



## John "Mike" Amicarella

October 20, 2025

John Michael "Mike" Amicarella, 70, passed away unexpectedly at his home in Fort Collins, Colorado, on October 20, 2025, leaving a "Big Mike"-sized hole in the hearts of all who knew and loved his laugh, his hugs, and his larger-than-life personality.

Born on May 5, 1955, in Littlefield, Texas, Mike spent his childhood in Steamboat Springs and Estes Park, Colorado, with his parents, Carmen and Lawrence "Mic" Amicarella. An avid outdoorsman from a young age, he enjoyed hunting, fishing, and participating in Boy Scouts. A dedicated student, Mike graduated from the prestigious United States Naval Academy in 1978 and earned his naval flight wings a year later from NAS Pensacola. He served with distinction for 20 years as a Naval helicopter pilot, flying the Sikorsky SH-3 Sea King and transitioned to the SH-60 Seahawk. His passion for special missions led him to orders at the Naval Strike Warfare Center in Fallon, Nevada, which was the highlight of his Naval career. Along the way he earned the distinguished call sign, "Animal." He retired as a Commander in 1997.

After his military service, Mike embarked on a second career with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, serving as a Regional Aviation Manager and Helicopter Inspector Pilot. For over two decades, he ensured the safety, effectiveness and efficiency of wildland fire and aviation operations that supported the Bureau's mission to serve Native communities and state and federal lands. He

mentored countless firefighters and pilots, earning widespread respect for his expertise, dedication, and commitment to aviation safety.

Mike was deeply involved in his local community in Northwest Fort Collins. He served on the Wellington Fire Protection District Fire Board, was Vice President of the Shamrock Irrigation Association, represented the Colorado Farm Bureau in Delta County, and was an active member of American Legion Post 176 and the Buckeye Community Club. He was a beloved leader, neighbor, and friend whose presence enriched the lives of many.

Despite his many professional accomplishments, Mike chose to live a life defined not by titles, but by character. He found joy in cattle ranching on the western slope at Kuntz Ranch, hunting and fishing with his son and grandsons, and attending his grandchildren's sporting events and activities. He cherished quiet moments at home with his wife Jane, their black lab Fia, two horses, and their cat Bootsie. Together, Jane and Mike shared countless adventures, including rafting through the Grand Canyon, walking the Camino de Santiago in Spain four times, hiking in Northern Italy, and enjoying biannual trips to Mexico and the Caribbean with close friends.

Mike will be remembered for his boisterous spirit, vibrant sense of humor, and unwavering love for his family and friends. His presence inspired those around him to be better. He was humble, hardworking, and exceptionally intelligent, carrying his wisdom with quiet, noble humility.

He is survived by his wife of 25 years, Jane Lopez; his son, James Amicarella; daughter, Courey Laube; former spouse, Nancy Whitehouse; stepdaughter, Marley Mardock; grandchildren, Austin, Jack, James, and Nora "the Great"; sisters, Toni and Susan Amicarella; stepsister, Cindy Riegel; and his extended Naval family, including the Homans and Godson Declan Homan, the Foleys, McCarthys, and LaRues. He was preceded in death by his parents, Carmen

and Mic, and his legendary black lab, Topaz, who held a special place in his heart.

A celebration of Mike's life will be held on Sunday, November 9, 2025, from 1–4 p.m. at The Covey in North Fort Collins. In honor of Mike's deep appreciation for the cowboy way of life, guests are encouraged to wear their best western attire. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to American Legion Post 176, the Combat Recovery Foundation, Freedom Hunters, or the Wildland Firefighter Foundation.

“It's those changes in latitudes, changes in attitudes, nothing remains quite the same.”

