NORTHEAST KINGDOM

BELOVED COMMUNITY MEMBER TOM BARRETT DIES

BY AMY ASH NIXON

Staff Writer

ST. JOHNSBURY - Tom Barrett, in his final months, taught us all something about living: he didn't waste a moment feeling sorry for himself, but made sure to drink in every precious moment he had, and to continue the compassionate, grateful way of being that defined him.

Barrett, 59, a St. Johnsbury native and 1976 graduate of St. Johnsbury Academy, died Friday.

For the past 20 years it had been Barrett's honor and privilege to help families, in his work as the funeral director and manager of Guibord Funeral Home of Lyndonville, a position he revered, and brought his deep empathy, faith and capacity for kindness to every day.

Before going to work at Guibord, Barrett, after college, had worked on local farms, at a pharmacy, and went on to serve for 33 years as a firefighter in his hometown.

Barrett also worked for many years at the E.T. & H.K. Ide Co. in St. Johnsbury, where he worked until his calling to serve in the funeral industry.

Rodney Sayles, who owned Guibord and Sayles funeral homes until July 1, said when he learned that Barrett was finishing his work at Ide, he called him multiple times, and finally Barrett got back to him. "I knew it would be a perfect fit," said Sayles. Barrett's ability to work with people during their loss was amazing, deep and always genuine.

“Tom had an enormous capacity for compassion like no one else I have ever known," Sayles said of Barrett this weekend. "His 'late-in-life’ change of occupation was a true calling to serve. We will miss him."

Barrett was well-known for his devotion to maple sugaring, operating Barrett’s Pure VT Maple Syrup in St. Johnsbury. This past sugaring season, Barrett was interviewed for a story about what he knew would be his last time sugaring after his diagnosis more than a year earlier with pancreatic cancer. At his sugar shack on Lawrence Hill Road, he told the reporter that he had just completed the largest first boil ever the night before, some 2,000 gallons of sap from the 1,500 taps he had, overseeing the process for some 16 hours straight.

Stephen Robertson, the new owner of Guibord and Sayles funeral homes, said on Sunday, “I’ve been working here since June of last year, and came in originally to take over for Rodney, never to replace Tom, and I never could. He's truly been the heart and spirit at the Guibord Funeral Home. His level of compassion is something you can only ever hope to match, a true brother in Christ." “If someone was able to live for today and not worry about tomorrow, that was Tom," said Robertson.

Sayles said in his final chapter of life, Barrett "was an inspiration to a lot of people fighting cancer." Asked how long he had known Barrett, Sayles said quietly, “I’ve known him since he was in his mother’s arms. I’ve known him since he was in his mother's womb, they grew up right behind us."

A service for Barrett on Wednesday, said Sayles, will be an incredibly well-attended, as Barrett touched so many people so beautifully during his life of service here in St. Johnsbury.

"He just did so well for so many people, not just in his job, but in everything he did," said Sayles.
Longtime friends of Barrett's, John and Marie Hagan got to know Barrett through sugaring, said Marie on Sunday.
“Sugaring was his main goal once he found out he was on his way out, he wanted a good sugaring season, and he had the best sugaring season ever," said John Hagan.
Marie Hagan said Barrett was "incredibly strong," to the end and tending to things to leave his family in the best place possible, even tending to the sale of his sugaring equipment very recently.
“When we were up at his camp a week ago today, he was saying how proud he was of his family,” said Marie Hagan.
“With camp, he wanted everything ready, he wanted the camp to stay the special place that it was,” they said of his family camp in West Charleston.
On a moose horn in the Barrett family camp, the words *North Side of Heaven* are inscribed, the couple said.
Friends and family have been helping Barrett with work details at the camp so he wouldn’t be worried.
“Tom was so special to so many people, and I just can’t imagine how many people he helped at their most difficult hour, he was just so good, so good,” said Marie.
Barrett’s sugarhouse was on the Lawrence’s property. “We enjoyed having him sugar up here,” said Ann Lawrence. “We’ll miss him sugaring up here tremendously.”
Dave Keenan was a member of the Lyndonville Rotary Club with Barrett and a close friend and they were firefighters together serving their communities. “Tom always considered himself a ‘blessed man,’ but he was really a blessing to know,” said Keenan. “He was kind, generous, and a gentle man who truly loved his family and cared about people whether he knew you or had never met you. He helped many families deal with their grief while he was fight ing his own. He never gave up even when he knew cancer would win.”
Sen. Joe Benning met Barrett through the Lyndonville Rotary Club, and they became close friends, he said Sunday. Barrett helped him on his first campaign for election.
“I have lost a good friend and the community has lost a great participator in all things that make life in Vermont wonderful,”

Benning said. Barrett was a member of the St. Johnsbury Fire Department from 1979 to 2012, and served most of his time as a paid on-call firefighter, said Chief Troy Ruggles on Sunday. “He was just a fantastic guy. He was an inspiration to everybody.

