

Kenneth "Bob" Core

Died November 9, 2023

Bob Core, 95, Traverse City native and regional history buff, engineer, boat builder, and jazz musician, died November 9 after a short illness. Bob was well-known in the local sailing community for designing, building, and restoring historical wooden boats both at the Maritime Heritage Alliance (MHA) and as a former co-owner of West Bay Boat Works. He was also a fixture in Dixieland Jazz circles as a banjo player who performed in many bands spanning a 60-year period.

Bob began life in the shadow of the Great Depression. Nevertheless, he had fond memories of growing up on Elmwood Ave in Slabtown at a time when garbage was buried in back yards and houses were heated by coal or wood stoves, a time before central heating, modern indoor plumbing and refrigeration. He reminisced about skiing down Wayne hill when it was still mostly wooded and sledding down the middle of Randolph Street. He recalled his grandfather, the sheriff, driving off in his Model T, dog Jug in the boot, to set up road-blocks to catch Al Capone. He accompanied his other grandfather in a horse-drawn wagon down Front Street in summers to deliver ice blocks cut from the bay for refrigeration and coal in the winter, and occasionally out to his grandfather's cherry orchard at the base of Old Mission Peninsula.

In the waning days of WWII, Bob graduated from high school and with a couple of classmates joined the navy. A standout basketball player, he played on a Navy team in California and Hawaii as entertainment for the troops.

After his tour, he returned to Michigan to study electrical engineering at MSU. In 1952, Bob married his wonderful wife, Betty, went to work for Consumers Power in Jackson, and started a family. Over the following dozen years, Bob pursued strategic transfers northward until finally the family landed back in Traverse City. In addition to restoring and sailing a classic Alden schooner, regularly gigging with jazz bands, skiing, and working with commercial clients for Consumers, Bob (and mostly Betty) took over and ran the motel his mother and uncle built on West Bay, and also where their father had stored the ice and coal Bob once helped deliver. In the early 1980's, Bob retired from Consumers Power and he and Betty sold the motel.

During the ensuing 45-year "retirement"--much longer than he ever expected,

thanks to brilliant local heart doctors and medical advances--Bob led a busy and productive third act. He liked people and often managed to find like-minded friends to turn dreams into reality, whether as a founding member of several musical bands and the Traverse City Jazz Club, or a founder of the Maritime Heritage Alliance. With the MHA, as lead shipwright (builder) of the Gracie L, the schooner Madeline, the Robert C bateau, and the restoration of the warship Welcome and many other historic sailboats, Bob oversaw and mentored hundreds of volunteers who worked hundreds of thousand manhours. For Bob, it was a labor of love—for the craft, the history, and the people. In addition to historic boats and Dixieland Jazz, Bob was a voracious reader, reading long into most nights—mostly literature and history—and he enjoyed attending classical music concerts at Interlochen and opera at Live at the Met. He also enthusiastically supported the Ruby Ellen Farm, a living, working historical farm conservancy on Leelanau Peninsula settled by his Core forebearers.

Most importantly, throughout his long life, Bob was a family man, devoted to his wife, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. He is survived by two children, Jacquelyn (Alan Madry) and Richard (Sylvia Bowling); two grandchildren, Jeffrey Madry (Rebecca Lawrence) and Carolyn Madry (Robert Howe); two great-grandsons, Joel and Ronen Madry; and a sister, Norma (Bud) Smitter. He was preceded in death by his wife, Betty, and their oldest son, Kenneth.

A celebration of Bob's life will be held at the Grand Traverse Yacht Club at 2pm Sunday, December 3. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be directed to Bob's favorite historical non-profits: the Maritime Heritage Alliance and the Ruby Ellen Farm.

To send flowers to the family of Kenneth Robert Core, please visit [Tribute Store](#).

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Sun Dec 03

Celebration of life

2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Grand Traverse Yacht Club

13615 S West Bayshore, TC