

Ex-Champaign police official dies



WAUKEGAN — A former Champaign police lieutenant who was active in teaching senior citizens about crime prevention died suddenly in Florida.

James M. Spires Jr., 54, died July 29, 2003, in Orlando, Fla., where he had been participating in a conference as a representative of the Florida Department of Transportation.

Memorial services will be at 11 a.m. Monday at the First United Methodist Church, 128 N. Martin Luther King Jr. Ave, Waukegan. The Rev. Tom Ostrander will officiate. Visitation will be one hour before the services.

Burial will be Tuesday at the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery, Joliet, with military and religious rites.

Mr. Spires was born May 25, 1949, in Waukegan, a son of Patricia and James Spires Sr. He married Linda Kay Ostrander on May 29, 1971. She survives in Fort Walton Beach, Fla.

Survivors also include his mother in Waukegan; a son, Sean Spires of Tennessee; and

three daughters, Katie Wittmer of England, and Alison and Meghan Spires, both of Fort Walton Beach.

He was preceded in death by his father, a brother and a daughter.

Mr. Spires graduated from the University of Illinois with a master's degree in business administration in 1969. He also graduated from Marquette University in

1971 and was commissioned as an officer in the Marine Corps. He served in the

Marines and Marine Reserves, retiring June 1, 1999, as a lieutenant colonel.

Mr. Spires was a member of the Champaign Police Department for 24 years, retiring to

Fort Walton Beach in July 2000.

Holly Nearing, a lieutenant and acting chief for operations for Champaign police, said Mr. Spires' death was a shock to everyone.

"He was so full of energy and full of ideas," Nearing said. "He was proud to be a police officer. He was in the Marine Corps Reserves and was proud to be a Marine."

Mr. Spires brought a lot of management ideas from the reserves to the police department. He had a lot of his own ideas, including many

training concepts when he was with the police training section, Nearing said. He also started up a bicycle patrol unit for Champaign police, she said.

“Whatever he was involved in, he was involved in 100 percent,” Nearing said.

Mr. Spires is also credited by several people with organizing and developing a local crime prevention program for senior citizens known as Triad/SALT: Seniors and Law Enforcement Together. The Triad name comes from the original three national sponsors: the National Sheriffs Association, the International Chiefs of Police and the American Association of Retired Persons.

Champaign County Sheriff’s Deputy Mark Goodwin, who was also among the original organizers with Mr. Spires, said plans were developed in 1998 and the local Triad-SALT program began in 1999, providing information to seniors about what crimes were going on and how to prevent being a crime victim.

“He was very instrumental in getting it going,” Goodwin said. “He had seen it in action and really pushed getting it going and was the pioneer of it in this area.

“Jim Spires was one of those guys who was always looking ahead. He was always on the cutting edge, trying to make it better for everybody,” Goodwin said.

Cindy Cunningham, director of adult day care at the Champaign County Nursing Home, said Mr. Spires was instrumental in getting local seniors involved in the program.

Jo Hopkins, coordinator for the Retired Senior Volunteer Program, said without Mr. Spires there would not be a local program.

“He was the spearhead of that group and when he left, it was a while before we pulled it together,” Hopkins said. “He had a lot of energy and was willing to put that energy into action.”

Mr. Spires was involved in a wide variety of other volunteer programs.