



## Kenneth E. Bender

September 7, 1925 - March 12, 2023

Kenneth Eugene Bender died peacefully surrounded by his loving family on Sunday, March 12, 2023 at 97 years of age. He was born at home on September 7, 1925 in Cape Girardeau, MO to Martin Gottfried and Elinor Hermine Wilder Bender. He was preceded in death by his parents, his wife of 71 years Martha, their grandson Clayton Bender Van Wagner, and his siblings Louise Bender Roth, Edward Martin Bender, and Margaret Bender Cruce.

At 17, Kenneth enlisted in the Army Air Corps, and after graduating from Cape Girardeau Central High School in 1943, he was called to active duty. He proudly served during World War II in the Pacific Theater as Central Fire Control gunner on the B-29 Superfortress bomber. During his service he co-invented the non-synchronous fire interrupter which was then installed on B-29s to prevent friendly fire among allied forces. Kenneth received the Distinguished Flying Cross, two Bronze Stars, and two Presidential Citations as well as the Southeast Missourian Spirit of America Award in 2013.

Kenneth attended Southeast Missouri State College participating in the a cappella glee choir. On a regional choir tour, Kenneth went dancing with his future wife Martha Ellen Stovall. He graduated with a B.S. in Business Administration on May 24, 1948. Martha graduated from SEMO the morning

of May 15, 1950, and later that afternoon they were married at First Presbyterian Church in Jackson, Missouri. As charter members of St. Andrew Lutheran Church, Kenny and Martha chaired the church's 50th Anniversary Celebration.

Kenneth was the co-owner and operator of Jackson Oil Company with Martha's brother Earl Stovall, Jr., and he was a dedicated community volunteer. He was a Cape Girardeau Public Library governing board member, past president of the Noon Lions Club, and participated in the construction of the Red House Interpretive Center. He was also on the board of directors and past president of Chateau Girardeau, and a founding and continuous board member of Wood & Huston Bank serving until his death. He was a literature and financial enthusiast as well as golfer, reader, woodworker, tinkerer, and ice cream lover. Kenny and Martha celebrated 71 anniversaries together with memorable vacations, family gatherings, and a newsworthy 50-car parade of family and well-wishers commemorating their 70th.

Kenneth is survived by his two daughters Rebecca (John) Van Wagner of Blairsville, GA and Kimberly (Ron) Foltz of Tallahassee, FL, four adoring grandchildren, and six great grandchildren. He was the life force and cornerstone of his family and is deeply missed by them all.

Visitation will be at St. Andrew Lutheran Church Thursday, March 16 from 5-7 p.m. The service will be at the church Friday, March 17 at 11 a.m. with the burial to follow at Cape County Memorial Park Cemetery and a luncheon at the church.

Memorial contributions may be given to St. Andrew Lutheran Church or the River Heritage Museum.

# Cemetery Details

## Cape County Memorial Park Cemetery

2315 Highway 61 North  
Cape Girardeau, MO 63701  
(573) 334-1909  
<https://www.fordandsonsfuneralhome.com/>

# Previous Events

## Visitation

MAR 16. 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM (CT)

St. Andrew Lutheran Church  
804 N. Cape Rock Dr.  
Cape Girardeau, MO 63701

## Funeral Service

MAR 17. 11:00 AM (CT)

St. Andrew Lutheran Church  
804 N. Cape Rock Dr.  
Cape Girardeau, MO 63701

# Tribute Wall

MH

“ *What a wonderful man! Ron and I so enjoyed with him at reunions in the North Georgia Mountains. Deepest sympathy to all his loving family. He left a legacy for the generations.*

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**Marcia Hair** - March 16, 2023 at 04:07 PM

SU

“ *Becky and Kim, I love that our parents had such a long and wonderful friendship. I loved your daddy! He was so sweet and kind to all. I am thinking of him and your families, who I know will miss him. Love, Susan Stiegemeyer Lewis*

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**Susan** - March 16, 2023 at 12:56 PM

SO

“ *I have known Mr. Bender and the whole family most of my life. What great memories I have. I am so sad and sorry for your loss, Becky, Kim and family. Your mom and dad were such wonderful people. I love you all!*



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**Susie Pickett O'Connell** - March 16, 2023 at 10:21 AM