



DR. JOSEPH C. SPAGNA

February 26, 1973 - June 17, 2024

MEMORIAL DONATIONS IN MEMORY OF DR. JOSEPH C. SPAGNA:
IN AN EFFORT TO ASSIST THE FAMILY, A CHILDREN'S COLLEGE
ACCOUNT HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED THROUGH
LAKELAND BANK

25 ROUTE 23

FRANKLIN, NJ 07416

(973) 209-4400

ACCOUNT NAME: TASCHA L. SPAGNA

VISITATION:

SUNDAY: JUNE 23, 2024

2PM TO 6PM

STICKLE-SOLTESZ FUNERAL HOME

FUNERAL MASS:

LIVE STREAMED: www.facebook.com/ststthomasjohn

MONDAY: JUNE 24, 2024

10AM

ST. JOHN VIANNEY CHURCH

2823 ROUTE 23 SOUTH

STOCKHOLM, NJ 07460

PRIVATE FINAL DISPOSITION

Joseph Clement Spagna, 51 years, of Stockholm, NJ, lived a rich and love-filled life. His warmth, sense of humor, easy-going nature, and humble intelligence made him friends wherever he went.

Joe was born on February 26, 1973 in Fontana, California to Joseph and Susan (nee Helmsing) Spagna and raised in Riverside, California with his sisters, Ana Maria and Lisa. Joe and his family enjoyed summer vacations to Crystal Cove throughout his life.

He graduated from Ramona High School where he played on a championship Ramona Rams football team. He also played football and participated in throwing events on the track team at Claremont McKenna College where he received his B.A. in Biology & Philosophy, and spent a memorable semester abroad on the west coast of Ireland, singing folk songs in the pubs.

Upon graduation, he went to work for Teach for America, teaching science in Baltimore. When he returned to California as lab assistant at the Joint Science Center at the Claremont Colleges, he discovered two lifelong passions: the study of spiders and his wife-to-be, Tascha Funk Spagna. Together Joe and Tascha moved to Berkeley where he received his PhD in Environmental Science, Policy & Management, in the Division of Insect Biology and worked in the Gillespie lab. Their first child, Elena, was born in Berkeley, and when they moved to Urbana, Illinois for Joe to work as a post-doc in the Suarez lab at the University of Illinois, their second child, Anton, was born.

In 2008, the family moved to New Jersey, where Joe happily engaged in a wide variety of professional, family, church, and community activities. He was a dedicated scientist and educator, working as a Professor of Biology at William Paterson University and answered any and all “bug questions” from

friends and acquaintances without intimidation. He loved mentoring his research students, working with his Honors College students and editing peer papers. He was the Editor for the Bulletin of NJ Academy of Sciences. In summer, Joe supported the Lake Stockholm Dolphins swim team as a volunteer at meets, as a board member, and later as team manager. He also volunteered for the Department of Persons with Disabilities annually as "Santa's Helper". Joe was honored to be able to give so much joy to the individuals, families and staff. He appeared in community theater performances at Salt & Light, Drama Geek Studios, and North Star, including his favorite role as Mr. Webb in "Our Town." He was an active parishioner at St. John Vianney Catholic Church and a politically-concerned citizen.

Joe loved music, playing guitar and singing to the kids when they were young. He loved sports, trivia, and board games and was playfully competitive. He loved to take walks and loved his pets. He loved to travel, often to see extended family, the Helmsings and Funks, and he loved being the "fun" uncle to Lizzie, Colton, and Dominic. He loved to spend time with friends, to tell stories and laugh, and he loved his family most of all. He will be dearly missed.

The family will receive visitors on Sunday: June 23, 2024 from 2pm to 6pm at the Stickle-Soltesz Funeral Home, 187 La Rue Road, Newfoundland, NJ 07435

The funeral mass will take place on Monday: June 24, 2024 at 10am at St. John Vianney Church, 2823 Route 23 South, Stockholm, NJ 07460.

Final disposition will be private.

