

PHOTO

Dr. James Parker VanWagner, age 59, former football running back and orthopedic surgeon was sidelined for the last time on Nov. 29, 2014, at home in Grants Pass, Oregon, with his family by his side.

Jim was born May 3, 1955, in Ann Arbor, to Jack and Marilyn (Parker) VanWagner. He started his football journey in Novi, then off to Michigan Tech, graduating in 1976, where he still holds records to this day and was inducted into the Hall of Fame.

Jim was drafted by the San Francisco 49ers and traded to the New Orleans Saints.

Jim's knee injury on the field didn't sideline him, it just changed his direction to sports medicine. He graduated from Michigan State University in 1986 with the Degree of Doctor of Osteopathy. His hands that held a football were transformed into the hands of a surgeon. Dr. VanWagner ran MVP Orthopedics in Traverse City. Jim was a jock to the core, active with community youth sports and the Detroit Red Wings.

On Nov. 13, 2004, Jim married Kelley Peters. In 2008 they moved to the West Coast for a new chapter in life. He was sidelined again in 2009, diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's. He fought the fight with strength, grace and bravery.

In addition to his wife, survivors include his mother, Marilyn; a brother, Thomas VanWagner; children, Elizabeth, Michael, Joseph and Jennifer; stepchildren, Steven Hardy and Alexander Hakes; and grandchildren.

He was preceded in death by his father, Jack VanWagner; and a brother, Jon VanWagner.

Memorial services will be held in Grants Pass, Oregon, and a celebration of Jim's life will be held in Traverse City. Both will be announced at a later date.