

NEWS

Port Huron's late IT director Jim Brennan remembered as a family man, friend and mentor

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Published 12:02 p.m. ET Jul. 21, 2020 | Updated 12:02 p.m. ET Jul. 21, 2020

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Jim Brennan, then-information technology director for Port Huron, was awarded the 2013 Gov. John B. Swainson Award by the Michigan Historical Commission. *File Photo.*

Jim Brennan was a man of many interests.

He was a runner with a long series of marathons, half-marathons and 5Ks under his belt. He loved to travel and was known for celebrating history and Irish heritage. Multiple loved ones and former colleagues with the city of Port Huron said he was also a dedicated friend and family man.

Just a few months after retiring as the city's director of information technology, Brennan died Sunday after a brief battle with leukemia. He was 68.

"He was an outstanding husband. The best dad anybody could ever hope to have," said his wife Jenise. "If he was your friend, he was a good friend to you. If you were lucky enough to have him as a friend."

Brennan began working as Port Huron's IT director in 2007, according to his obituary.

City Manager James Freed said he spoke to Brennan for the final time last week, visiting him in hospice care to tell "him I loved him and that he'd be missed."

"He retired in March and then COVID hit. We had a staffing change, and our new IT director's been doing a good job stepping into the role. It's just really hard," Freed said Monday. "He was one of my closest friends. ... It's just a shock and awe for the staff."

Bruce Fiedler, who succeeded Brennan as IT director, said they worked together for more than 12 years.

"Jim started out as my boss and mentor but became my friend," Fiedler said via email early Tuesday. "... One thing I will always remember about Jim is his quick wit and great sense of humor. I will dearly miss my friend."



Jim Brennan. Submitted.



Jim Brennan, a past president of the Irish American Club of St. Clair County and 2010 CelticFest grand marshal, and Maryanne Campbell, a past board member, talk during the kickoff breakfast on Friday, March 4, 2016, at Lynch's Irish Tavern in Port Huron. *Jackie Smith/Times Herald*

How he honored history and heritage

Jenise Brennan said she and her husband had plans to travel in his retirement. They were supposed to go to Europe for three weeks this summer before COVID-19 canceled those plans.

"Ireland was his favorite place to go," she said. "I'm so glad we were able to get as many trips as we did in. Because he was only retired for three days before all of this happened. He had a very short retirement."

Jim Brennan's appreciation for Ireland also manifested as a member of the local Irish American Club. He was the grand marshal for Port Huron's St. Patrick's Day Parade in 2010.

He was also honored by the state for work with Michigan's historical markers. He spent nearly two decades collecting information, posting them on his website, www.michmarkers.com, and received the 2013 Gov. John B. Swainson Award from the Michigan Historical Commissioner. The award honors state, county and municipal employees who go beyond their jobs to help preserve Michigan's history.

He'd collected information on 1,700 markers at the time, making it available at www.michmarkers.com. The website currently states it addresses more than 1,800 markers.

Jenise Brennan said he'd considered it one of his most "fun accomplishments."

"We went on many adventures to places to people don't normally go to," she said. "They're off the beaten path, they're little towns with histories that people didn't know about."



Jim Brennan, center, pictured earlier in 2020 surrounded by family. Brennan died on July 19 just a few months after he retired as the city of Port Huron's information technology director. *Jenise Brennan*.

A man who loved his grandchildren

Family members said Brennan, an Emmett resident, was a big supporter of the Yale Bulldog community, having served as a school board member for 12 years.

Jenise Brennan said he was also a big support of school athletics his grandkids were involved with.

Fiedler also recalled the many conversations he had with Brennan about high school volleyball. His daughter and Brennan's granddaughter both played, although at different schools.

"Jim was so very proud of all his grandchildren," he said.

"He rarely missed an event," Jenise Brennan said, be it track, basketball, tennis and cross country.

A "voracious reader," Jenise said her husband dug in deep into genealogical research and a variety of subjects, adding, "He could tell you things. It was like, 'How do you even remember all this stuff?'"

In mid-conversation Monday, their daughter Nicole, chimed in about the way her father spoke in a way that "would command your full attention."

"Because whatever he was going to say was that profound or profoundly witty," she said.

Services to remember Brennan were being held Tuesday and Wednesday this week. A visitation was set for 2 to 8 p.m. Tuesday at Kaatz Funeral Directors in Richmond. A rite of Christian burial was set for 10:30 a.m. Wednesday at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Catholic Church in Emmett with a 9:30 a.m. visitation.

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