



Ernest James "Jim" Kearney

June 15, 1938 - December 23, 2025

Ernest James "Jim" Kearney, 87, passed away on December 23, 2025. He was born on June 15, 1938, in Reading, Massachusetts, the only child of Francis Kearney and Florence Metcalf Kearney.

Jim is lovingly remembered by his wife of 43 years, Deborah Kaveney Kearney with whom he shared a life of partnership and quiet companionship, and by his two daughters, Jennifer Kearney (Shannon) and Jill Keller (Brandon) whom he loved deeply.

He was extremely proud of his grandchildren, Erin and Aidan, both college students in Texas, whose accomplishments and character brought him great joy, and step-granddaughter Kaylee Duval (Jacob) who presented Jim with his first great-grandchild, William.

Jim was a big, gentle giant who was always willing to show youngsters a fun and adventurous time and who was genuinely a kid at heart himself. Jim loved kids and dogs and they loved him.

Jim's family and friends will remember him as strong but fair, steady-mannered, deeply loyal, and quietly compassionate — a man who listened, who noticed people, and who led with both strength and heart.

Jim was an adventurer — a sailor and ocean-racing competitor along the Eastern Seaboard, a formula car racer, motorcycle enthusiast, and a collector and restorer of vintage café-style motorcycles. He loved things that went fast, and he embraced risk and challenge with energy and confidence. In his later years, he often marveled — with a mix of humor and gratitude — that life carried him all the way to 87.

Jim grew up in Hollywood, Florida and graduated from South Broward High School. He attended the University of Florida where they tried unsuccessfully to coax him onto the football team.

Jim was gifted with a sharp mind, natural leadership ability, and remarkable instinct for people and problem-solving that guided his career. While some could be intimidated by his over 6'4" frame, he was a gifted manager and gained the confidence of those he worked with.

Jim began his professional life in the finance industry and, for a time, owned his own finance company in Monticello, Florida. He later entered public service with the State of Florida, where he became a respected manager and leader. He served as Division Director of the Division of Land Sales and Condominiums and ultimately as Secretary of the Department of Business Regulation. Known for his fairness, integrity, and non-partisan approach, Jim was admired by colleagues, staff, and the business community alike. He took a genuine interest in the people who worked for him — from senior managers to the janitorial crew — and was known for his open door, steady presence, and sincere concern for others.

Jim continued his work in various public programs before retiring at age 62. Retirement did not slow him down — it simply gave him time to pursue the things he loved most. Jim was happiest outdoors, on his land “in the back forty,” where he planted pecan trees, a citrus grove, and camellias across the

property he cherished. A tireless planter and caretaker of growing things, he found joy and purpose in nurturing life from the soil.

Jim chose to donate his body to a university medical school to support the education of future physicians. Following the completion of that program, his ashes will be returned to his family and lovingly placed among the groves and camellias he tended with such devotion. His life and legacy will be celebrated privately and intimately at a later date. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the Leon County Animal Shelter.

Breanna Green of Bevis Funeral Home (850-385-2193 or www.bevisfh.com) is assisting the family with their arrangements.

Tribute Wall

AB

“ Anne B. planted a grove of 3 [Memorial Trees](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Ernest James "Jim" Kearney.

Anne B. - June 10 at 05:04 PM

AC

“ I worked with Jim when he was the Bureau Chief of the Division of Land Sales and Condominiums. His obituary is exactly who he was. He was a great friend and I will miss him tremendously. I will always remember you Jim.

Anne B Clemmons - June 10 at 04:46 PM

CB

“ Connie B. planted a grove of 10 [Memorial Trees](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Ernest James "Jim" Kearney.

Connie B. - January 20 at 01:35 PM