Friends and family of William Trump Walter, a career physicist with a love for civic-oriented projects and issues, said they remember him as a kind, devoted man who always went the extra mile for things he felt passionate about.

Walter, who was a first cousin to President Donald Trump, died April 22 due to complications from a fall he suffered one year prior at Cold Spring Hills Center for Nursing & Rehabilitation in Woodbury. He was 88.

Born to William and Elizabeth Walter on Dec. 28, 1931, Walter grew up in the Hollis section of Queens. William attended the McBurney School in Manhattan in his teenage years before graduating from Middlebury College at Middlebury, Vermont, in 1953.

Walter then enrolled in graduate school at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, taking time off to serve in the Army in the Korean War teaching radio repair at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, before he returned to MIT and completed his doctorate in physics in 1962.
Walter’s wife, Susan Walter, 81, who had grown up with one of his cousins, John Trump, who also was a cousin of the future president, said she met William Walter after she graduated Middlebury College in 1959 and had gone over one day to Walter’s aunt and uncle’s home to invite John Trump to the beach, not knowing her future husband would be there.

“He always had the sweetest smile,” Susan Walter said of her late husband.

The couple fell in love and began dating in the fall of 1959, later marrying in June 1960. They moved to Huntington in 1963.

Shortly after graduate school, Walter joined defense research firm Technical Research Group, or TRG, where he was on one of the first groups working on lasers. Walter eventually discovered and claimed the patent for the copper vapor laser, which is still used in machining and laser cutting applications and in concerts for entertainment. Walter later supervised graduate students and continued researching at the Polytechnic Institute of New York in Brooklyn. He also founded Laser Consultants Inc., in Huntington, which consults on air quality monitoring, lasers, laser applications and laser-material interactions.

However, Walter also heavily involved himself in community, environmental and civic issues. He regularly attended Huntington Town Board meetings to discuss issues like signage while serving as chairman of the Huntington Beautification Council for more than 40 years. Among his proudest accomplishments were spearheading preservation efforts for the Paumanok Wetlands in Huntington and playing key roles in campaigns to both refurbish exhibits and build a visitors center for the Walt Whitman Birthplace, where he served as president of its board of trustees.

Cynthia Shor, executive director for the Walt Whitman Birthplace Association, said Walter was “a leader in all respects” in both his personal and community life.
“I think his love of community just emanated from his sense of responsibility, his sense of giving back and his genuine joy in doing good deeds,” Shor said.

Walter, who will be cremated, is survived by his wife; his sons and daughters-in-law, Bill and Stacy Walter of Lafayette, California, Todd and Fiona Walter of Mountain View, California, and Bruce and Geri Walter of Ithaca, New York; his daughter and son-in-law Beth and Josh Miller of Oyster Bay, New York; and his grandchildren, Katy, Emily, Reese, Kiana, Nate, Bridget and Silas.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be sent to the Walt Whitman Birthplace, 246 Old Walt Whitman Road, Huntington Station.

By Jean-Paul Salamanca

jeanpaul.salamanca@newsday.com @JPaulSalamanca

Jean-Paul Salamanca covers the East End. He focuses on Riverhead, Southold and Greenport on the North Fork, as well as Hampton Bays, Westhampton Beach, Flanders, Riverside and Quogue on the South Fork.

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