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BUSINESS

Obituary: Boise lawyer Ken Pursley's 'adventurous and meaningful' life

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Kenneth Pursley

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Ken Pursley died doing something he loved.

Pursley, 75, a founding partner of the Givens Pursley law firm in Downtown Boise, was on a fishing trip in Brazil when his boat overturned Wednesday in the upper reaches of one of the tributaries of the Amazon River.

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“Ken’s death is a harsh, heartbreaking blow to all of us at Givens Pursley and to Ken and Elizabeth’s many friends and family, to whom we extend our deepest sympathies and condolences,” the law firm said Thursday in a statement. “Ken was a dear friend and valued mentor to many of us. His impact on our law firm and all of us individually is difficult to capture in words.”

Pursley’s not-so-ordinary life began in 1940 in Sandpoint.

He attended Sandpoint High School and was recruited to a summer program at a college in California after his junior year, then stayed at the two-year Deep Springs College after that program — allowing him to start college, go on to Cornell University, graduate from law school at the University of Chicago and eventually become a licensed attorney without having officially completed high school.

“Ken tried to rectify this oversight by appealing to Sandpoint High School, but was unsuccessful because he was one half-credit shy of the required course load,” a

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biography provided by Givens Pursley said.

He moved to Boise in 1970, ran unsuccessfully for Congress as a Democrat in the 1976 election, and then co-founded the law firm in 1977. He retired from the firm, now one of Idaho's largest, in 2005.

But Pursley's retirement from the legal profession didn't stop him from pursuing other interests. He started a real estate investment and development company with Boise developer Rick Clark — a company that invested in Hotel 43, Albertsons Marketplace, Eagle Health Plaza, the Mulvaney Medical Office Building and other high-profile properties.

Pursley advocated for the outdoors, as a board member of the Nature Conservancy and a supporter of the Boise Greenbelt, the 2001 Foothills Initiative and Boise Youth Soccer.

And finally, he entertained his passion for fishing and life on the water. He became part-owner of Idaho Angler, a fly-fishing outfitter shop on Vista Avenue just south of Overland Road in Boise.

Shop co-owner Rick Williams called Pursley "smart as a whip." The retired attorney "never used his intelligence to beat anybody up, at all. He was a mentor to everyone," Williams told the Statesman.

Williams, Pursley and their wives traveled together to the Seychelles and spent many days fly-fishing on a sailboat in the Indian Ocean.

“There were a lot of superlatives about him,” Williams said. “Very good fisherman. Not flashy at all. ... But at the end of the day, he’d have some of the biggest fish.”

On his fishing trips, Pursley seemed to find unique fish, just as he sought interesting new sights and experiences in his life, though he wasn’t a thrill-seeker, Williams said.

One of those experiences was an exotic fly-fishing trip to Patagonia with former Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin, who served under President Bill Clinton.

With his wife, Betsy, and Clark and Clark’s wife, Pursley once traveled more than 35,000 miles on a boat. The two couples ventured from Southeast Alaska to the coast of Maine, via the Panama Canal.

“We will miss him terribly,” Givens Pursley partners Ed Miller and Chris Beeson wrote Thursday. “We can only be consoled by the fact that Ken died doing one of the things he loved, fishing, but more importantly, leading an adventurous and meaningful life.”

Arrangements for Pursley’s memorial services were still pending late Friday.

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