In an effort to assist the family, a children's college account has been

established through Lakeland Bank, 25 Route 23, Franklin, NJ 07416:
Account Name: Tascha L. Spagna

Previous Events

Visitation

JUN **23**. 2:00 PM - 6:00 PM (ET)

Stickle-Soltesz Funeral Home

187 La Rue Road

(Parallel to Route 23 North between Clinton Road and Union Valley Road)

Newfoundland, NJ 07435

(973) 697-6700

info@sticklesolteszfuneralhome.com

<https://www.sticklesolteszfuneralhome.com>

Funeral Mass

JUN **24**. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)

St. John Vianney RC Church

2823 Route 23 South

Stockholm, NJ 07460

(973) 697-6550

Tribute Wall

KQ

“ I am heartbroken to hear of the loss of my mentor, Dr. Spagna. I had the honor of having him as my professor and mentor, performing research under him for nearly 3 years during my undergraduate career. Not only was he an outstanding professor and scientist, but overall, he truly was an outstanding person who cared deeply about all of his students. I have Dr. Spagna to thank for much of my success throughout my undergraduate career and beyond, including growing my love for research, supporting my presentations at multiple conferences and even helping me gain my acceptance to veterinary school. His support and encouragement helped to guide me and gave me the confidence to follow my dreams. Dr. Spagna was truly the best mentor I could have asked for, and I will forever be thankful for the great impact he had on my life.

My heart goes out to his family and loved ones during this incredibly difficult time. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

*Sincerely,
Karisa Quimby
WPU Class of 2020*

Karisa Quimby - July 04, 2024 at 07:26 AM

HB

“*Dr. Spagna was such a big part of my undergraduate career as I was lucky enough to have him for 3 classes and I got to do research with him as my mentor. Out of all of the professor's I had, he truly had the greatest impact on me and I am so beyond grateful for all of his support throughout my 4 years at WPU and even after I graduated. The conversations I had and lessons I learned from him are invaluable. When I was struggling to find a mentor willing to help me with my Honors thesis project because I was planning to study abroad, he happily took me under his wing and eagerly helped me come up with a research project. He was always telling jokes and always kept such a positive outlook even when I wasn't getting the best data. With all of his help I was able to complete my research project for the Biology department and Honors presentations; and I even had enough successful data that he had me present it at a Biology and Biochemistry Research Symposium. Beyond everything he helped me with in class and with my research, he was such a great person and he always gave me great advice. I will truly miss our catching-up emails. I could not have asked for better mentorship, and I am so appreciative of everything he did for me.*

May Dr. Spagna's memory be a blessing. I extend my deepest condolences to his family; he will be missed dearly.

With sympathy,

Haylee Baker; 2023 WPU alumni

Haylee Baker - June 25, 2024 at 01:21 PM

“*Dr. Spagna was my Honors mentor as well as my professor for a majority of my Biology and Honors courses. I first met him in my introductory Honors class which taught good study practice. It provided many spaces for people new to purely academic spaces to write reflective notes to themselves on how things were what they expected and how things were different. He was laid-back, only caring that we understood the core importance of our activities without caging us within exact parameters, and gave us ample room to complete tasks independently and uniquely.*

Over the years of working with him for my research, he only continued to push me towards independent workmanship. He had invited me to his lab to study Agelenid spider distributions across North America using the Maxtent map modelling software. Little did I know that beyond those words, he did not have a plan for me! The task was my own: how I conducted my research was on me. So I gathered coordinates for an entire semester, I read and re-read how to utilize Maxent, and I even learned mathematical theory because often times scientists don't understand the mathematical background for the software they are using and its limitations. I learned that I could be a great and diligent [woman!] scientist in a burgeoning field not because I was predisposed with any special gifts for genius or mathematical understanding, but just because I was fiercely committed and willing to teach myself whatever I needed to know. My independent research allowed me to realize myself: Dr. Spagna only gave me the space to do it.

Because of independent nature of my research, I did not spend much personal time with Dr. Spagna like many of my fellow researchers in the lab might have. I did not handle specimen; I only came for brief meetings to explain what I learned and my future project plans. However, my personal interactions came in small moments. I chuckled and answered his jokes during class. I wrote silly notes in my exams and drew comics humoring the consequences to the wrong answers given by the multiple choice sections. Whenever we met in the hallway we would walk together

*and talk about the goings on in the school, which was rapidly changing. I remember pointedly sitting in his lab during the summer and mentioning something of a charming puzzle game, *Professor Layton.* He too quickly went onto his phone and pulled up a picture of one of his daughters dressed up as Luke Triton, the young aspiring apprentice of the gentleman sleuth in the game! It still remains a deeply charming moment in mind, and despite never meeting Spagna's family I was immediately endeared to them.*

What pains my heart most is the fact that they have to continue on without his bright joy and constant care near. It is nothing anyone could have expected: as a Christian, it made me pause and wonder what the plan of God might be for such a thing to happen. But from my brief talks with Spagna I know his family to be themselves bright, and charming, and good, and that Spagna's love is not lost, but will live within his family forever, and from there be spread to every community they touch. Perhaps that is the plan. Perhaps not. But regardless, I have faith in the good future of the family. My prayers go to you in both parts mourning and hope.