-Jimmy Buffet

# Previous Events

## Celebration of Life

NOV 9. 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM (MT)

The Covey

2661 West County Road 64

Fort Collins, CO 80524

<https://www.thecoveyevents.com/>

# Tribute Wall



“ Goes Funeral Care & Crematory created a Webcast in memory of John "Mike" Amicarella



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Goes Funeral Care & Crematory - October 27, 2025 at 05:32 PM

PA

*Dear Jane,  
We are holding you and your precious family in our hearts and prayers at this sad, difficult time. We send comfort, support and love.  
Paula and Stan Gudder*

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paulaNstan - November 10, 2025 at 05:08 PM

S"

“ Jane and family, sorry this is late, just wanted to say how sorry I was to hear about Mike's passing. He was a dear friend, I learned alot from him, he was a big influence on my career and was a big influence to the aviation program on the Black Hills. Again my condolences and prayers are with you and family. Steve "Blackie " Davis, 605-440-2122

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Stephen R Davis "Blackie " - November 16, 2025 at 11:43 AM

SC

“ *What a tremendous loss to the community in fire and aviation at large and the obvious pain for you Jane and the family. Mikes larger than life storytelling and insistence on integrity and doing the right thing have set many a thousand of us up for success. His contributions to me personally and professionally will not go unnoticed or unappreciated. Words don't quite do it justice and our language doesn't have enough colorful adjectives to describe what Mike meant to me and the wildfire family. Godspeed and blue sky's....Sean Cox, Coronado NF R3*

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**sean cox** - October 30, 2025 at 01:18 AM

DU

*Into the sunset you go now my friend, we'll miss you and strive to live the lessons you taught us.*

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**David Underwood** - November 06, 2025 at 10:50 PM

JS

“ *I worked with Mike in BIA fire and aviation. Mike was professional and very effective at connecting with the field people who operated the program. As a result he was admired and trusted. I also shared a common experience in Naval Aviation with Mike. Fair winds and following seas my friend! You will be missed.*

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**Jim Stires** - October 29, 2025 at 11:04 AM

RH

“ *Sorry for your loss Jane you and your family are in my prayers, i considered Mike a friend he has always willing to assist everyone that needed help and he has helped me without even asking. Ray Hart and Rosebud Agency.*

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**Raymond Hart** - October 28, 2025 at 10:14 AM

TW

“ Hi Jane. My name's Teresa Ann Wesley. I was Mike's timekeeper at BIA, NIFC. We had the usual get your time in or else. He was a hard worker, was a good one to bridge communication between agencies. He met my son David when David was 4-5 years. From then on they were buddies. When he come into town, he would take David to eat and talk Man stuff. David would always ask when he will be back. David grew up, life happens. But Mike was best Buddy David ever had. Mike was a good man. Thank you for sharing him as a worker, friend and being part of fire management. Good journey Mike. Your time on earth is complete. Job well done. God bless all left behind. Teresa Ann Wesley

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**Teresa Ann Wesley** - October 27, 2025 at 11:32 PM

LD

“ Jane- So sorry for your loss. Our thoughts and prayers are with you.  
Jack & Lynn Dailey.

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**Lynn Dailey** - October 27, 2025 at 03:06 PM



“ Jane, I'm so sorry for the pain and loss you and your family are going through. Mike's presence made any HEMG workshop worth the drive. His humor, his immense knowledge but most of all his kind and welcoming attitude. From Red Greene jokes to doing load calculations in his head for different ac was inspirational and fun. Love and good thoughts from Shelley and I.



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**Scott Molinari** - October 26, 2025 at 08:23 PM

BS

*There is so much to say and simple words can't do justice to summarize feelings.*

*I met Mike during his second career and worked with him on aviation safety team assignments and inspections. His dedication to achieving safe, positive outcomes was inspiring.*

*Years ago when I was helping Jane in the very early days of her Aviation Program Manager position for Colorado DFPC, I toured the aviation sites around the state to get a sense of how things were going and to help her identify needs and priorities in their program. After my tour I met with Mike and Jane at their house to debrief. Mike, knowing my 'Minnesota Nice' nature, knew that I would need a little primer to oil my mouth. He always had a gallon jug of Jameson whiskey in his freezer. After he "burned" my first drink by adding only a thimbleful of ginger ale, he said, "My friends in Minnesota say after you burn the first drink the next ones taste better". Well, after several drinks, the truth serum worked and I shared all of my concerns in likely very colorful language. The three of us shared several Jameson nights later and I always keep a gallon jug of Jameson on hand to help remember those days.*

