



James "Jim" Honkanen

August 1, 1929 - January 11, 2025

James "Jim" Honkanen passed away peacefully on January 11, 2025, at the age of 95. A beloved resident of Cedar Cove Assisted Living in Cedarville, Michigan, for the past four and a half years. Jim continued to cherish his time at his cabin in Brimley, Michigan, whenever possible.

Jim's educational journey began in his birthplace in Beacon Hill, Michigan, then relocating to Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, to pursue a higher education at Soo Tech. He furthered his studies at Wayne State University, earning a teaching degree. He then obtained a master's degree from Michigan State University. Between his college years, Jim served as a sergeant in the United States Army at the Army Chemical Facility in Fort Meade, Maryland, from 1952 to 1954. It was during his military service that he met the love of his life, Beverly Riffel, whom he married in November 1953 in Saginaw, Michigan.

Jim began his teaching career with the Detroit school system before moving his family to Sault Ste. Marie. There, he became the Dean of Admissions at Lake Superior State University. An avid fisherman and hunter, Jim partnered with his friend, Jack Truckey, to purchase a hunting camp on Neebish Island, a cherished spot still enjoyed by their families today. Jim was also one of the original creators of the I-500 snowmobile race on the famous 1-mile ice track, which continues to be run on the first Saturday of February each year.

Jim's love for his cabin at Birch Point began at the age of 16. He convinced his parents, Ed and Anna Honkanen, to purchase it, and it remains a treasured family retreat where summers are filled with joy and memories. Jim was active in many community activities, earning the title of "honorary Italian" at the CC Hall for his years of rolling meatballs. His Catholic faith was a guiding force in his life, and he was a dedicated parishioner at St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Sault Ste. Marie before transferring to St. Francis Catholic Church in Brimley. There, he faithfully recited the rosary daily and in Sunday Masses. Jim and Bev were well-known for their contributions to making pasties at St. Francis. Able to retire early from the job and university he admired the most at LSSU, he and Bev continued doing what they enjoyed the most, entertaining people. Whether it was telling Finnish jokes, performing in parades as "Jimbo the Juggler", or just having friends and family over at the "neighbors" for food, wine and ice cream, Jim was always willing. Also, an avid horseshoe player, Jim organized and ran horseshoe leagues in both Sault Ste Marie and during their winter months in Orange Beach, Alabama.

Jim is survived by his two daughters; Diane (Scott) Honkanen of Raleigh, North Carolina, and Linda (Steve) Bryan of Brimley; daughter-in-law, Pam Honkanen of Sault Ste. Marie; Jim's legacy also includes seven grandchildren, Steve (Tiffany) Walters of Raleigh, Andrea (Dan) Eaves of Lake Orion, Michigan, Chelsea (Andy) Howson of Midland, Michigan, Greg (Sophie) Walters of Terrebonne, Quebec, Ashley (Nate) Ward of Edmonton, Canada, Michael (Alison) Walters of Raleigh and David (Abbie) Bryan of Greenville, Michigan; and fourteen great-grandchildren, Skylyn, Lucas, Connor, Corinne, Sawyer, Brady, Theo, Benjamin, Kate, Lyla, Emerson, Gavin, Jordan and Bailee.

Jim was preceded in death by his beloved wife, Beverly (Riffel) Honkanen; son, Mike Honkanen; and parents, Edward and Anna Honkanen.

A Mass in Jim's honor will be held at St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church on Monday, May 19, 2025, at 11:00 AM, followed by his burial at Oaklawn Chapel Gardens, where he will be laid to rest next to his beloved wife, Bev, and his parents, Ed and Anna. Visitation will begin at 10:00 AM. Officiants of the service will be Father Peter and Father Tim.

In lieu of flowers, Memorial Contributions can be made to St. Francis Xavier Church, Brimley c/o 11509 W. H-40, Rudyard, MI 49780 or to Cedar Cove Assisted Living, 226 S. Mary L St., Cedarville, MI 49719.

Jim's vibrant spirit and love for life will be deeply missed by all who knew him.

Family Life Funeral Homes assisted the family with arrangements.
Condolences may be left to the family at www.familylifefh.com.

Cemetery Details

Oaklawn Chapel Gardens

15264 S. M-129
Sault Ste. Marie, MI 49783

Previous Events

Visitation

MAY 19. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)

St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church
6769 M-221
Brimley, MI 49715

Mass of Christian Burial

MAY 19. 11:00 AM (ET)

St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church
6769 M-221
Brimley, MI 49715

Tribute Wall

SD

“ I met Jim at Cedar Cove where I volunteer. I loved all his Eeno and Tiovo jokes and tell them myself now. He was a very kind and gentle man and I will miss him.
Sherry Dewitt

Sherry Dewitt - January 23, 2025 at 10:47 AM

LT

“ Jim was such a sweet man. I enjoyed knowing him at cedar cove. Jim loved my Great Dane Zeus and even asked me to take a picture of them together that he had in his room. He will be missed.

Lorie Thompson - January 18, 2025 at 11:21 PM

DR

“ Dawn Roffey lit a candle in memory of James "Jim" Honkanen



Dawn Roffey - January 18, 2025 at 08:25 AM

MM

I met Jim at LSSC when I was first hired as a Counselor there in 1981. He helped guide me, along with Jack Truckey, through my initial years there providing me so much support as I navigated my new career. I will never forget the times that we shared and Neebish Island between the North and the South Camp and the Resident Advisor training. I admire him so much and he treated me with such respect. I'll never forget that kind of support at the administrative level such a wonderful man. My memories of him will always be in my heart. He is a part of what made my early years at Lake State grow in to the foundation for a nearly 40 year career there. I will never forget. My condolences to his family. God speed Jim.

MJ Meehan - January 18, 2025 at 11:24 AM

DS

“ I remember conversations with Jim at Cedar Cove where he and my brother, Carl Hanna, became good friends. He impressed me as being one of the greatest guys, interesting, fun, and a pasty competitor.

Dianne Schmitigal - January 17, 2025 at 09:18 PM

DH

Dianne, so true. Dad and Carl had a great friendship at Cedar Cove. I remember times they had everyone in the dining room laughing. Two wonderful guys

Diane Honkanen - January 17, 2025 at 10:12 PM

RM

*Sure enjoyed working with Jim & Jack together recruiting for LSSU.
Roger Malette*

Roger Malette - January 18, 2025 at 05:16 PM