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Murray L. Cole, 87, longtime supporter of MSU, Boy Scouts

Tuesday, February 23, 2010

BY JAY LEVIN
THE RECORD
STAFF WRITER

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Murray L. Cole, a lawyer devoted to Montclair State University and the Boy Scouts, died Feb. 14. He was 87 and lived at Cedar Crest Village in Pequannock.



Mr. Cole, a former president of the Passaic County Bar Association, specialized in real estate, banking and commercial law during a career spanning more than 50 years, much of that time as a partner in the Paterson firm Cole, Yamner and Bray.

A graduate of Williams College and Cornell University Law School, Mr. Cole served on Montclair State's Board of Trustees from 1981 to 2004, longer than anyone in the university's history. He was chairman twice, from 1983 to 1989 and 1995 to 1999.

University President Susan Cole — who is no relation — was hired during Mr. Cole's second stint as chairman. In an e-mail to the campus community, she called Mr. Cole "one of the university's longtime supporters and friends" and cited his influence and generosity.

Mr. Cole was committed to education in general but felt a particular allegiance to public institutions, said his son Jonathan: "He believed the well-known private universities would always have support, but that the public universities, such as Montclair State, needed people to fight for them."

Mr. Cole and his wife, Miriam, a former Martha Graham dancer, established the university's Musical Instrument Endowment Fund in 1999 with a gift of \$25,000, and made a subsequent \$25,000 contribution to the fund, said Montclair State spokeswoman Paula Maliandi.

The couple also endowed a studio in the new John J. Cali School of Music building.

Miriam Cole said her husband's interest in musical education was not based on any musical ability he had.

"He was the most unmusical person you could imagine," she said. "He couldn't sing, he had no ear for music — but he appreciated it."

Mr. Cole was equally passionate about the Boy Scouts of America. The Paterson native achieved Eagle Scout rank and, while he never was a scoutmaster, he served the organization for decades on the national leadership level.

He received Scouting's highest commendation, the Silver Buffalo Award, in 1990. President George H.W. Bush received the award the same year.

Mr. Cole's sons ended their Scouting careers as young Webelos. "We didn't become Boy Scouts, and I'm sure on some level our father was disappointed," Jonathan Cole said. "But he knew we were doing what we were interested in, and he always supported us."

Mr. Cole, a former resident of Wayne and Ridgewood, is survived by his wife of 61 years; sons Jonathan of Arlington, Va., and Peter of Jerusalem, and a brother, Dr. Herbert Cole of Wayne. Another son, Matthew, died in 1981.

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In keeping with Mr. Cole's wishes, there was no funeral.

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