

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' OFFICE  
NEWS RELEASE



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**Remembering Tom Dempsey, Kent County Corporate Counsel**

**GRAND RAPIDS** – Corporate Counsel Thomas J. Dempsey died last night after a brief but courageous battle against cancer. Tom leaves behind his wife Karen, children Travis Dempsey, Christine (Ronald) Kemker and James Dempsey, and grandson Channing Dempsey. He was 55 years old.

Tom was hired as Corporate Counsel for the County in March 2014. He was known for his wealth of knowledge as well as his ability to break down complex legal issues for members of the Kent County Board of Commissioners and staff from the Administrator's Office. He and his team members Linda Howell and Sangeeta Ghosh handled dozens of lawsuits, hundreds of policy and contractual questions and Freedom of Information Act requests on behalf of two dozen County departments.

The Board of Commissioners remembers Tom's enthusiasm and expertise. "Tom was an ever-present figure in our County meetings, seated to my right, to advise on procedure and provide legal counsel," said Jim Saalfeld, Chair of the Kent County Board of Commissioners. "Because Tom and I were both lawyers and engaged in municipal issues, I felt a special bond with Tom. I am saddened by this loss. The thoughts and prayers of the entire Board of Commissioners are with Tom's wife Karen and his family."

Dempsey practiced general municipal law with two different firms before working as a municipal leader. He served as Village Manager in Sparta (1996-2002) and City Manager in Portland, Michigan (2003-2014). "Tom was always genuine, always accessible and had a true servant's heart," said Wayman Britt, Interim County Administrator. "His experience working in municipal leadership made him a valued member of our team. My deepest condolences and prayers go out to his family and staff at this difficult time. I will miss him."

Dempsey, a graduate of Loyola University of Chicago Law School, was a member of the Michigan Bar Association, the International City/County Management Association, and the Michigan Local Government Management Association among other professional organizations.

"His work leading the legal team was professional, polished, and personal," said Linda Howell, Assistant Corporate Counsel. "His combination of legal experience and municipal leadership gave him unique insight and the ability to evaluate situations and craft solutions that prevented problems and provided a foundation for positive results and outcomes. It was an honor to work with and learn from Tom."

"Tom's legal counsel to the County was always driven by what was in the best interest of the County," said Sangeeta Ghosh, Assistant Corporate Counsel. "He was a great leader and inspired others to lead a meaningful life both professionally and personally. He leaves his legacy having guided many people in their professional journey."

Funeral arrangements are being handled through Matthyse-Kuiper-DeGraaf Funeral Home:  
[www.mkdfuneralhome.com](http://www.mkdfuneralhome.com).

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