

WASHINGTON



APRIL 25, 2023

POLITICS LOCAL NATIONAL WORLD OPINIONS A&E LIFESTYLE HEALTH

OBITUARY

# Norm Kent, co-founder of South Fl News, dies at 73

Marijuana and LGBTQ rights champion, baseball fanatic, radio talk host passed away at

Published 2 weeks ago on April 13, 2023

By **Special to the Washington Blade**



South Florida Gay News co-founder **Norm Kent**. (Photo courtesy SFGN)



***By Steve Rothaus for South Florida Gay News***



Attorney Norm Kent — relentless fighter for marijuana and LGBT rights, baseball fan, popular radio talk host and co-founder of South Florida Gay News — died at 73 on April 13, 2023, months after learning he had pancreatic cancer.



In his final interview on March 28, Kent told SFGN he was diagnosed in October 2021. “One day, I said, ‘Let’s fly to Atlanta and go to a Dodgers game. If they’re telling me I have cancer, we’re going to a baseball game.’”



## BOLIVIA ES LA SEDE DE LA IX CONFERENCIA REGIONAL ILGALAC

“You definitely can’t accuse him of not being interesting,” said Fort Lauderdale attorney Russell Cormican, Kent’s law partner for nearly 25 years.

“The most important thing looking at Norm’s legacy is that he reminds us how important to stand up for what you believe in, no matter how unpopular it might be or what type of repercussions or blowback you might get from people, if you know what you’re doing is the right thing,” said Cormican, 51. “When he sees an injustice, he’s not afraid to lead the way against it. That’s the common thread that’s gone through his life.”

Born Norman Elliott Kent in Brooklyn, N.Y., on Oct. 18, 1949, his family soon moved to Woodmere in Nassau County on Long Island.

“Ever since I was a little kid growing up in North Woodmere and taking Bus 53 to junior league games, I was a good, competitive baseball player. The doctor once said I had steel springs in my legs,” Kent said. “I just loved the game. I love it now because you don’t know what’s going to happen on the next pitch. It’s not scripted like a movie. Like comedians, you never know what the next joke is going to be.”

To never miss a game, Kent equipped his longtime small, two-bedroom Victoria Park home with 16 televisions.

“It looks like mission control,” Cormican said. “Heaven forbid there are four baseball games on. He has to see each one.”

Thirty years ago, he even owned a baseball card shop at the Gateway Shopping Center in Fort Lauderdale, Norm Kent’s Baseball Heaven.

Kent, who is survived by older brother Richard and younger brother Alan, once flirted with becoming a professional ballplayer but their dad Jesse told him, “You’re going to be in the family.”

After graduating in 1971 from Hofstra University on Long Island with a bachelor’s degree in social sciences and sociology, Kent made his father happy and received a Hofstra law degree in 1975.

During college, Kent began establishing a national reputation as a leading proponent of legalizing marijuana use.

Kent joined [NORML, the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws](#) in 1992 and served 1992-94 on NORML’s national board, rejoined the governing body in 1998 and in 2013-14 served as national board chairman.

In 1988, Kent made headlines representing singer Elvy Musikka, a Hollywood woman blinded by cataracts who was busted for growing pot in her own backyard.

“After 23 different operations for cataracts,” Kent recalled March 28, “she found the cataracts that let her see was by taking marijuana. It had a certain THC in it which let her see.”

He continued: “Who was her government, or the president, to stop her from seeing? The police came to her house in Hollywood and said we’re going to have to arrest you for smoking pot, she said, ‘I dare you to. I don’t care. It’s my life. It’s my right to see.’”

“She went to a lawyer. She went to me. And I said let’s go to court. [We argued a case in Broward Circuit Court](#) before Judge Mark E. Polen and we won. He said your right to marijuana is a lot more important than the right of the government to tell you what you can smoke. That case became the seminal case for hundreds of others.”

While dying of cancer, Kent himself couldn’t find pain relief smoking marijuana: “No, I had a respiratory condition in 2018 when I got a defibrillator and pacemaker.”