-Nikki Gaffney, 2022 WPU alumni

Nikki Gaffney - June 24, 2024 at 10:51 AM



“*Dr. Joseph Spagna was my professor at William Paterson University. Not only that but he was my advisor for my undergraduate honors project as well as my graduate project from 2015-2018. We grew close during those year, even attending an international conference together. It was an honor to work with him and learn from him. I always greatly admired his research and looked up to him. He will be greatly missed.*

Dana Longano - June 24, 2024 at 07:59 AM

MW

Our condolences are with the family

mr nd mrs weaver - June 24, 2024 at 06:22 PM

MW

“ *Joe had warmth and cheer and infectious enthusiasm for science and life in general. He always stood up strongly for what was right and just. He changed so many lives; he was loved and valued and respected by students, friends, colleagues and family. Dear Spagna family, may you find comfort in knowing how much Joe accomplished professionally and personally in his all too few years. May his soul soar and continue to shine light throughout the universe and in your hearts. Miryam & Israel Wahrman*

Miryam Wahrman - June 24, 2024 at 03:30 AM

JS

“ *James S. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of DR. JOSEPH C. SPAGNA.*

James S. - June 23, 2024 at 03:37 PM

VS

“As we bid farewell to a remarkable individual, Dr. Joseph C. Spagna, I am struggling with words to capture the many emotions we are all experiencing. Joe was not only our esteemed colleague but also a cherished friend to many of us. In our shared time Joe left an indelible mark on our lives, both professionally and personally. From the very beginning of my association, it was evident that Joe was someone special. With a mind and a heart full of compassion, Joe quickly became an integral part of our work (COSH) family.

His dedication and unwavering commitment to students set a high bar in our professional expectations. One of the most admirable qualities of Joe was his ability to bring out the best in others. Joe was also a mentor to many students in the ASPIRE program. His guidance helped shape the careers of numerous students in the Department of Biology and Honors. I am confident that his legacy will live on in the professional and personal development of the students he mentored!

Beyond the confines of the office, Joe was a person of diverse interests and talents. His love for insects, particularly spiders, was evident in his grants and service to the New Jersey Academy of Sciences where he served as the chief editor of the “Bulletin”. He had often shared fascinating stories about his adventures with spiders when he submitted his grant proposals. Those stories not only entertained me but also gave me a glimpse into the rich tapestry of insects as part of his assessment of the biodiversity of the High Mountain Reserve Park in Wayne.

As I craft this note of recognizing the life of our late colleague Dr. Joseph Spagna, there is a particular line from Hamlet that keeps recurring in my mind. It is the magnificent part in Act 5 Scene 2 that runs like this: "Not a whit, we defy augury: there's a special Providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, tis not to come, if it be not to come it will be now, if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all!". In this quote, Hamlet rejects the notion that the will of the gods or fate can be divined, or avoided, and asserts that

everything unfolds according to an immutable plan. If something is fated to happen, it will happen. If not now, then it will come later. Let us honor Joe's memory by embodying the qualities he exemplified. Let us strive to be compassionate, to lead with purpose, to face challenges with courage, and to find joy in our daily lives. Dr. Spagna, your spirit will forever resonate in the corridors of George and Dorothy Hennings Science Hall East and in our hearts. May you rest in peace, knowing you have made an immeasurable impact on our lives. My heartfelt condolences to the family.

Venkat Sharma, PhD
Dean

Venkat Sharma - June 23, 2024 at 03:28 PM

BR

Beautiful tribute

Bridget - June 23, 2024 at 08:58 PM

JP

“*Joe was an extraordinary scholar, teacher, mentor, and colleague to so many at William Paterson. I know the Honor's students have especially benefited from his leadership and guidance. It is hard to even imagine WP without him. My heart goes out to all impacted by this loss, but especially to his family. -Josh Powers, Provost, William Paterson University*

Joshua B. Powers - June 22, 2024 at 08:10 PM

MA

“*Mary A. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of DR. JOSEPH C. SPAGNA.*

Mary A. - June 22, 2024 at 11:03 AM



“ *Enduring Grace was purchased for the family of DR. JOSEPH C. SPAGNA.*



June 21, 2024 at 06:07 PM



“ *From your NJ Academy of Science Family planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of DR. JOSEPH C. SPAGNA.*

