



Obituary

Born: Friday, February 10, 1928

Died: Monday, June 3, 2019

Jay William Preston, 91, who with his wife Beth, built a successful telephone company in Ronan and devoted over five decades to the Mission Valley through numerous civic and charitable activities, passed away of natural causes on June 3, 2019 at St. Luke Hospital with his family at his side.

During a long, full life, he served his country, his community and his family with integrity and an unquenchable faith that life is good. His boundless energy -- a marvel to all who knew him -- was epitomized by the simple but powerful words: "Show up!"

Service Summary

Memorial Service

3:00 PM Fri Jul 19, 2019

Mission Valley United Methodist Church

Jay was born February 10, 1928, in Hitchcock, S.D., the second of three children to Grant and Garnet (Buckles) Preston. Jay became a Montanan when the family acquired the telephone company at Hot Springs, in 1935. Jay grew up there, learning the business, playing sports and graduating high school in 1946. He went on to earn a degree in electrical engineering from Montana State College, then served as an Air Force second lieutenant, working on radar systems in Rome, N.Y. It was there, on excursions to Boston and New York, that he renewed his acquaintance with Elizabeth ("Beth") Cummings, a nurse and fellow western Montanan whom he had first met in college. Their friendship blossomed into romance, and they were married in Plains on Valentine's Day, 1954. For the next 65 years, they loved and nurtured each other in an enduring union that blessed them with three children: Jay, Elizabeth ("Betsy") and Judith ("Judy").

Jay and Beth began their married life in Seattle, working for Boeing. In 1955, fulfilling their desire to return to Montana, Jay was hired as the first employee and general manager of the newly established Blackfoot Telephone Cooperative in Missoula. Four years later, they purchased the Ronan Telephone Company, commencing many years of effort to expand and modernize its offerings. From the introduction of dial phone service to Ronan and Pablo, and on through a series of major upgrades, they improved the quality of life for thousands of customers. Jay also helped upgrade telephone service and introduce internet service to Hot Springs. Over his 55 year telephone career, he was a firm and kind hearted father figure and mentor to associates, many of whom followed his lead becoming leaders in the community.

Jay's busy schedule included terms on the school board. He was an effective volunteer for the JC's, the Ronan chamber of commerce, serving for a term as its President, along with lifelong service in the Lions Club, among other activities.

Jay purchased, maintained and put up Christmas lights on Ronan's Main Street, and helped build the Ronan

Community Center. He was a key fundraiser for St. Luke Extended Care, his final residence. He left a strong legacy for his family of community involvement and service.

Many of Jay's most joyous times were spent on the west shore of Flathead Lake, at the house he built in conjunction with the Cummings family north of Mello Point. It became a hub of the extended family's activity and has remained so for more than 60 years. Jay wore many hats – designer, builder, repairman, captain, counselor -- and never seemed to stand still. He was a master of the grill, made a mean gin-and-tonic and relished heaping bowls of popcorn.

Jay's zest for healthy recreation was evident in everything he did. He was an accomplished pilot and a fiercely competitive sailor. He loved dancing, water skiing and snow skiing. He skied with style and grace, well into his 80s. Jay and Beth were avid travelers, sailing the Caribbean and visiting every continent except Antarctica. Many visitors to their cherished "Lakehouse" never forgot Jay's patience in helping them experience the thrill of water skiing for the first time or experiencing the quiet peace of sailing along the shore of Wild Horse Island. He enjoyed nothing better than taking guests up in the sky for a spectacular view of the Mission Mountains. His laughter and stories, spun from the tiller of the "A Multidao," brightened many a summer afternoon.

The sailboat's name -- Portuguese for "the multitude" -- perfectly summed up a man who was happiest when sharing life's bounty with others.

We who mourn the loss of our husband, father, grandfather, uncle and friend, know his life had its share of challenges, as all lives do. What we remember is that he lived it with generosity, the best of intentions and a welcoming and loving inclusion for his ever growing family. His memory can best be honored by striving to live as good and true a life as is humanly possible.

Jay was preceded in death by his parents; his older brother Dwight and his wife Dorothy; his younger sister Phyllis (Ekblad) and her husband Robert, and his sister-in-law Rhoda Cummings.

He is survived by his wife Beth of Ronan; his brother-in-law Rial Cummings of Missoula; his brother-in-law Dean Cummings and sister-in-law Gerry of Sunnyvale, Calif.; and his children and their families: Jay and Cynthia Preston of Charlo; Dr. Elizabeth Preston, of Oakland, Calif., and Judy Preston and Anais Starr of Polson. He is also survived by his grandchildren: Matthew Preston (Savannah) of San Antonio, Texas; David Preston (Jordan) of Missoula; Ezra Preston of Dillon; Katherine Lee and Jayson Lee of Oakland, Calif.; step grandchildren: Nathan Cantlon (Dana) of Charlo; Zac Cantlon (Jessica) of Polson; and Patricia Johnson and Lorien Johnson of Kalispell; and great grandchildren: Issac and

Toby Cantlon, Elise Cantlon, and Evan and Hailey
Hendrickson.

A memorial service celebrating Jay's life will be held July
19, 2019 at 3:00 pm at the Mission Valley United Methodist
Church, on Post Creek hill on US 93, 6 miles north of St.
Ignatius.