Shortly after college, Kent worked briefly as an urban affairs analyst for the New York Legislature, and in 1978 relocated to South Florida where his parents had moved.

Kent never officially told them he was gay.

“My parents always suspected he was gay from the time he moved to Fort Lauderdale brother Alan, a retired psychologist. “They would always ask me, ‘Do you think Norm gay?’”

Alan Kent, who also is gay, came out to their parents in 1982. Five years later, after th died, Norm called Alan from Provincetown, Mass., with some news: I’m gay.

“I said really? Tell me something I don’t know,” Alan Kent recalled.

Before he died, Norm Kent said that for him “there was no such thing as being in [the

“There was always this fear that as a gay lawyer it might cost me economically,” Kent “But there I was, a gay lawyer who was representing gay bars and gay friends and gay

Kent said that decades ago he never cared if people knew his sexual orientation. Once Florida Sun Sentinel reporter interviewed Kent for a story and asked about rumors th gay — and then never published that he was.

“It’s not my job to do their thinking for them. It’s my job to be who I am. And I’m pro every minute and moment of who I am and what I was,” Kent said. “And if that meant faggot who could throw a baseball, that’s their problem.”

After he moved to South Florida, Norm Kent briefly wrote a column for Playbill maga taught sociology at Florida Atlantic University. Soon he became known locally as an a for runaway gay youths who hung out at Fort Lauderdale Beach.

On the strip, Kent interviewed 30 boys ages 12 to 20 working as prostitutes. By 1984, spoken with about 150 boys on the strip — a third of them said they had sold their bo survive.

For years, Fort Lauderdale police and politicians worked to downplay the local homel problem, according to a 1989 Miami Herald profile of Kent headlined “Upholder of th Unpopular.”

“It was like the mayor in Amity denying that there was a shark out there,” Kent told t Herald, referring to the blockbuster 1975 film of the era, “Jaws.”

Kent spent the rest of his life advocating for homeless gay youth. In 2000 — after having survived treatment for lymphoma — Kent met John Fugate, then 18 and disowned from school by his Lakeland family. Kent, who at the time published the Express Gay News in Lauderdale, offered Fugate a job delivering newspapers.

“I was living under the bridge on Federal Highway just south of 26th Street,” Fugate said on March 28, weeping, a few feet from Kent’s hospice bedside. “And Norman found out I was sleeping on the street and he invites me to the Floridian Restaurant for dinner.”

That night, Kent told him: “I just want you to know if you ever need a place to stay, you can always stay at my house. Here are the keys.”

At first, Fugate said he was “too proud and scared” to come to Kent’s home. But a few days later, about 3 a.m. on a cold, rainy morning, Fugate showed up. Eventually, he moved into Kent’s home.

Despite their age difference, Kent, 53, and Fugate, 21, became partners. Seven years later, they ended their romantic relationship. But they remained close friends and continued to see each other on and off. After Kent’s health began to decline in 2018, Fugate and his new partner, Brian Swinford, stepped in as Kent’s caregivers.

Fugate said Thursday that Kent died of a recently diagnosed lung cancer.

On April 10, [Fugate posted on Facebook](#): “Sometimes you start to doubt your beliefs and wonder why it’s happening to good people and telling yourself why can’t the good people win. In why does it have to be this way? I’m so lucky to have had Norm Kent in my life forever. He changed me to make me a better person, there’s no way on earth I could ever repay him. I can only show him the love that I have for him other than being here for him now.”

Mark Possien, Kent’s close friend since 1977, described his Victoria Park home as “a room where so many people.”

“If you were down and out, he would invite you to come and stay with him. He’d get you off drugs. If you were on drugs, he tried to get you off drugs,” Possien said. “He was selfless. He did everything with no expectation of any kind of return or reward from the person.”

About 1991, Possien moved into a spare room in the Victoria Park house where Kent and him launched Catalog X, one of the first gay-owned mail-order adult toy businesses.

“I was Dildo Central!” Kent wrote in his final SFGN column published March 30.