From your NJ Academy of Science Family - June 21, 2024 at 06:07 PM



“ *I met Joe years ago at an arachnology congress, we studied the same group of spiders. Joe frequently and selflessly sent me spiders from the USA for chromosome analysis. A few years ago, we started a closer collaboration in a Czech-American project on chromosomal evolution of spiders. I spent a month in Joe's lab as part of the project. Joe was an excellent and responsible host, creating a pleasant environment for our work in his lab. During the December shooting in Prague, he immediately contacted me to see if we were okay. We will miss you very much. I would like to express my deepest condolences.*

Jiri Kral, Charles University, Prague

Jiri Kral - June 21, 2024 at 04:23 PM

JK

“ Jiri K. planted a grove of 3 [Memorial Trees](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of DR. JOSEPH C. SPAGNA.

Jiri K. - June 21, 2024 at 04:19 PM

MS

“ Joe was a friend and colleague in the Department of Biology at WPUNJ. We frequently talked, because we shared a laboratory in the Science Bldg. A few times he arrived with his two delightful, young daughters. I think that it was the younger daughter who was a happy talker, and she and I would exchange greetings. Remembering them both, I often thought that Joe and his wife were fortunate parents.

Frequently, when I brought sushi back to our lab from the Student Center, I could not eat it all, and Joe gladly finished it. As you know, he could eat well, so we were both satisfied.

Joe was a good researcher and teacher, and always had a student or two conducting research in his lab. Students especially liked Joe's summer course on invertebrates, in which they collected and identified and wrote about insects.

Joe introduced me to his sister Ana Maria through the books which she authored, as he was very proud of her writing. He happily described his trip, some years ago, with his daughters to visit Ana Maria, where to get to her house you had to take a ferry across a large, oligotrophic, lake in Washington state. I guess that the trip is still a grand memory for all.

Through all his busy work, Joe agreed to be editor of the New Jersey Academy of Science Bulletin. Back in the day, before Joe joined us at WPUNJ, I was editor of the Bulletin for five years, so I know what a never-ending responsibility it is for an editor.

I retired from WPUNJ in 2012, and after that only talked to Joe on the telephone occasionally. I recall his happily telling me of his promotion to full professor, and well deserved.

I attended Joe's 50th birthday party, which seems like only yesterday. It was a happy affair at the church hall, where I got to finally meet his sister Ana Maria. We had a nice chat and I took a

couple of photos of Ana Maria and me. If I knew how to send a photo from my cellphone to this funeral home website, I would.

If you got this far, you know that we at WPUNJ had a great deal of respect for Joe Spagna as a researcher, teacher, friend, and devoted family man. His legacy combines all of these qualities, and he will live in our memories forever. We will miss him.

*Michael J. Sebetich
Professor Emeritus
Department of Biology
WPUNJ*

Michael Sebetich - June 21, 2024 at 03:44 PM

AM

Thank you for your kind words, Mike, and your long friendship with Joe. I , too, tried to post the photo with no luck. But it was a special time.

Ana Maria - June 22, 2024 at 03:09 PM

SU

“ *Students of William Paterson University purchased the Beautiful in Blue for the family of DR. JOSEPH C. SPAGNA.*



Students of William Paterson University - June 21, 2024 at 01:43 PM



“ *Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of DR. JOSEPH C. SPAGNA.*



June 21, 2024 at 01:27 PM



“ *North Star Theater Company planted a Memorial Tree in honor of our friend Joseph Spagna! May he find shade and peace wherever he goes!!*

William Fell - June 21, 2024 at 12:52 PM



“ *William F. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of DR. JOSEPH C. SPAGNA.*

William F. - June 21, 2024 at 12:43 PM

DA

“ *He was a cool dude!*

I barely knew him, from various activities at William Paterson Univ, where we both taught. We were in different Colleges, and must have been on some of the same committees or something.

*I was always impressed by his intelligence, and compassion, and by how well-spoken he was-- the latter not *always* being a characteristic of scientists.*

Such a loss, and a such a young age!

*Most sincerely,
David Koistinen, Dept of History*

David - June 21, 2024 at 01:16 AM

JB

“ *Jeremy B. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of DR. JOSEPH C. SPAGNA.*

Jeremy B. - June 21, 2024 at 12:32 AM

MM

“ *I met Joe through GVP advocacy and shared many friends with him in that endeavor. Thoughtful, kind and interesting, you never knew what detail he would bring to a conversation. Condolences to all of his family and friends.*

Michael Kelly McCloskey - June 20, 2024 at 10:33 PM

MM

“ Michael M. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of DR. JOSEPH C. SPAGNA.

