



# Kevin M. Kelly

FEB 10, 1959 - JUL 30, 2025



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## **Kevin M. Kelly**

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**K**evin Michael Kelly, 66, passed away peacefully at home in Kailua, Oahu, Hawai'i on July 30, 2025 after a long, brave battle against cancer. Kevin is survived by his wife, Carolyn Lewis, and his siblings Anne Keehnen, Maureen (Jim) Busis, Patrick Kelly and Vincent Kelly. He will also be missed by his nephews and nieces, Liam Kelly, Colette Keehnen, Gus Keehnen, Ethan (Sarah) Busis, Hannah Busis, Abigail Busis, Erin Kelly and Shaun Kelly.

Kevin was born in Denver to Richard and Diane (Mersnik) Kelly. The family moved to Houston in 1964 where Kevin grew up. Kevin's father passed away from ALS in 1970 leaving his mother to raise the five children. Kevin graduated from St. Thomas High School in 1977. In gratitude to the school Kevin recently established a scholarship fund for young men being raised by a single mother like he was. Kevin attended SMU in Dallas and graduated from the University of Texas at Austin in 1982 with a BS in Geology. Kevin went on to study oceanography at San Diego State University. Then, in a move that would determine the course of Kevin's life, one of his professors recommended him to a colleague at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. Kevin accepted the offer in Hawai'i, earning a MS in Oceanography in 1988. Over the next three decades Kevin transitioned into a wide-ranging, highly successful career at the University of Hawai'i in business development for marine technology, maritime security, the administration and management of large scientific grants, and liaising with legislative bodies and government agencies such as DHS and the National Science Foundation. He detoured back to the mainland only once for two years, earning an MBA from Portland State University in 1998. Having settled in the North Shore of Oahu, Kevin recognized the need to help area residents to become more significant in the state's economy. In 2015 Kevin founded the North Shore Economic Vitality Partnership (NSEVP), a non-profit dedicated to promoting economic growth from within the region using community-driven



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solutions. Initially Kevin's side project while still working at the University of Hawai'i, it became his full-time vocation after he retired from the university in 2020. Today NSEVP is a thriving organization, leading the effort to document and improve the region's entire food system to maintain agriculture as an economic pillar in the region's economy. As funding, partnerships and staff all grew, Kevin transitioned from day-to-day leadership to Chairman and CEO.

Kevin was vibrant, curious, and caring. Everyone who knew Kevin came to love him, and he gained close friends from all walks of life over the decades. His professional travels and personal adventures ranged from conducting underwater research dives in submersibles to beach volleyball and snowboarding, as well as power meetings. Kevin was a kaleidoscope, with so many friends and anecdotes, but always that solid core of being talented yet grounded. Above all else, Kevin was optimistic and loved a good laugh. Kevin was one of a rare breed whose vision, leadership, risk taking, integrity, good humor, hard work and honesty led to him transform whatever he turned his attention to.

Besides his many close friends, Kevin was blessed with three partners at different periods of his life. He met Claire Cappelle while an undergraduate. They married and lived happily for many years until amicably divorcing. He met Virginia Abshier while in Portland. They married and lived happily in Hawai'i until she passed away suddenly in 2020. And presently Kevin has been happily married to Carolyn Lewis, a Hawai'ian native returned home. Besides being Kevin's loving partner, Carolyn has been a rock and an angel throughout his illness.

A celebration of life event will be held on August 8, 2025, from 2 to 6 p.m. at Anna O'Briens in Honolulu. Contributions in Kevin's memory may be made to the Kevin M. Kelly Scholarship Fund for Boys in Single Mother Households at St. Thomas High School, <https://www.sths.org/support/fundraising/memorialgifts/> or the North Shore Economic Vitality Partnership, <https://nsevp.org/make-a-donation/>.



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