



Gary Lee Capps

December 13, 1935 - February 14, 2025

Longtime Bend resident Gary Lee Capps died February 14, 2025 (the same day his mother passed in 1958) of complications from the flu. He was 89 years old.

Gary was born on December 13th, 1935 in Wenatchee, Washington to Gordon and Elaine Capps. Shortly thereafter he moved with his parents to LaGrande and later Ontario, Oregon where he graduated from high school in 1954. Gary was a stellar athlete lettering in both football and baseball. Gary attended Whitworth College in Spokane where he quickly came to the conclusion a more religious life was expected of him. Apparently, he was told to finish the semester and not to come back, which he was immensely pleased to accommodate. He transferred to the University of Oregon where he graduated with a degree in Journalism in 1958. His career in media sales was spurred by his position as Business Manager of the Oregon Daily Emerald.

Upon graduation, he took his first job in radio broadcasting at KUGN in Eugene. In 1960 he was hired by KPOJ in Portland. One of his crowning achievements at KPOJ was creating a contest in 1962 to name Packy, the first elephant born in captivity in 44 years, at the Oregon Zoo. Fortunately for Gary, he outlived Packy by some 35 years. In 1963, Gary was hired as the manager of KGRL 940 radio, moving to Bend with his then wife Shari and children. Gary later purchased the station and began his quest to acquire as many stations in podunk towns as possible. When his younger brother Dave joined

this pursuit, the group of small-market radio stations became Capps Broadcasting, with nine radio stations throughout Oregon and Idaho. He was president of the Oregon Association of Broadcasters and named Broadcaster of the year in 1986. In 1987, Gary sold his portion of the stations and left broadcasting behind. He was later the Executive Director of the Bend Chamber of Commerce and owner/broker of Century 21 Real Estate in Bend. Gary retired in 2005.

Gary was an active community member, with involvement in the City of Bend Planning Commission, working to pass Bend school levies and the Tower Theater Foundation, among others. He was a long time board director of the Bank of the Cascades, serving as Board Chair for 25 years. He loved bird hunting, music, skiing, and golfing. He was an avid fan of the Oregon Ducks and never once gave up on the dream of winning a national championship in something other than track.

Gary is survived by his brother David Capps, his three children, Mark Capps, Diane Brown and Sarah Rivers as well as his six grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

A celebration of his life will be held Saturday, April 12th at 1 p.m. at The Haven, 1001 SW Disk Drive in Bend.

Previous Events

Celebration

APR **12**. 1:00 PM (PT)

The Haven
1001 SW Disk Drive
Bend, OR 97702

Tribute Wall

JS

“ Jennifer S. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Gary Lee Capps.

Jennifer S. - April 11, 2025 at 12:02 PM

“ By Allan Crisler:

I first met Gary on a summer day in July 1968 at The Pine Tavern. I was interviewing for the position of Executive Vice President of the Bend Chamber. Gary was the incoming President and therefore was a part of the interviewing committee. That day was the beginning of a family bond between the Capps and the Crislers. With so many projects that we've worked on together over the years, it is difficult to know where to start when it comes to thanking Gary. His service and commitment as both a friend, a business partner and an engaged, active citizen in our community has shaped not only my life but the growth and shape of what we know as Bend today.

In the work we did together in our early years in Bend, Gary had the ability to join the crew in getting the job done. The 70s and 80s were challenging transition years for Bend and Gary had a knack for building momentum and fundraising for causes he was committed to. One campaign he supported was passing the local school bond. He walked door to door with Sue Hollern for the cause. The story that arose from that day being that one of the local citizens answered the door buck naked. Another passion project Gary poured himself into was the renovation of the Tower Theater—a centerpiece for the arts in our community. Along with Jim Crowell and Steve Scott and countless other volunteers, he put in many hours to raise funds and support for the effort.

A story you may not have heard of was when a group of us from the Chamber of Commerce were tasked with setting off the City's 4th of July fireworks from Pilot Butte. During the show, Gary went to clean out one of the canisters that had not gone off and it exploded as he went to extract the firework. It blew his hand off at his wrist and by some act of God, Dr. Hoffman worked all night to reattach the nerves so Gary would have use of his dominant right hand. He's lucky he didn't get his head blown off or we would have been gathering 45+ years ago!

Gary and I joined forces again later in life as business partners. Together we added a Bend Century 21 office, teaming up with a successful Redmond office. Gary made the financial investment that was necessary to make the deal go together. His friendship, trust and loyalty made it possible for us to retire with some money in our pockets. He didn't know the first thing about running a real estate office, but trusted that I did. He was a steady head and grounding force, especially when it came to the financials of running a business.

Hard to believe that a farm kid from Wisconsin and a city kid from Ontario would be a match for each other, but we did it and enjoyed our time together. We had so many similar interests and in the end, so much history together over the years. My daughter calls us "Bend's settlers". We weren't the first to call Bend home, but we did make a timely impact in creating a Bend that was financially viable for our families and future generations. Along with his family, that is a powerful legacy that Gary leaves for all of us that call Bend home.

