

## Former News Press publisher Jim Bellatti dies at 89 Known for his passion for public service

Michelle Charles [mcharles@stwnewspress.com](mailto:mcharles@stwnewspress.com)

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James R. "Jim" Bellatti, former publisher of the Stillwater News Press died Tuesday morning. He was 89 years old.

Born July 7, 1927, Bellatti came from a publishing family that operated The Blackwell Tribune, a morning newspaper in Blackwell for more than 20 years before they moved to Stillwater in 1941.

His father bought The Stillwater News and The Payne County News then added The Stillwater Gazette and The Stillwater Daily Press to his holdings.

The first issue of the combined Stillwater Daily News-Press published Nov. 10, 1941.

Jim Bellatti was 12 years old when the family relocated to Stillwater. He graduated from Stillwater High School, where he met his wife Louise Crosnoe Bellatti, in 1945.

They would have four children, Charles Richard "Rick" Bellatti, Jane Bellatti Armstrong and husband David, Susan Bellatti Glasscock and husband Kirby, and Becky Bellatti Bittle and husband Robert. They have 11 grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

Following graduation, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy where he served as a Seaman 1/C Radar Technician from 1945 through 1946.

He returned to Stillwater upon discharge to attend Oklahoma A&M and help his brother Lawrence Fitzhugh "Chub" Bellatti launch KSPI radio.

Jim and Louise were married Dec. 20, 1947.

The Bellatti family saw community involvement as a vital part of its role in Stillwater and Jim was no exception. He said that attitude was handed down from his parents C.R. and Edith Bellatti.

"Our family believes we are here to serve," he said when inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1989.

In addition to serving as station manager for KSPI radio from 1951-61, helping to found and operate Network Service, the sports broadcast service that would later become the OSU and OU networks and serving as co-publisher and editor of the Stillwater News Press from 1961 through 1997, Bellatti was deeply involved in community affairs.

He belonged to numerous civic and philanthropic organizations and received many awards for his community service and his leadership in the civic and business realms.

He was inducted into the Stillwater Chamber of Commerce Hall of Fame in 1997.

He served as Civil Defense director for the city of Stillwater and was a founder of the Oklahoma Emergency Broadcast System, serving as its Chairman for more than 20 years.

A News Press article from the 1950s tells of the time he coordinated a rescue effort in response to a mass fainting during a musical performance at OSU after exhaust fumes from buses idling outside the performance hall entered the building and caused members of the choir to pass out.

Former KSPI employee Gene Ragsdale remembers Bellatti calling him to the basement of city hall to get updates from storm spotters and broadcast storm warnings over the radio.

Getting information, whether it was local or national news, to readers and listeners quickly and accurately was always the goal, Ragsdale said.

He also remembers Bellatti calling him around 2 a.m. on June 5, 1968, and telling him to get to the radio station and start broadcasting because Robert Kennedy had been assassinated.

As an alumnus of the Oklahoma State University College of Business Administration, Bellatti served the university in several capacities over the years.

He chaired the capital campaign to build the School of Journalism.

He was part of the search committee that brought Sen. Jim Halligan to OSU as its 16th president in 1993. He was a member of the university's Centennial Advisory Commission and was named president of the Friends of Old Central as well as a member of the Board of Governors for the OSU Foundation.

In recognition of his service and accomplishments, Bellatti was inducted into the OSU Alumni Association Hall of Fame in 1999 and received the Henry G. Bennett Distinguished Service Award in 1993.

He was part of the effort to bring a Young Men's Christian Association family center to Stillwater and eventually held local, national and international offices with the YMCA, serving as president of the World Alliance of YMCAs from 1985 through 1988 and traveling the world in that role.

Always active in the Presbyterian Church, he served both local and national roles during his life.

Bellatti is a former president of the Oklahoma Press Association and received its highest honor, The Milt Phillips Award in 1988.

He was inducted into the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame in 1987.

Bellatti was well-loved by his family and thought of fondly by friends, colleagues, members of the community and former employees.

“He was always a very kind man,” Ragsdale said. “He cared about his employees and those of us who are still around will miss him.”

Personal friend Owen Thomas, who can look back on six decades of monthly dinners and shared wedding anniversary celebrations with Jim and Louise, says Jim made a huge impact on the world around him.

“Jim was always involved in the community,” Thomas said. “It’s hard to say any one special thing he did. He did a lot of things that were special. He was a great citizen ... A person would be hard pressed to say anybody was a better citizen, not just of Stillwater but of the world.”

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