

Thomas, James Michael

June 21, 1946 - July 28, 2016



James Michael Thomas of Gibraltar, Mich., and Burnt Store Marina, Fla., a man of many passions, lost his 14-month battle with esophageal cancer on July 28. He was 70.

Jim was proudest of his 40 years as a certified public accountant. He particularly cherished his last 16 working years, as senior vice president of First Mercury Financial Corp. of Southfield, Mich., where he played a key role in First Mercury's initial public offering in 2006 and subsequent sale to Fairfax Financial Holdings Ltd.

Weekends were always too short for Jim. Some of his happiest moments were spent watching sports in person and in front of his 70-inch TV, clicking among NASCAR, the Lions, the Tigers, the Eagles and the Phillies (with a side of special love for the LaSalle University Explorers).

But he reluctantly gave up his Michigan International Speedway season tickets when he embraced boating. Just as he did everything else, he boated in a big way, restoring and captaining the Original 6, a classic fiberglass Chris Craft 410. He joined Ford Yacht Club and the Chris Craft Commanders Club, becoming that group's Chief Commander during his final year.

Jim's love of the water stemmed from his 4 years in the Navy. He joined after he graduated from LaSalle University in Philadelphia in 1968 with a degree in accounting. He spent 4 years – 1968 to 1972 – assigned to the USS William M Wood (DD/DDR-715), a World War II-vintage destroyer stationed in the Mediterranean Sea to fend off the Soviets during the Vietnam and the Cold Wars. He rode out his enlistment as a radioman. As he got older, he looked back on those Navy years as some of his best, joining the Wood reunion group, attending 15 reunions with old and new buddies and volunteering as treasurer and membership director.

Jim was born, raised and lived most of his life in Philadelphia. He attended Roman Catholic High School for three years, but graduated from Lansdale Catholic High School after his family moved in his senior year.

After his years in the service, he began his accounting career at Coopers & Lybrand, but left public accounting in favor of the insurance business, where he found his calling as a financial executive who understood the delicate balance between risk and opportunity.

He is survived by his wife of 16 years, Jennie L Phipps. His two previous marriages ended in divorce. He is also survived by sons Matthew David and Michael John of Johnstown, Pa., two stepsons, Christopher "Kit" Cutler (Larissa Lailla) of San Carlos, Calif., and Daniel J. Cutler (Christiane Wurmstedt) and granddaughter Ida Lou Cutler, all of New Orleans; his brothers Walter J. Jr. (Linda) of Somers Point, N.J., and John E. (Denise) of Rome, Ga.; his sister Eileen of Largo, Fla.; and his sister Patty of Bradenton, Fla.. He also is survived by as-good-as-daughter Meg Reimer Treat (Robert) of West Bloomfield, Mich.; and by numerous nieces, nephews and great nieces and nephews.

He was preceded in death by his mother Elizabeth Stead Thomas Familiare (John) and by his father Walter J. Thomas Sr. and stepmother Katherine "Kay" Granieri.

Graveside services will be held at Bay Pines National Cemetery in St. Petersburg, Fla., Oct. 7 at 10:45 a.m. with luncheon to follow. All friends and family are welcome. In lieu of flowers – the cemetery doesn't allow them – please donate to [Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary for Camilla Hall or the retirement fund](#) or [LaSalle University](#)'s program to help students in need.

More than anything else, Jim loved sports. If you play it with a ball, a puck or it goes round in circles fast, he was a fan. His father introduced him to short-track racing and he always had a special fondness for dirt-tracks, the grittier the better. For years, he never missed a Indy 500, but his favorite race track moments were at Michigan Speedway where he was a season ticketholder in the SkyLounge Suites, alternating between the bar and a seat overlooking the start/finish line.

Jim grew up in Center City Philly listening to DooWop and Philly R&B. He also liked country music and good-time rock n' roll. That boy could dance.

Jim spent four years in the U.S. Navy, seeing the world from the deck of U.S.S. William M. Wood, DD-715, a World War II Destroyer, where he was a radioman and a speedy teletype operator. In the last 15 years, the Wood reunion group has been one of his passions. He made a difference, volunteering; researching the history and life of William M. Wood, the nation's first surgeon general; and recruiting new members.

Jim was a 40-year member of the Pennsylvania Association of Certified Public Accountants. Do you need a receipt from 1992? Just ask.

He also fervently loved Lake Erie and E Dock of Ford Yacht Club in Grosse Ile, Michigan. He restored -- well, he signed the checks – two classic Chris Crafts, a 1982 410 and a 1987 Amerisport, and he was active in the Chris Craft Commander Club, serving as the Chief Commander at the time of his death.

To the end, he was the glue that held his family together. He was loved, and he will be missed.

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