Michael M. - June 20, 2024 at 10:27 PM

BH

“ My prayers go out to Joe's family n their breavement. To lose a loved one so young is a tragedy I cannot imagine. My limited acquaintance with Joe on the Lake Board, left me with the impression of a sincere, caring man with a genuine fondness for all children and both the disposition and knowledge to help others. Joe must have been an outstanding teacher.

Bob Helmond - June 20, 2024 at 12:21 PM

PD

“ The Department of Mathematical Sciences at WPU offers our condolences to the family of our colleague and friend, Dr. Joe Spagna.

Paul von Dohlen - June 20, 2024 at 10:46 AM

DS

“ Tascha, I am so sorry to hear of the loss of your husband. My heart is with you and your girls. Donna Sant (from Illinois)

Donna Sant - June 20, 2024 at 10:44 AM

PV

“ Paul V. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of DR. JOSEPH C. SPAGNA.

Paul V. - June 20, 2024 at 10:39 AM

CM

“ *Caterina M. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of DR. JOSEPH C. SPAGNA.*

Caterina M. - June 20, 2024 at 05:28 AM

MA

“ *Maria Agapito lit a candle in memory of JOSEPH SPAGNA*



Maria Agapito - June 20, 2024 at 01:32 AM

MA

“ *Mrs. Spagna, on behalf of the NJ Academy of Science executive Board, we are deeply sorry for the loss of your beloved husband Dr. Spagna (Joe). Joe was an amazing colleague and friend. His efforts to help us lead the NJ Academy of science was selfless. Our thoughts and prayers are with you and your family.*

Maria Agapito - June 20, 2024 at 01:31 AM

LB

“ *I am so sorry to hear this news - Joe was such a wonderful person, that I had expected to be with us for many years yet! My very best to the family, his memory is a blessing, of course, but this sudden loss is hard indeed. I hope everyone gets to take some time this summer in nature, somewhere restful and renewing...*

Leslie Bary - June 19, 2024 at 10:56 PM



“ Rainbow Of Remembrance Spray was purchased for the family of DR. JOSEPH C. SPAGNA.



June 19, 2024 at 06:10 PM



“ William Paterson Chemistry Department planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of DR. JOSEPH C. SPAGNA.

William Paterson Chemistry Department - June 19, 2024 at 03:52 PM



“ It says so much about Joe that we have remained friends since our first meeting when I was his 7th grade English teacher. He was one of the brightest students I taught in 47 years, and one of the funniest humans ever.
He will be missed.

Kathy Rosssi - June 19, 2024 at 03:02 PM



“ Linda A. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of DR. JOSEPH C. SPAGNA.

Linda A. - June 19, 2024 at 01:26 PM

TC

“ The Honors College planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of DR. JOSEPH C. SPAGNA.

The Honors College - June 19, 2024 at 11:25 AM

TC

“ The Honors College purchased the Rainbow Of Remembrance Spray for the family of DR. JOSEPH C. SPAGNA.



The Honors College - June 19, 2024 at 11:25 AM

 Erin Roche

“ I had the privilege of growing up with Joe in California and then rekindling our friendship when we were both adults living on the East Coast. He was a special person and will be deeply missed.

Erin Roche - June 19, 2024 at 10:48 AM

FF

“ Francisco Diaz - WP Family planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of DR. JOSEPH C. SPAGNA.

Francisco Diaz - WP Family - June 18, 2024 at 09:56 PM

FF

“ Francisco Diaz - WP Family purchased the Full of Love Bouquet for the family of DR. JOSEPH C. SPAGNA.



Francisco Diaz - WP Family - June 18, 2024 at 09:56 PM



“ Blue Caribbean Bouquet was purchased for the family of DR. JOSEPH C. SPAGNA.



June 18, 2024 at 08:47 PM

TS

“ The family of Mike & Pam Schulte purchased the Beautiful Heart Bouquet for the family of DR. JOSEPH C. SPAGNA.



The family of Mike & Pam Schulte - June 18, 2024 at 07:49 PM

SM

“ I am just so sad to hear this news. Joe was a wonderful friend, and an invaluable swim team board member for so many years. He will be missed by so many. My go-to bug guy. I just can't believe he's gone. My thoughts and prayers are with Tascha and the girls, and the whole Spagna extended family.



Susan Masciarelli - June 18, 2024 at 07:47 PM