Doug Brown - April 11, 2025 at 08:50 AM

“ *My Friend,
Gary Lee Capps
By
Burke Nicholson*

We grew up together in Ontario, Oregon. We first met in 1943, 82 years ago. Very few people can proudly state that about a friendship! We attended grade school, junior high and high school, and on to Whitworth college.

Gary came daily to our home, so it seemed reasonable that my mother told him; "let us know you're at the door, count to 10 and come in!"

*Growing up together we shared so many adventures;
On one of our double dates we were using his dad's Buick. We decided to park with two young ladies in a corn field and listen to KSRV. All went well until the battery died! Yeah, we had a problem!! I remembered that the farmer parked his flatbed truck nearby with the keys on the front wheel! Soo, I decided to bower it to jump the Buick! Yes, very smart! But without jumper cables, giving the car a push seemed like a good idea. Except that the trucks bumper was much higher than the Buicks... Gordon was not pleased. Yes, not our smartest moment!*

In high school we formed a small dance band. "The Swing Kings" had five members. Gary played the sax, and I played the trombone and drums. We played almost every weekend. We played frequently for the Boise Cascade Payette Lumber Company. We quickly learned that the wives of the lumberjacks were able to continue drinking and dancing long after the big guys were under the tables! As small town boys we had never seen anything like that before. But the ladies continued filling our tip jar!

After high school graduation, Gary and I drove to Whitworth College together. As we left Ontario we realized that our lives were changing forever! Not a word was spoken for over an hour!

There are so many memories I cherish. I feel blessed that I had a best friend named Gary Lee Capps.

BD

*That is beautiful! Thank you so much for sharing your memories.
~Diane*

Brown, Diane - April 08, 2025 at 08:42 PM

SC

This is so sweet. Thank you, Burke!

Sarah Capps - April 09, 2025 at 11:10 AM

MC

Dad felt the same way about you Burke! Thanks for sharing.

Mark Capps - April 10, 2025 at 10:20 AM

CC

“ I was hired at KGRL by Ben Tracy and Gary Capps when I was 16 years old. 1970. What a life changing opportunity for a young man to be mentored by the likes of these men. I was young and hot headed so Gary and I would butt-heads a bit, but in retrospect, I quote him often. And much of my life has been guided by the lessons learned from Gary, Ben, and those fun filled educational days at KGRL. One of my favorite Gary quotes “In broadcasting there is no such thing as theft. There is only ‘market adaptation’. What someone else has done successfully can be ‘adapted for our market’.” If you were a witness to Gary’s success, you may want to “adapt it for your market”.

Corky Coreson

Corky Coreson - March 16, 2025 at 02:27 PM

BD

Thank you for your tribute. We love reading about our dad.

Brown, Diane - April 08, 2025 at 08:43 PM

SC

You got to KGRL the year I was born! Love reading all the old stories. Thanks, Corky!

Sarah Capps - April 09, 2025 at 11:11 AM

MC

Thank you Corky. You were an inspiration for me.

Mark Capps - April 10, 2025 at 10:26 AM

HL

Bend wouldn't be the Bend we enjoy today if it were not for Gary. I was lucky to have him as a neighbor and a friend.

Harriet Langmas - April 17, 2025 at 01:26 PM

BT

“Seems like yesterday. As an entertainer, did a show at the Bend Elks in about 1956. At age 19, after doing shows in Las Vegas, LA, and across the country, was burned out. Moved back to hometown of Portland. Began a radio career. Ended up Program Director at 50,000 Watt KGON in Portland. Saw a story in what was the Oregon Journal, regarding Gary Capps moving to Bend to began manager of KGRL.

“Gary, you don't know me. I'm Ben Tracy, PD at KGON. Read you're moving to Bend. Want to either you. Can we set up a meeting to discuss?”

We shook hands. I moved my wife and 3 kids and we were off to Bend for some of the most wonderful 20 years of my life.

Gary and I were involved like close twin brothers in his broadcasting endeavors for so many if those early years.

We only really have a few close and dear friends in life. I'm honored to say Gary is at the top of that page.

Ben Tracy

Ben Tracy - March 16, 2025 at 01:49 PM

BD

Thank you, Ben. I know our dad cherished your friendship

Brown, Diane - April 08, 2025 at 08:44 PM

SC

Ben Tracy...the man, the myth, the legend! Lots of Ben Tracy stories in our family. Thank you for your kind words about our Dad.

Sarah Capps - April 09, 2025 at 11:12 AM

MC

Thank you Ben - looking foward to catching up at dad's celebration!

Mark Capps - April 10, 2025 at 10:27 AM



“ A grove of 3 [Memorial Trees](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Gary Lee Capps.

March 10, 2025 at 07:24 PM



“ 3 files added to the album Capps album



Niswonger Reynolds Funeral Home & Greenwood Cemetery - February 24, 2025 at 03:39 PM