



## The Oregonian

### **Businessman Wayne Kuni dies of cancer**

**Death - The founder of Kuni Automotive is remembered for the hearts he touched**

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Wayne D. Kuni, founder of Kuni Automotive and a community leader who worked in recent years to craft a succession plan that directed much of his company's proceeds to charity, died Friday of cancer. He was 75.

Over the past 35 years, the Vancouver resident built his namesake company into a 10-dealership chain across four Western states. But as his friends and colleagues shared stories, many punctuated by tears and laughter, they measured his success by the many hearts he touched and minds he helped expand, as opposed to the cars he sold.

"Wayne loved cars, but that's not what made him a successful businessman," said Greg Goodwin, the company's chief executive officer who had worked with Kuni for 16 years.

"He loved the people he worked with and he had high expectations," said Goodwin, explaining that as Kuni expanded his Beaverton-based company, he provided opportunities -- and a financial stake -- for his managers. "He treated us like family."

Kuni was born in Detroit, Mich., and after graduating from Kettering University (formerly General Motors Institute of Technology), worked for the Chevrolet Motor Car Division, according to family. By 1969, he held the title of national investment manager, overseeing \$300 million worth of investments for General Motors Corp. He resigned, hungry for a new opportunity, and in 1970, founded Kuni Cadillac & BMW Inc., which today employs 850.

"It didn't matter if someone was older or younger, he was a mentor to everyone," said Carl Christoferson, Kuni's chief financial officer, who has worked for the company for more than 20 years.

Christoferson recalls a plaque that sat on the back of Kuni's desk that captured the essence of his beloved boss: "You can do great things if you don't care who gets the credit."

"Wayne did a lot of great things," Christoferson said, "but he did them privately."

A recent story in a trade magazine, *Automotive News*, outlined Kuni's plans to leave a financial legacy to help charities, in particular those working on cancer research and caring for mentally disabled adults. Goodwin recalls speaking with a few Oregon business leaders who read the story and said they'd had no idea at the size -- and success -- of Kuni's luxury car empire.

When Kuni was diagnosed with lung cancer two years ago, he set to work creating the Kuni Foundation, which will be supported by the company's proceeds. Kuni told *Automotive News* that he expected his business to gross \$700 million in revenue this year and with his death, his 37 percent stake in the company would go to the foundation.

"Wayne was one of the great business leaders of our time," said Dick Keller, a friend of 45 years who became close with Kuni when the pair served on the board of Northwest Natural Gas in the 1980s. "He had

a great imagination, a wonderful sense of humor, a tremendous ability to lead people and a great sense of community."

"Whenever he'd get into an organization, he was apt to wind up running it," said Keller, who later asked Kuni to serve on his family company's board.

Kuni served on the boards of public and private companies and organizations, including the Oregon Health Sciences University Foundation, Linfield College, American Red Cross, United Way of the Columbia-Willamette, and the Portland Downtown Rotary Club and its foundation. He also was president of many industry groups, including the Oregon Automobile Dealers Association and the Portland Metropolitan Automobile Dealers Association, and was the national chairman of the Cadillac Dealers Advisory Council.

Kuni is survived by his wife, Patricia Andersen Kuni of Vancouver; three children, Michael, Sean and Kimberly; two grandchildren; two stepsons; a stepdaughter, a step-grandson and his brother, William H. Kuni Jr. Two children, Stephen and Deborah, died earlier.

Kuni's family said he enjoyed golfing, traveling, entertaining with his wife and a good game of pitch.

Kuni also enjoyed boating. Keller recalls a time when Kuni's diesel engine cut out on a cruise near Aberdeen, Wash. After struggling to get under way, Kuni eventually got a Coast Guard tow, Keller recalled.

"He got on the tow boat and promptly took command," said Keller, adding that his friend was a natural leader who never hesitated to confront an issue, but in a way that deflected any resentment. "He may have lost an engine, but he got a Coast Guard ship in return."

Kuni's fearlessness, determination and positive attitude were contagious, even to a young banker with her mind set on moving his business to her company.

Malia Wasson recalls successfully wooing Kuni, a client who soon became a close friend. When she was looking for a job in the 1980s, he picked up the phone as she sat in his office and called the local president of U.S. Bank, where she now works as president.

Years later, she got a call from Kuni asking her to lunch.

"He was so astute and planned his moves out in advance, I should have known this wasn't a casual date, there was always a plan," Wasson said. She remembered how the invitation fell on the week of a contentious decision to open the Arlington Club, which had long closed its doors to women -- even as visitors.

"We walked in and he took a table where everyone could see us and he was beaming ear to ear," said Wasson, recalling many unhappy faces staring back at her in the lunch crowd. "He was sending a big message to his fellow members: 'You know what guys, get with the real world here.'"

"With Wayne it didn't matter what gender you were or what color, it was about what you did and how well you did it."

The family will hold a private interment in the Garden of Roses, Sunset Hill Memorial Park. The family suggests remembrances to the Wayne D. Kuni and Joan E. Kuni Foundation or a favorite charity.

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