

A Remembrance

Jim Pruitt: The Patient Cowboy



The industry remembers a BCMC fixture whose boots will not be easily filled.

by WTCA Staff

The industry—BCMC tradeshow leadership, exhibitors and staff especially—will miss the presence of James Kent Pruitt at this year's show. The longtime account executive of national exposition service contractor George Fern Co. died suddenly on Wednesday, July 18, at his home in Olathe, KS, of a massive heart attack. Pruitt was 52.

Lovingly known as "JP," Pruitt was born on July 15, 1955, in Springfield, IL. He was a graduate of Shawnee Mission South High School and was employed by Louisville-based George Fern Co.

The BCMC Committee was shocked and saddened by the news. Since starting at George Fern in January 1992, JP worked tirelessly with members of the committee and exhibitors to accommodate their needs year-round. JP facilitated every aspect of exhibitor move in and move-out, which involved a great deal of planning.

Although it required him to spend many weeks away from his family, JP loved his work and it showed. He worked relentlessly, keeping an even temper and a quiet smile during high intensity situations. BCMC exhibitors came to appreciate his composed demeanor. "JP was the GO TO GUY. Always calm, cool and collected even when we were not. Whether finding our trucks, getting equipment in and out, or just where the best place was to get good coffee. He made the BCMC run smoothly. I know my staff will miss him greatly," wrote Brent Davis, Sales Manager of Klaisler Mfg Corp.

Many spoke of his genuine nature and friendship. "He was a guy who NEVER backed down from a challenge and was a true believer in the phrase 'everything works if you let it.' His calm, easy-going manner helped make every year's BCMC trip significantly easier for me. We became friends over the years and I will miss those annual late night chats over an adult beverage when we solved the world's problems. There are not enough good guys in the world, and we lost one in JP. He will be missed," remembered Ray Kunze of ITW Building Components Group Inc.

Steve Shrader of Hundegger USA said, "I was always impressed with JP as a professional and as a friend. He was that calm figure in the heat of setting up for a show that assured you everything would work out...which it always did. A few weeks ago he reminded me he was also a friend; JP invited me and my wife to dinner knowing I lived close to where he would be vacationing. We could all learn from JP."

JP was known for his trademark cowboy boots and meaningful swagger on the show floor. "You always knew things were under control when you saw him walk across the show floor in his cowboy boots, mustache and blue shirt. You knew this because he was the type of man who would do whatever needed to be done and do it himself if necessary. He was dedicated to his job but you also got the sense that he was dedicated to the exhibitors. Dedicated to making this the best and easiest show they had ever been involved in. I will miss his smile and good nature, but most of all I will miss the way he treated me like we were the best of friends even though we only saw each other once a year," Michael Klein of MiTek Industries wrote.

JP also had a profound effect on the BCMC Committee and staff over the years. According to records, his work with BCMC began with the 1992 show in Louisville,

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KY (at the time, Fern was known as Hubbell/Tyner). BCMC became one of his accounts in 1995, and he was Fern's floor manager ever since. To say he had a hand in the BCMC's success during that period is an understatement.

Ben Hershey worked with JP on the Committee for seven years. "It has been a pleasure to have worked with JP since 2000. Over the past few years, I had the opportunity to work with him directly on getting the floor set up and exhibits coordinated. He taught all of us a lot about how to improve the show each year. I will miss him a great deal and the contribution he made to the show," he wrote.

WTCA President and BCMC committee member Barry Dixon appreciated his steady disposition. "JP was the consummate professional while adding a flavor of fun during his tenure with BCMC. I remember him always being calm under fire and very committed to finding solutions while carrying a smile on his face. I will dearly miss our conversations and his invaluable input within the Committee," he said.

Peg Pichette and Jill Zimmerman are two staff members who relied on JP's experience and patience while organizing BCMC each year. "I had the privilege of working with JP for almost eight years. For the last couple of years we often joked that we could read each others' minds. We worked very well together; in fact, I couldn't have asked for a better person to guide me through my first show. He was a special guy. I still find myself wanting and needing to pick up the phone to ask him a question; he always had an answer. I will definitely miss working with him, but more importantly, I will miss a great friend," said Pichette.

Zimmerman won't soon forget his mark on BCMC. "The success of BCMC and our exhibitors was in large part due to JP. He often solved our problems before we knew they existed. He shared our passion for the success of BCMC and wasn't afraid to share ideas on how to help improve it. He was the best multi-tasker known to mankind, and he even baked homemade cookies for our staff every year at Christmas. JP was a wonderful guy and he will be greatly missed. I will miss the cowboy boots at the show," she said.

JP was preceded in death by his father Lynn. Survivors include his wife Elizabeth; daughters, Brittney and Brooke and son, Justin; mother, Marianne; son, Bryan and wife Lisa and their children, Lauren and Lindsay; daughter, Lisa and husband Paul and their children, Alexis and Anna. A memorial service was held on July 22, at D.W. Newcomer's Sons Johnson County Chapel in Overland Park, KS. At the family's request, memorial contributions may be made to the Children of Jim Pruitt Education Fund c/o Credit Union of Johnson County, 14280 W. 135th St., Olathe, KS 66062. **SBC**

Bio information taken from an obituary published in the Kansas City Star newspaper on July 20, 2007. Thanks to James Knudtson of George Fern Company for providing additional information.

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