



Kenneth W. Heikes

March 7, 2025

Long-time Billings resident and former Eastern Montana College administrator Kenneth W. (Ken) Heikes passed away peacefully of natural causes, with family close by, on March 7, 2025, at Morningstar Senior Living in Fort Collins, Colorado. He was 91 Years old.

Ken was born on November 26, 1933, in Twin Falls, Idaho, the only child of Theodore (Ted) and Wilma Heikes. He attended grade school in Kimberly and American Falls, Idaho. During his formative years, he frequently attended family gatherings and had a beloved dog Smokey who was his constant companion. As an only child, it was clear that Ken was doted on and as he grew, he strove to make his parents proud. The family moved to Boise, Idaho, and he completed junior high there. Ken was quite the baseball player at the time, proving to be ambidextrous in both throwing and batting, while producing an impressive .800 batting average.

Throughout high school, Ken worked hard, delivering groceries and running errands for a neighborhood grocery store. A good and focused student, Ken was the apple of his mother's eye. And because his dad was the Superintendent of Idaho Power's power facilities, Ken spent many hours on trips with him visiting various hydroelectric facilities across Idaho. His parents played very important roles in his life.

He graduated Boise Sr. High in 1951, attended Boise Junior College, and received an associate's degree in business in 1953. While in college, Ken worked part-time as the manager of the student lunchroom. He was a driven young man, honing his impressive managerial skills even then. Ken completed his college education at Idaho State College (ISU), Pocatello, Idaho, in 1955 with a BS Degree in Business with an accounting emphasis.

After saving fellow college student Lena Jantz from a university cafeteria prank gone bad, Ken then courted, proposed and ultimately married Lena in 1955. Ken was the one boy Lena brought home that her three brothers couldn't scare off. They thought he was all right, readily accepting him into their big German family. Ken and Lena were married in Boise on June 26, 1955. After a short stint in Salt Lake City, Utah, they made their way to Pocatello, Idaho, where their two sons were born, and moved to Billings, Montana in 1966. They were so proud to tell everyone that both of their boys graduated from Montana State University with engineering degrees. And doubly proud that all four grandkids are college graduates too.

Ken's first job after graduation was with the Internal Revenue Service as an IRS auditor, primarily for the southwestern counties of Idaho. Tired of the travel, he went to work in the business office of Idaho State University. From there he applied for work for the F.J. Barnett, CPA firm in Pocatello and passed the CPA exam.

After a few years in Idaho, Ken accepted employment as financial officer at Eastern Montana College (now MSUB) in Billings, Montana. Ken made his mark on the college and was employed there for 26 years with the working title of Administrative Vice President. As part of his duties, he attended each regular, and special legislative session for 1967 through 1991 representing the Montana University System as a floor lobbyist. Then Governor of Montana

Stan Stephens, in a letter, made comment that “Ken, you have made remarkable contributions not only to Eastern Montana College, but to higher education in general. I can remember a number of times when I have personally benefitted from your counsel, and I know I can say the same for members of the Montana Legislature.”

Suffice it to say, Ken was excellent at his job and a valuable and knowledgeable advocate for Eastern Montana College in untold ways. He put in thousands and thousands of hours above his regular work schedule over the years to make sure things ran smoothly. He had the foresight to purchase property close to the campus as it became available to use for future growth. He was always ready to take on a leadership role and advise those with similar goals, and he also made time for the students, often mentoring the ones in student government. His commitment to civic duty and the relationships he built from those he encountered speaks volumes. From college students to campus workers and faculty members, to city and county officials, to members of the Montana legislature, people thought highly of Ken and remembered him well after their paths had crossed.

Even after retirement in 1991, Ken wasn't quite done. He worked as a part-time as Planned Giving Officer for the MSUB Foundation from 1991-1995. Beginning in 1968, Ken had been one of the three founding directors of the Montana State University Foundation. He served the Foundation in several capacities and was named “fundraiser of the year” on a couple of occasions.

Ken remained engaged in the community working on various committees for the City of Billings and Yellowstone County, often as chairman. He also was involved with the Western and National Association of College and University Business Officers, plus headed the Student Relations committee of that association. In addition, he served on the steering committee for their revised

“Business Officers” handbook.

If that weren't enough, Ken also spent 20+ years with the Kiwanis organization and with First English Lutheran Church, serving on the Church Council as treasurer and advisor for the financial and facility committee. Whew!

During retirement, Ken and Lena spent many summers in Island Park, ID and winters in Yuma, AZ with friends and family stopping by to enjoy their generous hospitality. They enjoyed traveling, visiting 40 countries and all 50 states. Ken also assisted his boys with their various home improvement projects and helped their North Place neighbors whenever he could. And as hard as it may be to believe, he even attended a Cher concert with Lena when they were in their 70's!

Ken was married to his beloved Lena for 67 years. The onset of Lena's dementia prompted a move from their family home of 50 years to a senior living facility in Billings, where Ken became her primary caretaker and constant companion until she passed away on February 4, 2023. His devotion was admirable, and they were fortunate to have had one another on which to lean. She kept Ken going and was his partner until the end. He continued to talk about her every day until his death.

Ken was diagnosed with vascular dementia shortly after Lena died, leading to his relocation to Colorado to live nearer family. We were so grateful for this added time with him and are glad that he has been reunited with Lena.

Ken is survived by son Craig (Lori Gafner), Fort Collins, CO; son Brian (Cynthia Favero-Heikes) Castle Rock, CO; grandchildren John, Meg, Jack and Will, all of Colorado; brother-in-law Ken (Linda) Jantz, sister-in-law Myrna Jantz and sister-in-law Marie Jantz, all of Idaho; and nephews and nieces Roger, Karl (Kris) and Paul (Shauna) Hamilton, Ina (Tim) Jaszkwowiak, Cass

Cook, Laura (Sean) Vincent, Erik (Jerrie) Jantz, Justin Jantz and Kendra (Sergey) Burlo, and Nathan and Matt Jantz. Ken was predeceased by his wife Lena, his parents, and sister-in-law Rose Hamilton, brothers-in law Bud Hamilton, Allen Jantz and John Jantz.

His family expresses heartfelt thanks to the compassionate staff at Morningstar Senior Living for their tender care of Ken.

The closing excerpt from Ken's retirement speech in 1991:

“And if I'm lucky through the years perhaps I'll serve as guide, Inspiring some newcomer with the fire of civic pride. The credit will go to you, my friends, and my sons, and Lena, my wife. By caring and sharing, you've given to me the best 25 years of my life.”

Tribute Wall

CH

“ 9 files added to the album *This is Ken*



Craig Heikes - March 17, 2025 at 07:31 PM

IN

What a nice tribute, and thank you for sharing the pictures. He was a wonderful uncle, and made us all feel very loved and special.

Ina - March 18, 2025 at 08:02 PM