

Ferndale Fixture Passes Away

BY JASON MICHAEL

FERNDALE - Kevin Rogers, longtime community activist and owner of Just 4 Us gift shop, died Monday, Jan. 5. He was 57.

Raised in Clinton Township, Rogers was a Boy Scout growing up. In fact, he attained the rank of Eagle Scout, something he remained proud of until the end.

"I did not return my ribbon," Rogers told BTL last year. "It's mine. I earned it. They'll take it out of my cold dead hands if they want it back."

Always joking, Rogers kept his sense of humor even after being diagnosed with cancer – stage four melanoma – last spring. Though the cancer spread quickly, Rogers remained in good spirits as he battled valiantly against the disease. Fundraisers were held in June and November to help with medical costs, and Rogers remained a regular presence in the store he had owned since 2004.

It was there that Rogers spoke with BTL last summer about his health and his life.

"It's kicking me in the ass big time," Rogers said of the cancer at the time. "It's come after me with both barrels, and hopefully the doctors are ready to fight with both barrels, because I am."

Rogers reminisced about growing up in Clinton Township and bragged he was the youngest elected official in the state when, in 1975, at the age of 18, he was elected to the post of city constable.

"I ran in an all Republican area and beat out a 25-year Republican incumbent," Rogers said. "I ran for reelection, won twice and resigned because I met the love of my life and moved out of the city."

Rogers ran for constable again when he relocated to Ferndale. He won, but would never serve in the position.

"At the same time that I won, they passed an initiative to abolish the constable position in the city," Rogers remembered.

In 1999, the Ferndale City Council passed a human rights resolution that called for an end to discrimination against gays. Soon a petition drive was underway to rescind it. Joann Willcock held a meeting in her home for those interested in supporting the ordinance at the ballot. It was there



Kevin Rogers (left) with Glenn LeBoeuf (right).

that she met Rogers, who co-chaired the campaign with her. The two soon became very close.

"Kevin is like a brother, like a part of my family, a part of me," Willcock said. "He's just been a part of my life for probably the last 15 years, and we just became such good friends. I'm going to miss him desperately."

In 2004, Willcock helped Rogers purchase Just 4 Us from original owner Michael Lary, and the two became business partners as well as friends.

"It was basically about a year and a half that we worked with the human rights ordinance," Willcock recalled. "We just got to have such a close relationship and we talked about our dreams, and his dream was to have a business of his own. So when Just 4 Us came up for sale, I was in a position where I could help with that. That's why we did it. It was a way for me to give him his dream."

Rogers thrived as storeowner, even as the economy took a downward swing. But Just 4 Us was as much community center as anything.

"I met Kevin at the bookstore and we just kind of hit it off right off the bat," said longtime friend Michael Nelson. "Our relationship evolved to

the point that we were hanging out together outside the bookstore and doing a lot of things together like Sunday morning breakfast. I have Kevin and his bookstore to thank for me meeting most of the friends I have today."

Peter Artemas is another customer turned close friend who was very active in helping Rogers over the past year.

"When he bought the store, he inherited me," said Artemas. "The 10 plus years that I knew him, we would hang out three or four times a week. I can't say how important he was to me because I'm only just realizing it myself. But he was better than any boyfriend could be. He was better than any friend could be. He just had a spirit about him."

"He had this kindness that people don't have anymore," Artemas continued. "He was always giving. Anytime anybody had troubles and walked into his store, he would look for ways, sometimes extreme ways, to help them."

A funeral service for Rogers took place Saturday, Jan. 10 at St. Margaret of Scotland Catholic Church, located at 21201 E. 13 Mile Road in St. Clair Shores.