By 1998, Possien had opened two Catalog X retail stores, one in Fort Lauderdale, the South Beach. “It was a gay department store. We had everything we thought gay people interested in.”

Possien, who closed Catalog X in 2003, now lives in Lake Worth. In late March, Kent told that his “biggest disappointment” about having terminal cancer was not having enough “to sue Ron DeSantis for the drag queen stuff.”

“He said, ‘I’ve taken on all these cases all my life, I didn’t make money on them and sometimes they cost me money,’” Possien said. “When he saw something that was wrong, unjust, he wanted to fix it.”

During college on Long Island, Kent dabbled as a reporter writing for the local Jewish and Nassau Herald.

Later in South Florida, Kent himself became a media celebrity.

“He’s lived his life in the public eye,” Kent’s brother Alan said. “Norman has done a lot of stuff and he’s had a lot of recognition for what he accomplished.”

Norm Kent’s name frequently appeared in both the Sun Sentinel and the Miami Herald. Among his high-profile legal cases:

- Helping adult video store owners charged with obscenity in the 1980s.
- Representing the owners of nude dance clubs in the 1990s, when South Florida municipalities tried to shut them down.
- Defending countless men charged with public sex in restrooms, in parks and on beaches throughout South Florida well into the 2000s.

A 1992 case that got particular attention: When gay radio superstar Neil Rogers, Kent’s friend, was charged with indecent exposure at an adult movie theater in South Beach.

“Millions” of other men were arrested under the same circumstances, Kent recalled.

“Only straight men would go free. ... And people like Neil would get into trouble. I said, ‘the hell is going on here? This isn’t right. This isn’t fair to gay people.’ Over the years,

would be wrongfully and unjustly arrested and prosecuted.”

From 1989 to 1992, Kent had his own daily talk show on WFTL AM. Later, he hosted radio programs including one broadcast live during the breakfast rush at the Florida: Olas Boulevard.

He also represented Rogers in the radio business. “I wound up making him, as his agent, a million a year,” Kent said.

Kent said that for years, Rogers made fun of him on the radio and elsewhere, sometimes referring to him as “Norma.”

“Do you know that they gave me an award for donating money to the Broward General Society in 2000,” Kent recalled. “And they put my name up on a plaque. And one of the people who made the plaque, she really thought my name was Norma. She didn’t put ‘Norma’ on the plaque. She put ‘Norma.’ I said, ‘Neil, you did that.’ We thought that was hilarious.”

In 1999, Kent took on a new title: Newspaper publisher. He launched the Express Gay News, which covered all aspects of queer life in South Florida.

Kent sold the paper four years later to Window Media, a national LGBT media group that later renamed it the South Florida Blade. Window Media went bankrupt in November 2009 and quickly shut down the Blade. Most of the staff of the Blade reorganized and launched Florida Agenda, which shut down in 2016.

In January of 2010 Kent launched a new newspaper and website called South Florida Gay News, along with a new business partner Piero Guidugli, who stayed with the company until his death in 2020.

Celebrating 400 issues of SFGN in 2018, Kent and Guidugli highlighted a few of their most compelling stories, including:

- A five-year long program of entrapment by two West Palm Beach policemen who had entrapped more than 300 men.
- Hollywood police fired officer Mikey Verdugo in 2010 after the department learned he had previously appeared in a 15-minute gay porn scene 14 years earlier. (Verdugo now owns Bodytek in Hollywood, Davie and Wilton Manors.)



- The 2010 firing of licensed practical nurse Ray Fetcho AKA drag queen Tiny Tina, when it was found out that 35 years earlier Fetcho had been charged with a lewd act for hosting a wet joke contest at the old Copa nightclub in Fort Lauderdale. (Fetcho died at 68 of cancer and in 2015.)

In 2016, Kent wrote in a publisher's column about the last of the big gay bar raids in Dade County, when in 1991 then-Sheriff Nick Navarro created a media spectacle arresting the Copa and at Club 21 in Hallandale Beach.

