

Dean Willard Keefe

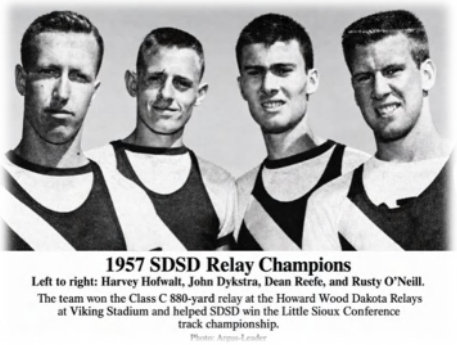
May 12, 1939 – June 2, 2020

Dean Willard Keefe, 81, passed away on June 2, 2020, surrounded by family in his final days. He was born on May 12, 1939, in Faulkton, South Dakota, to Kenneth and Ida Keefe and grew up on a farm near Seneca.



Dean attended the South Dakota School for the Deaf (SDSD), graduating as valedictorian of the Class of 1957. An honor student throughout high school, he also distinguished himself as a student leader and athlete, lettering in football, basketball, and track and field. He later attended Gallaudet College.

Among his memorable accomplishments at SDSD, Dean was a member of the 1956 track and field team that placed second in the Little Sioux Conference under coach Howard Hovland. That fall, he captained the Pheasants football team, coached by Clyde Ketchum, which also finished second in the conference. In 1957, he helped the track and field team, again coached by Ketchum, win the Little Sioux Conference championship and the school's first Region V title. A talented distance runner, Dean competed in the mile, 880-yard run, sprint medley, and, when needed, the 440-yard run.



1957 SDSD Relay Champions
Left to right: Harvey Hofwalt, John Dykstra, Dean Reefe, and Rusty O'Neill.
The team won the Class C 880-yard relay at the Howard Wood Dakota Relays at Viking Stadium and helped SDSD win the Little Sioux Conference track championship.
Photo: Argus-Leader

Dean remained grateful for his SDSD education and the opportunities it provided for academic, athletic, and personal growth. His schoolmates remembered him as hardworking, innovative, and insightful—a confident leader who welcomed challenges and encouraged others through his example.

Dean worked as a printer for The Washington Post and served in multiple leadership roles within the Deaf community. His contributions were recognized in 2010 when he was inducted into the South Dakota Association of the Deaf Hall of Fame in the Community Service category. His enthusiasm for athletics continued later in life through active participation in the Northern Virginia Senior Olympics.

Dean is survived by his wife of 37 years, Lynn Keefe of Burke, Virginia; sons, Ryan and Anthony; daughters, Annette and Pamela; their spouses; 10 grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

Dean lived with integrity, determination, and a passion for the many interests and people who enriched his life. He was laid to rest on June 9, 2020. He will be remembered with love by his family, friends, former classmates, and the Deaf community.

