

## Peterson's sudden death strikes community's core

By Erik Borg

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TRURO — In the end, Truro Town Administrator Rex Peterson remained a fixture of Outer Cape town government until his final days.

Peterson, 61, died Feb. 19 while on vacation in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. He was town administrator in Truro since October 2011 and was fast approaching retirement. His last day at Town Hall was scheduled for June 30.

Among his many professional contributions, Peterson will be remembered as a familiar and beloved face in all four of the Outer Cape's town halls, having held positions in Eastham, Wellfleet, Truro and Provincetown as well as Dennis over the years.

"Rex has not just been our town administrator for the last three years, but has worked in municipal government for 20 years and just made so many amazing contributions to our communities," said Jay Coburn, chair of Truro's board of selectmen. "I think not only the board of selectmen but the town staff and the residents of the town are just incredibly saddened. We will miss him greatly."

Peterson's partner of more than 25 years, Tom Funk, was with Peterson in Florida when he died. He found him sitting peacefully in a chair in the early morning hours of Feb. 19, according to a town official.

Funk is scheduled to return to the Cape with Peterson's remains on Thursday. Memorial service arrangements have not yet been announced.

"I know one thing, it's going to be have to be one big place, because he touched a lot of people," said Assistant Town Administrator Charleen Greenhalgh.

Peterson was born in Nebraska, attended Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill., and later received a master's degree in architecture from the Harvard University Graduate School of Design.

Prior to coming to Truro, he was a permit coordinator for Provincetown from 1996 to 1999, a town planner in Eastham from 1999 to 2001, and the assistant town administrator for Wellfleet from 2001 to 2011.

He first met Greenhalgh more than 20 years ago when she was the town planner for Dennis and he interviewed to become her assistant. Over the years, the two worked closely together in Dennis and Truro and developed a close friendship.

“I think he was probably one of the best town officials that I’ve worked with. Whatever his capacity, he was always friendly, kind and helpful and just a hard worker,” she said. “But he was also a goofball, you know? He was a ‘Chatty Charlie,’ he liked to visit, he liked parties. He was quite the free spirit.”

Aside from his affable ways, Peterson was effective in advancing causes near to him. He was an advocate for affordable housing initiatives in Wellfleet and Truro and was a central player in transforming the neglected Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in Wellfleet Center into a nonprofit community center known as Wellfleet Preservation Hall. The \$2.6 million project opened its doors to the public in 2011.

Peterson announced his plans to retire on Dec. 17. Upon the news, he said he was looking forward to a new chapter on the Cape.

“I think, after 20-plus years in municipal government, I’m ready for the next phase, though I’m not sure what that is yet.” he said at that time.

His partner Funk is a retired art professor and working artist. The two shared a home in Wellfleet.

On Tuesday, the selectmen appointed Greenhalgh as acting town manager. The search for Peterson’s full-time replacement is already underway and will continue as scheduled. The search is expected to take up to a year, according to selectmen’s discussions on the matter. Greenhalgh has said she will not seek the position beyond the interim.

“He leaves some pretty big shoes to fill,” Coburn said.