*Thanks Jane for being such a great partner for this truly outstanding friend!*

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**Bill Schuster** - October 28, 2025 at 09:49 AM

DT

*What a great guy. So friendly and helpful. I always looked forward to his visits to the helibase.*

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**DTD** - October 28, 2025 at 12:18 PM

ES

*Mike was a great man that has had a lasting impact on generations of fire professionals. Great human and he is already missed. God Bless. RJE.*

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**Estes** - October 28, 2025 at 03:26 PM

NS

*Mike "I'magorilla" will be missed. He was always there to help make things better. Nic Strohmeyer*

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**Nic Strohmeyer** - October 28, 2025 at 04:58 PM

DG

*My prayers are with Mike, Jane and the family. What a wonderful tribute Mike's video is to his family, friends and co-workers! What wonderful memories!*

*Jane, please accept my most sincere thoughts on your loss.*

*Don Gold, USNA '78*

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**Don Gold** - October 31, 2025 at 11:56 PM

HB

*Mike Amicarella: You could never find a better friend than Mike. Mike would always greet you with a big smile on his face and address you with a unique and funny pronunciation of your name, in my case, "Hi, Skippppppp" or "Schipppppppp", putting a smile on your face no matter what kind of day you were having.....I met Mike at the Naval Academy Preparatory School in August 1973, at Naval Training Center, Bainbridge Maryland on the Susquehanna River. Then onwards to the Naval Academy together graduating in June 1978. Our paths crossed again about 5 years later, around August 1983, when we were both Flight Instructors at HS-10 at North Island Naval Air Station in San Diego. One fine afternoon, five of us Lieutenants (O-3s), including Mike, piled into my 1983 Datsun/Nissan Maxima station wagon, circa spring of 1986 and drove two (2) hours north from San Diego to Inglewood, California (Los Angeles) to the Forum to see Wayne Gretsky and the Edmonton Oilers play the Los Angeles Kings. Mike had us :howling" in laughter on the trip up and back!!! Then nine (9) years later, in September 1995, our paths cross again as Commanders (O-5's) at Naval Air Station Fallon, Nevada, where Mike was the Senior Mountain Flying Instructor, where Carrier Air Wing H-60 Seahawk pilots came to learn how to land a H-60 at 10,000 feet and safely fly at high altitude in the nearby mountains. I had the honor and privilege for Mike to be my Instructor for two (2) Mountain Flying Syllabus Flights, 3 hours each, landing numerous times at 10,000 feet. There Mike and I were, from Seaman Recruits/ Seaman Apprentices (E-1/E-2) at the Naval Academy Prep School in August 1973, to Commanders (O-5s). Mke was the most gifted aviator, a "Natural", that I ever came across, retiring myself with over 3000 hours flying. Mike was always outward going, a pleasure to be around. Jane, my wife Debra and I send our sincere condolences on your loss of Mike. I am crushed beyond words with the loss of Mike, how Mike always was so kind and friendly to anyone, and to friends would do anything to help you. Howard "Skip" Bayes, USNA, Class of 1978*

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**Howard "Skip" Bayes** - November 02, 2025 at 06:02 PM

SS

*Mike will be missed by all who crossed his path. He was a larger-than-life personality, honest, kind, and true to his beliefs. He was a true leader and mentor who taught many of us the common-sense approach. He always knew a spot in any town that might have a beverage or two to offer. A place to catch up and get the real work done. He definitely made the world of fire and aviation not only better but safer for all who will follow in his footsteps.*

*To you and your family, Jane, we send our thoughts and prayers for comfort and courage during this time. Ride high, Mike.*

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**Shad Sitz** - November 04, 2025 at 05:47 PM