Memorial services will be on Oct. 30 for a former Highline art professor who died in late spring.

Former art Professor James Gardiner died at home last spring after a battle with Parkinson’s Disease.

Gardner was raised in Detroit, Mich. and studied at Wayne University, where he earned a master’s degree in fine arts.

While in Detroit he became a very active rower.

“His family … had a cabin in Rondo park in Ontario just north of Detroit,” Welsh said. “They would go there for summers and in his 20s he was a summer lifeguard there and he was recruited by some of his friends to begin his rowing career at the Detroit Boat Club.”

Gardiner’s friends were looking for a group of guys to try out for the Olympics, Welsh said. Gardiner and his friends joined the Detroit Boat Club and prepared themselves for tryouts.

“They tried for the ‘52 [Olympics] but they didn’t qualify,” Welsh said. “Then at the ‘55 Pan-American games with that same coach from the Detroit Boat Club, they won a gold medal.”

On the steam of winning gold in the Pan-American games, they tried out for the ’56 Olympics and qualified.

“He won a silver medal and the Russians won the gold medal,” said Highline Art Professor Bob Stahl. “They almost beat the Russians but the Russians were heavily favored and they came in second in the double sculls event.”

He tried out for the next Olympics in 1960, but didn’t qualify, and co-coached the ’68 Olympics rowing team.

“He started at Highline in ‘66, so he was working at that time,” said Welsh.

Gardiner moved to Seattle in 1963 and became a Highline professor in 1966. He taught art at Highline from 1966-2007 and had a hand in choosing some of the art professors who teach at Highline today.

He became a single parent to his three young girls early on.

“My mom was an alcoholic and took her own life, and so dad raised the three of us girls, my sisters and I from 9, 11, and 13 to adulthood,” Welsh said.

“He’s actually the one that hired me,” said art Professor Rob Droessler. “If it wasn’t for Jim, who knows where I’d be right now.”

“He loved teaching,” Welsh said.

“When my older sister was about 7 or 8 dad needed to take her to school,” she said. “And so he took her with him and she told him afterwards ‘Dad, you’re so different in the classroom than you are at home.’ I think the classroom was really his element.”

He had a love for learning, providing information to others, and learned from teaching, Welsh said.

“That was his love was hoping that people could build on whatever he brought to them. And that he would learn from that whatever [learned],” she said.

“So he as an instructor, could do it all,” said Stahl. “He was very popular with his students -- he had a good, easy-going manner about him -- and had a great passion for his field of art and that communicated to his students I think rather well.”

Not only was he very influential in the development of the arts program at Highline, he was also very influential for the students he taught.

“He was very laid back, very patient, and he seemed to have a pretty good rapport with students,” Droessler said. “They were pretty successful, you know, he had a lot of students that came through that actually went on and are doing their own art now. It wasn’t just people taking the class because they needed art credits, it was a lot of people who were genuinely interested in becoming artists.”

He was dedicated to his craft, and was able to take trips -- partially funded by Highline -- where he studied ancient art and brought what he learned back to the classroom.

“He did a three-month tour in the English isles and just looked at symbolism,” Welsh said. “Like the spiral type symbols and found it in a variety of places from, looked at ruins and also looked at rock outcroppings that were very old. He infused that into his art, his personal art as well as taking that back to the classroom and teaching about that.”

One of Gardiner’s biggest inspirations was nature, which was an inspiration to both him and his second wife, who he met at Highline.

“[He] wanted people to know that there’s more to life than just the four walls we sit inside of,” Welsh said. “Nature I think was a big muse for him and Paula [his wife], who was a poet and she wrote a lot of nature.”

Gardiner taught at Highline until he was 78, when he retired due to Parkinson’s Disease.

“One day in class he described that he was teaching and he just all the sudden was -- everything went black and as far as he knew he kept talking because he kept standing,” Welsh said. "He didn’t fall over and then he came back on line.”

Shortly after Gardiner retired his wife, Paula died from Breast Cancer.

For more information on the Memorial services contact his daughter, Katie Welsh, by phone at 206-723-6390, or by email at katalyst10@gmail.com.