He was full of life and energy and everything he did he always did to perfection,” said Ruggles. “His calling in life was really in the funeral service, he did such a fantastic job taking care of the families. He was a great friend, he was a great firefighter, and he's going to be truly missed.

Firefighter Troy Darby was close to the Barrett family growing up and said, “I pretty much grew up at their house.”

“I did call him Dad,” and Mrs. Barrett, he called mom, Darby said. “That was my second family.”

Darby said, “Everybody loved him. In talking to him in the last few months, he always expressed how blessed he was to have his family and his friends … Talking about the funeral and things when we were sugaring this year, he would say ‘I’m nobody special, I’m just Tom Barrett.’ He never considered himself special; everyone else knew he was special. He just considered himself Tom Barrett. As special as he was to all of us, he never saw it that way.”

Thomas K. Barrett, 59, of St. Johnsbury died at home peacefully Friday evening, July 8, 2016.

He was born Nov. 27, 1956 in St. Johnsbury, the son of Herbert and Martha (Morrison) Barrett. Tom graduated from St. Johnsbury Academy in 1976 and Vermont Technical College in 1978 with an Associate’s Degree in Ag Business. On Nov. 11, 1978 he married Patricia “Patti” Gaskin.

Tom worked his way through his school years doing odd jobs, dairy farming and worked at Desrochers Pharmacy in St. Johnsbury. After graduating from college he worked for Kilfasset Farms Dairy as a milk truck driver/supervisor

delivering milk throughout the area. He then became a career firefighter in St. Johnsbury and worked part time for the E.T. & H.K. Ide Co in St. Johnsbury. In 1988 Tom was promoted to store manager at the Ide Co. where he worked until 1996. He stayed on the St. J. Fire Dept. as a call firefighter for a total of 33 years. In 1996, Tom began a long career at the Guibord Funeral Home of Lyndonville as funeral director and manager.

Maple sugaring was a large part of Tom's life. He operated Barrett's Pure VT Maple Syrup in St. Johnsbury for over 25 years and enjoyed working in the woods and watching wildlife. In the 1990s he served as president of Caledonia County Maple Sugar Makers Assoc. He was a longtime member of the Lyndonville Rotary Club and enjoyed helping with their annual Penny Sale.

Family was very important to Tom. Spending time clearing land and building their camp in Charleston was a family event. Time with his wife, children and grandchildren around the campfire or where ever, was always a wonderful time.

Survivors include his wife Patti; two children and four grandchildren: daughter Jenelle Noble, husband Justin and their two children Natalie and Felicity of Waterford, son Thomas J. "TJ" Barrett, wife Taryn and their two children Brynn and Madden of Colchester; two brothers: David Barrett of Lyndon and Peter Barrett of Littleton, N.H.; two sisters: Carol Barrett of Connecticut, Lisa Barrett and husband Joe Newell of Lyndonville; his mother in-law Gisele Gaskin of Lyndonville; Patti's siblings: Heidi Lussier and husband Reginald of Kirby, Joni Palmer and husband Scott of Danville, Ernie Gaskin and wife Darla of Indiana, Timothy Gaskin and wife Paula of Lyndonville; many nieces, nephews, cousins, and aunts and uncles, and many friends including the Hagan and Lawrence

families. Troy ‘Hoyt’ Darby and Darren Pierce were also considered family.

Besides his mother and father, he was predeceased by his father in-law Ernest Gaskin, a sister in-law, Lauri Larabee and her husband Vernon.

On Tuesday, July 12, visiting hours will be held from 5-8 p.m. at the Guibord Funeral Home in Lyndonville. (Entrance will be via the Center Street door with exit out the Main Street door.)

On Wednesday, July 13 at the St. Johns Church in St. Johnsbury, beginning at 10:30 a.m., a few selected speakers will pay tribute to Tom. At 11 a.m, the Mass of Christian Burial will begin with the Rev. Bernard Gaudreau celebrating the Mass. Burial will be held at the convenience of the family.

Donations made in Tom’s memory may be directed to either the Good Shepherd Foundation, P.O. Box 146, St. Johnsbury, VT 05819 or to the Gene McDonough Scholarship, 1187 Main St., St. Johnsbury, VT 05819.

Memories and condolences may be shared privately at www.guibordfh.com. The Guibord Funeral Home is located on the corner of Main and Center streets in Lyndonville.