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## Jinx Ferrari stood up for the Range

By **RENEE RICHARDSON**  
Senior Reporter

Friends and family were still dealing Friday with the shock of longtime Crow Wing County Commissioner John **"Jinx" Ferrari's** death Thursday. He was 72.

**Ferrari**, who served on the county board for 26 years, died at Abbott Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis.

Roy Luukkonen, retired Crow Wing County auditor, stopped in at the courthouse to see **Ferrari** a few weeks ago and said they had a nice talk. While he worried at times about the commissioner's health, Luukkonen said he didn't expect to get the sudden news of his death Thursday night.

"It was a shock," Luukkonen said. "I guess I thought **Jinx** was going to be around for a long time."

When Luukkonen retired last year, **Ferrari** joked he expected they would run out their time with the county together. The two met when **Ferrari** was first elected to the board in 1980 and Luukkonen was chief deputy auditor. Luukkonen said one of the things he most appreciated about **Ferrari** was always knowing where he stood.



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"You could always count on him," Luukkonen said.

A strong advocate of the Cuyuna Range, **Ferrari** often had to remind fellow commissioners the county did not solely encompass the Brainerd lakes area. The Crosby native committed a lot of time to the development of the 4,500-acre Cuyuna Country State Recreational Area from a place with little maintenance into a property with multiple nature and recreational uses.

Brainerd Dispatch/Renee Richardson

Active with the National Recreational and Park Association, **Ferrari** helped secure funding for the Cuyuna Lakes State Trail, which is popular with bicyclists.

**Ferrari**, chairman of the county board at the time of his death, served on the county's Lands and Forestry Committee and was instrumental in getting the Trus Joist plant in Deerwood.

"He was a steward of our forest as well," Luukkonen said.

**Ferrari** is believed to be the longest serving Crow Wing County commissioner, at least in modern memory, and Luukkonen said his tenure ranks up there among county commissioners in all of Minnesota's 87 counties. In a political landscape where voters make wholesale changes, **Ferrari** maintained his district's support and was devoted to his constituents.

"He was just a wonderful person," said a friend, Rick Wiersgalla, president of Unity Bank, Crosby. "He is going to be deeply missed." **Ferrari** served the bank's board of directors since 1997.

"He was a great supporter of the area," Wiersgalla said. "We are deeply saddened and our sympathies go out to his family."

**Ferrari** was a private man who was proud of his family but never boastful, Wiersgalla said. And while the commissioner could exhibit a gruff exterior, Wiersgalla said he was a caring person.

"He had a very big heart," Wiersgalla said. "He would help anybody he could and he never asked for anything in return. He was a true gentleman. He was just a wonderful person. He was a one-of-a-kind person. Anything I needed I could always ask **Jinx**."

Terry Sluss, former county commissioner, served with **Ferrari** for 10 years. Sluss said the county campus is part of **Ferrari's** legacy. The master plan would not have been possible without **Ferrari's** support in 1993 to purchase land across the street from the historic courthouse. Commissioners previously said without that purchase, the county government would have been forced to leave downtown Brainerd.

"He didn't like technology," Sluss said. **Ferrari** mentioned just last Tuesday that he used a computer grudgingly. "He used to tease me about cell phones. He certainly will be missed."

Known to be an even influence on the board, **Ferrari** served on nearly every one of an extensive list of county committees during his tenure. He had a special emphasis on topics close to the Cuyuna Range, particularly the preservation of its history and mineland. He also enjoyed serving on the Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport Commission.

"It's a hard thing to face up to," airport manager Steve Sievek said of **Ferrari's** sudden death. "I just talked to him on Monday and everything was fine."

Sievek served with **Ferrari** on the county board for eight years, counted him as a good friend and worked with him on the airport commission. Of all the fellow commissioners he served with Sievek said **Ferrari** had the most influence on him.

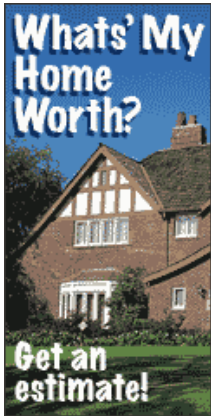
"Not the most outspoken, he listened a lot more than he talked but I learned in my time with him when he decided to say something it was pretty good time to pay attention," Sievek said.

Although quiet, Sievek said **Ferrari** could be feisty about the things he was passionate about. **Ferrari** was able to see plans for the airport's big runway project come to

#### Meeting changed

**As the result of the death of Crow Wing County Board chair John Ferrari, the Crow Wing County Board will not meet Tuesday. The board meeting was rescheduled for 9 a.m. Wednesday.**

**The 9 a.m. Building and Grounds Committee and CAM will not meet Tuesday.**



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fruition. He was a supporter of the airport, dedicated to his commissioner's role and loyal to Crow Wing County's interests, Sievek said.

**Ferrari** died one day short of his 51st wedding anniversary. He married Joyce Heinneman on April 20, 1956.

In addition to his public service, **Ferrari** was an area businessman. He owned and operated The Crosby Bar, Dee J's Floral, Range Manufacturing and the former Snow Hut, all in Crosby. He was a member of the Brainerd Elks No. 615, Myrin-James American Legion Post 443 of Ironton and a member of the Holiday Rambler Group.

He was born in Crosby on Jan. 11, 1935, to John and Amelia **Ferrari**. He served on the Cuyuna Range Heritage Preservation Society, and was past secretary with the Crosby Fire Department.

Funeral services will be 11 a.m. Tuesday at the Immanuel Lutheran Church in Crosby. Burial, with military honors by the Myrin-James American Legion Post, will be in Lakewood Cemetery in Crosby. Friends may call from 4-8 p.m. Monday at the Immanuel Lutheran Church and one hour before the service Tuesday. Koop Funeral Home in Crosby is handling service arrangements.

The Crow Wing County Board will not meet on Tuesday for its regular meeting and will meet Wednesday instead.

By law, a special election to fill **Ferrari's** board seat will take place not less than 30 days and not more than 60 days following the vacancy. The board is expected to adopt a resolution calling for a special election at its next meeting.

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