nature to try to go somewhere else, and we've almost worn this world out," Jim once said. "I think now is the time to reach out and go somewhere else to start with a clean slate. There is no reason not to try."

The memorial service will be held at 4 p.m. on Saturday, October 10, 2015, at First Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1311 Holman St. in Houston.

Immediately following the memorial service, friends are cordially invited to a celebratory reception from 5 p.m. until 8 p.m. at the Bradshaw-Carter Home, 1734 W. Alabama St. in Houston.

In lieu of flowers, the family encourages friends to support the Texas Cave Management Association (TCMA). Donations can be sent to TCMA, P.O. Box 7427, Austin, TX 78713 or online at http://www.tcmacaves.org/, an organization that Jim supported regarding the protection of Texas caves.


More information:
- Follow this link for the newspaper obituary.
- Follow this link for the eulogy presented on October 10, 2015.

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Photos from Jim McLane’s life and adventures

Jim McLane inside Gruta del Carrizal, Mexico in November 1964

Jim McLane at Santorini, 2012
Jim McLane at work on a pipeline

Jim McLane with Jennifer Beegle at party for National Speleological Society Board of Governors, 2011
Jim McLane at the Louvre, Paris, in 2012

Jim McLane and Jennifer Beegle in Athens, 2012
Jim McLane with aircraft model
Jim McLane and Jennifer Beegle traveling by taxi in Santorini, 2012

Jim McLane with daughter Krystal