“Sheriff Navarro orchestrated the raid as if he were hosting a Hollywood opening,” Kent wrote. “As the news report by Steve Rothaus indicates, the sheriff turned the raid into a media spectacle placing the entire LGBT community in a false light. Navarro arrived on the scene, believe it or not, in a helicopter, accompanied by his wife, dressed in an evening gown. Reporters were shocked by the crass celebration, amazingly accompanied by foreign Russian dignitaries who were show off for.”

Kent said he never regretted publishing a story, even if it got him into hot water with powerful power figures, including activists and elected officials.

“It’s the newspaper. It’s what editorial cartoons are all about,” he said. “It’s not for the politician to be thin skinned. It’s for the politician to go naked before the canon and the fact that he, too, can be criticized no matter how good they think they are.”

The past five years, Kent suffered several life-threatening health setbacks. He had two major surgeries to remove tumors, COVID in 2021 and then the pancreatic cancer diagnosis in 2022.

Last September, he stepped down as publisher and handed the running of SFGN to Assistant Publisher Jason Parsley.

“Jason has established himself as a very powerful voice, not afraid to stand up to anyone,” Kent said March 28.

Parsley, 45, a one-time hair stylist who in 2007 got a journalism degree from Florida International University, has worked at SFGN since 2011.

These days, a local LGBT newspaper and website are more important than ever, Parsley said.

“Our stories, need to be told, must be told,” he said. “Unlike big corporate media, an paper is invested in the community.”

“You have a hostile legislature that wants to silence and erase our voices and stories. because this isn’t taught in school, places like the gay media are where you are going informed and educated and learn about the queer community.”

Parsley said Kent “had a passion for journalism and being a storyteller.”

“He leaves a long legacy of journalism and a dogged pursuit of the truth,” Parsley said wasn’t just a news reporter. He also wrote scathing and biting — truthful — editorials would sometimes call out members of our own community and push the ball forward

---

*Journalist **Steve Rothaus** covered LGBTQ issues for 22 years at the Miami Herald.*

[@SteveRothaus](#) on Twitter.

---

## **Norm Kent’s eloquence and outlook on life expressed final column**

Thirteen days before his passing, on March 30, South Florida Gay News published an column written by Norm Kent entitled, “What is Hospice and What it Means to Me,” i he movingly and eloquently described his outlook on life and his passion for journali noted by those who knew him.

“Last week, the doctors told me about a new and invasive cancer and tumor that wou even more sudden and maybe midnight trips to the ER and hospitals, ending the day newer needles in my arms and weakening veins,” Kent wrote.

“Nope, no more,” he continued. “I think I have done my share for here and now. An a gay rights and your rights; for NORML and human rights. Your body. Your life. Your c I have made you proud.”

He reminisced about his life experiences and those dear to him along with loved ones have been at his side during his illness before stating, “So folks, that all brings me to health care hospice, like President Jimmy Carter has just done. It’s not to say goodbye

thank you for the many hellos. From the many memories; from your local hospitality establishments and homes and businesses.”

And in keeping with his philosophy on life, Kent concluded by saying, “Keep on doing right, remembering what is right is not always popular, and what is popular is not always right. You will always find a path belonging to you. Like Yogi Berra, New York Yankees Hall of Fame once said, ‘When you come to a fork in the road, take it.’ It’s your own. Forever.”

— Lou C]

**RELATED TOPICS:** #ALAN KENT #BRIAN SWINFORD #ELVY MUSIKKA #EXPRESS GAY NEWS #FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY #JASON PARSLEY #JOHN FUGATE #MARK POSSIEN #MIKEY VERDUGO #NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR THE REFORM OF MARIJUANA LAWS #NEIL ROGERS #NICK NAVARRO #NORIE #PIERO GUIDUGLI #RAY FETCHO #RUSSELL CORMICAN #SOUTH FLORIDA GAY NEWS #STEVE ROTHHAUS #T

DON'T MISS



**Howard Bragman, veteran publicist and LGBTQ activist, dies at 66**

ADVERTISEMENT

FUND LGBTQ JOURNALISM

SIGN UP FOR E-BLAST

AROUND THE WEB