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Mourners gather on Sunday for the funeral of Randolph Murdaugh III, family patriarch and former state prosecutor for the 14th judicial circuit.

Joyful celebration commemorates life of Randolph Murdaugh III

BY SOFA SANCHEZ
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About 200 people filed into the Hampton Cemetery Sunday afternoon for the funeral of one of South Carolina's most prominent lawyers, Randolph Murdaugh III, the former 14th circuit solicitor who died Thursday.

The occasion — the third funeral in three days for the Murdaugh family — was more a celebration than a mourning, as two friends of Murdaugh, 81, recounted stories. "A man who can count his friends with all five fingers is a very lucky man," said Donnie Myers, former 11th judicial circuit prosecutor. "Randolph counts for three of mine."

Among so many professional honors and accomplishments as a decades-long prosecutor for Allendale, Beaufort, Colleton, Hampton and Jasper counties, Murdaugh's greatest honor, Myers said, was his family. He didn't have a favorite child, but he told each one: "Let me tell you something. You know you're my

favorite." He asked his first grandchild, a girl, to call him handsome because, he said, he'd never had a woman call him that.

"Goodbye, my loyal friend," Myers said, choking up. "Goodbye, my brother."

Murdaugh, the patriarch of the powerhouse legal family, three generations of whom have been state prosecutors, was ill at the time of his death, friends said. He passed away Thursday, just three days after his grandson, Paul Murdaugh, and daughter-in-law Maggie were found shot to death outside their Colleton County home.

The shootings have sparked national interest and speculation about potential suspects and motives. Their funeral was Friday, but Sunday's service also commemorated their burial.

On Sunday, friends honored Randolph III, who in 2018 had been awarded The Order of the Palmetto, the highest civilian honor given by the governor of South Carolina.

Murdaugh was the third

generation to serve as 14th circuit solicitor.

His father, Randolph "Buster" Murdaugh Jr., held the same position for 48 years.

His grandfather, Randolph Murdaugh Sr., was solicitor for 20 years until his death in a car-train collision in 1940.

The Murdaugh family started the storied Hampton law practice that would become Peters, Murdaugh, Parker, Eltzroth and Detrick, known as PMPED, in 1910.

After graduating from the University of South Carolina's law school, he and wife Libby returned to Hampton, where he joined his father's law firm and became an assistant solicitor. Upon his father's retirement as solicitor in 1986, Murdaugh became the circuit's chief prosecutor, retiring in 2005.

"For 87 consecutive years, three generations of the Murdaugh family served as Solicitor of the 14th Circuit," his funeral program said. "This 87 years of service in one office, by the same family, is the longest in the history of the United States."

A WISE MAN, AND FUNNY

Perry Buckner, a retired 14th Circuit judge, told those attending the funeral that Murdaugh had a way of making everyone feel special. After people had spoken with Murdaugh, they would say, "I may not agree with him, but I sure do like him."

Murdaugh cherished his friendships and, in turn, Buckner said, they cherished their friendships with him. "I do not know anyone in my life who loved their family more than Randolph Murdaugh," Buckner said.

Murdaugh once told Buckner how happy he was to have his grandchildren living with him while son Alex and daughter-in-law Maggie were remodeling their home. Murdaugh reaped the benefits of having his grandsons so close, Buckner said, as the grandfather and two grandsons fished and hunted together, even trapping raccoons.

Buckner said he learned so much from his friend. Murdaugh taught him he didn't have to be a pitbull in the courtroom to be successful — and to never assume he was smarter than a jury. "I can't tell you how many lawyers I've seen in my courtroom that have made these mistakes, and everyday I'm grateful for the lessons Randolph has taught me."

Buckner concluded his eulogy with a story about a church service he attended where the pastor used four worms. He put one in a jar of cigarette smoke, another in a jar of alcohol, the third in a jar of soil, and the fourth in a jar of chocolate syrup. All the worms except for the one in soil died.

"If my friend Randolph Murdaugh had been there," Buckner said, "he would have quickly raised his hand and said, 'As long as you drink, smoke and eat chocolate syrup, you'll never have worms.'"

The tearful crowd nodded in agreement as they roared with laughter.

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