

## OBITUARY

### KEN LEGHORN

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**April 11, 2017** — Kenneth Sully Leghorn, age 62, died in his home in Juneau, Alaska, surrounded by family and friends after a seven-month struggle with cancer. Ken was born on March 9, 1955 in Weston, Mass. He is survived by his wife, Julie York Coppens; his daughter, Yana Warner; her step-sibling, Seth (née Elsie) Coppens; his sister, Lisa Leghorn, of Safford, N.M.; his step-sister Camilla Williams of East Dorset, Vt., and her children Lily Calfee and Pete Calfee of Denver, Colo.; his father, Richard Leghorn of Osterville, Mass., his wife, Nancy Leghorn, and her children Paul Garrity, Mark Garrity, Kevin Garrity, and Andrea Wood; his cousins Christine Leghorn of Beverly, Mass., Susan Fontaine of Boulder, Colo., and Carlen Olsen of Sarasota, Fla.; his uncle Arthur Holtzman of Rochester, and his children John Holtzman, Janet Gates, Ann Beale, and Ellen Zeph. Ken's mother, Nancy Holtzman Carter, passed away in 2010.

As John Muir wrote, "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin" — and Ken felt those profound connections from his boyhood. Growing up near Boston, and later visiting his father on Cape Cod and Florida's Gulf Coast, Ken spent every free minute out of doors, carving trails in the woods, piloting his own small motorboat, learning to identify hundreds of plant and animal species (especially birds), and enthusiastically sharing his natural discoveries with family and friends. At the same time, he was a gifted violinist and scholar, graduating from Phillips Exeter Academy in 1973 and Williams College (Phi Beta Kappa) in 1978. He majored in biology; rowing crew, organizing intramural games, and convincing his classmates to join him on extreme cold-weather survival treks were among his favorite extracurriculars.

Upon graduation, Ken left the East Coast and headed off to Alaska, putting off medical school just long enough, he thought, to climb Mt. Denali. But when the expedition was over — Ken stopped just shy of the summit to care for a friend with altitude sickness and ensure his safe descent — so were his ideas of returning south and becoming a doctor. He decided to stay, taking various rugged jobs and famously living in a school bus on a Juneau back road. He joined up as a guide with Alaska Discovery, an expedition outfitter, which he later bought and

expanded to include a range of wilderness experiences for clients, both in Alaska and the Russian Far East. After selling this business to Mountain Travel Sobek in 2000, and taking an extended career detour into philanthropy, Ken dived back into adventure travel in 2014 with Pack Creek Bear Tours, a joint endeavor of Alaska Seaplanes and the Native corporation Kootznoowoo Inc., guiding small groups on viewing trips to the world-class brown bear sanctuary on Admiralty Island.

Ken Leghorn was, in the words of his longtime friend and colleague Sam Skaggs, “an entrepreneur, a conservationist, a philanthropist, an expert musician, an alpine and a Nordic skier, a father, husband, reliable neighbor, and one of the most active visionaries Alaska has ever had.” Ken remained an avid mountaineer, following up the Denali climb with attempts on Mt. St. Elias and Mt. Fairweather, and he was an expert kayaker, logging more than 10,000 miles in Alaska alone. In 1986 he worked on subsistence use studies that helped protect parts of the Tongass National Forest near Angoon, and he was among the first in the state to use ecotourism as an argument for saving wilderness. Ken was a leading advocate for protecting Pt. Adolphus and Berners Bay, two gems of Southeast Alaska, and he had an eye on the next generation: with Scott Brylinsky and others, Ken helped create Discovery Southeast, an organization dedicated to teaching young people natural history and love of place.

Ken served 17 years on the Alaska Conservation Foundation board, many as chair, helping to grow the endowment to \$3 million and creating other successful endowments, including the Sail Alaska fund. Ken served six years on the Audubon Alaska board, and seven years with Ski for Light, Inc., as a program-builder and volunteer instructor-guide for visually and mobility-impaired adults. Working with the Nature Conservancy honed his skills in development, expertise he generously shared over the years with a wide range of organizations, from the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council to Juneau Jazz & Classics.

Most significantly, Ken was one of three founders of the Juneau Community Foundation, building an operational framework as the first executive director. In March of this year, co-founders Reed Stoops and Eric Kueffner presented him with JCF’s Founders’ Award, recognizing “a lifetime of achievement and service to Juneau and Alaska.” Among his many other honors were a 1997 25-Year Partnership Award from the Tongass National Forest, a 1997 Navigator Award from the Juneau Convention & Visitors Bureau, a 2000 citation from the State

of Alaska for Best Long-Term Program, and the 2017 Bjarne Eikevik President's Award from Ski for Light, Inc.

Ken's love of music matched his passion for adventure and the outdoors. For 37 years his violin could be heard not only occasionally in a remote Southeast Alaskan bay, or from the porch of his hand-built Shelter Island cabin, but also from a brightly lit stage with members of the Juneau Symphony. Over his last year of life, almost until the day of his passing, Ken was working to raise \$25 million for the new Juneau Arts and Culture Center. In XTRATUF boots and a halibut jacket, or rocking a tuxedo and shiny black concert shoes, Ken lived life fully, positively, and completely, with a good dose of humor. His sense of wonder about Alaska never faded, only deepened with time and with every experience of her gifts. The same was true of his countless human friendships.

"Ken was a life force who sparked creativity and energy wherever he went," said lifelong friend Richard Wheelock, who first met Ken in 1969 when they arrived as freshmen at Phillips Exeter. "He was constantly calling me to join him on adventures, and whether it was to spend our junior year in France, hike Vermont's Long Trail, climb Mt. Denali, serve as an Alaska Discovery guide on an Icy Bay kayak trip, to tour Pack Creek with him along with my family, or serve as his best man when he married Julie in 2015, I always said 'yes,' and never regretted it. He was a dear and loving friend who I will forever miss."

There will be no formal memorial service, in accordance with Ken's wishes, but plans for an outdoor community celebration of Ken's life, and scattering of his remains in a few of his favorite places, will be shared at [www.caringbridge.org/visit/kenleghorn](http://www.caringbridge.org/visit/kenleghorn). Donations in Ken's honor may be made to any of the nonprofit organizations listed above. The Juneau Community Foundation encourages friends, colleagues and loved ones to share memories and to keep Ken's can-do spirit alive via the social media hashtag #belikekenleghorn.



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