



## John W. Payne

July 31, 1940 - May 17, 2023

John Payne, age 82, of Kearney, passed away Wednesday, May 17, 2023 at Brookestone Gardens in Kearney. He loved his hometown, seizing opportunities throughout his life to champion its growth and prosperity. John's wishes for cremation were honored. The celebration of John's life will be at 10:30 am CDT on Friday, May 26, 2023, at Kearney First United Methodist Church, 4500 Linden Dr., Kearney, NE 68847, with Pastor Matt Fowler officiating. Luncheon to follow. The service will be live-streamed at <https://www.kearneyfirstumc.org/watch-online>. In lieu of flowers, memorials to the University of Nebraska Foundation general funds (<https://nufoundation.org/>), or the Payne Family Endowed Scholarship Fund (<https://nufoundation.org/fund/01062850/>) are appreciated.

John was born July 31, 1940, in Kearney, Nebraska, to Ruth (Sherer) and Alvie E Payne. He was the first of three sons. He was an active, athletic child, and had vivid memories of being waylaid by rheumatic fever in his early years.

At age 13, John started working on the delivery truck for the family furniture business, inheriting a strong work ethic from his father and passing it down to his children. By high school, he had developed a reputation for his field goal kicking prowess, earning him the nickname John "The Toe" Payne. He also relished playing basketball for Longfellow High (now Kearney High School), graduating in 1958.

John attended Kearney State Teachers College - now the University of Nebraska at Kearney. He joined Sigma Upsilon Nu fraternity during his freshman year. That spring, John's best buddies insisted he call a girl he didn't know to be his date at the fraternity formal. JoDell Peterson said yes.

JoDell and John married at the Holdrege United Methodist Church on hot and steamy July 31, 1960 (his 20th birthday). After earning his business degree in 1962, John joined his dad at Payne Larson Furniture in downtown Kearney, and later became president of Payne Enterprises.

John's entrepreneurial spirit led him to a number of other businesses over the years, serving as president at Radio Kearney KRNY, NTV Network, and Kearney John Deere. He was recognized as Kearney Jaycees Boss of the Year.

His belief in his community drove him to run for Kearney City Council, serving from 1971-1980. John saw a bigger opportunity for Kearney State College to join the University of Nebraska system, prompting an election bid for an open seat on the University of Nebraska Board of Regents, where he served from 1981-1999, including as chairman four times. John was a pivotal player when the University eventually did bring KSC into the fold, leaving a lasting legacy for his beloved hometown.

He was a Trustee for the University of Nebraska Foundation, and a member of the NU President's Society, as well as the UNL and UNK Chancellor's Societies. He remained a devoted UNK alumnus, serving as president of the Alumni Association, and co-founder of KSC Athletics Associates. He received a Distinguished Alumni Award in 1984. John and JoDell helped furnish the UNK Alumni House after it was acquired and renovated. In 2013, the couple were co-recipients of the Jim Rundstrom Distinguished Service Award.

Always a Kearney champion, John served on the board of directors for the Kearney Area Chamber of Commerce, Kearney Visitors Bureau, Museum of Nebraska Art (MONA), the Archway and the Classic Car Collection.

He also held board positions at First Commerce National Bank and Wells Fargo Bank of Kearney. He was a member of First United Methodist Church and served as chair of its board of trustees. He was also president of the Nebraska Football Hall of Fame Foundation.

Even with a full schedule, he always made plenty of time for golf and never missed a Husker football game. His other passion - fast cars - took him to lightly-traveled country roads so he could lean on the gas pedal and "clean the engine."

He lived a life of consequence, had fun in the process and played a few mulligans.

John's survivors include daughters Linda Payne Kitt (Ron) of Kearney, Nancy Payne (Ben Goodkind) of Arlington, VA, and son Steven Payne (Lauren) of Jacksonville, NC; grandchildren Colby Payne (Pam) of Virginia Beach, VA, Noah Goodkind of Olympia, WA, Sam Goodkind of San Francisco, CA, Joshua and Rebekah Payne of Jacksonville, Cara Kitt Mullins (Pat) of Omaha, NE, Cory and Erin Kitt of Kearney; great-granddaughter Penelope Payne of Virginia Beach; brother Ron Payne and sister-in-law Nita Payne; sister-in-law Marian Payne of Kearney; sisters-in-law Cynthia Peterson and Cheryl Peterson of Lincoln, NE; several nephews and nieces, cousins and close friends.

Family members preceding him in death are his wife JoDell Payne, daughter

Ann Payne, his parents, brother Charles Payne, grandparents Warren and Ada (Campbell) Sherer, John and Catherine (Griffith) Payne, and all of his aunts, uncles, and several cousins.

# Cemetery Details

## Kearney Cemetery

4400 Avenue I  
Kearney, NE 68847

# Previous Events

## Celebration of Life

MAY **26**. 10:30 AM - 11:30 AM (CT)

First United Methodist Church  
4500 Linden Drive  
Kearney, NE 68847

# Tribute Wall

GL

“ *To the Payne family: We were so sorry to hear of John's passing. We were fellow members at the Kearney Country Club. John and Jo Dell were wonderful people, always so friendly and welcoming. John was such a great advocate for the University of Nebraska and such a fan of the Nebraska Huskers. He will be greatly missed by all those who knew him!*

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**Gene and Linda Liebig** - May 31, 2023 at 03:16 PM

JF

“ *To the Payne Family,  
I worked for Payne Larson Furniture during my college years at KSC. I thoroughly enjoyed my time at the store, and have many fond memories of John & the staff at the store. My husband and I later got to know the entire family and house sat for them when the family would go to Husker Bowl games. I always looked forward to John & JoDell's Christmas letter every year! I will always cherish the memories I made with John & his family! With my deepest sympathy, Julie (Carr) Foster*

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**Julie Foster** - May 25, 2023 at 10:05 PM

MM

“ Dear John W. Payne Family:

*Ruth and I were again deeply saddened to learn of John's passing. I wanted to write and extend our sincere sympathy to members of the family.*

*John was an outstanding individual, and a personal friend to many of us in Nebraska. He was a true Nebraskan. I always enjoyed my numerous interactions with him, in many different capacities. In addition to the great personal loss that your family members have suffered, his many friends and associates have also sustained a tremendous loss in his passing. As you know, John was a highly respected individual and an exceptionally talented person. We know that you have many pleasant memories of your time together, and we trust that your sorrow and loneliness will be lessened by knowing that you also have an enormous number of caring friends who share in your bereavement.*

*One is always saddened when we lose a loved one, but especially so when you lose both parents in a very short time period. Please know that our thoughts and prayers are with you during this difficult time. Best personal regards.*

*Sincerely yours,*

*Martin A. Massengale  
President, Chancellor, Founding Director  
and Foundation Distinguished Professor Emeriti*

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**Martin Massengale** - May 25, 2023 at 10:21 AM



*Thank you so much for your kind words, Dr. Massengale. He loved his association with the University and many interactions with you and Ruth.*

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**Nancy Payne** - May 25, 2023 at 07:06 PM

RC

“ *John Payne Family:*

*Wanted to send my condolences for John's passing.  
Have many fond memories of being with John on and off the golf course.  
It was a pleasure to be around him.  
I always enjoyed his great personality.*

*God Bless!*

*Randy Carlson  
PGA Life Member*

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**Randy Carlson** - May 24, 2023 at 10:56 AM



*Thank you so much for the thoughtful note!*

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**Nancy Payne** - May 25, 2023 at 07:05 PM



“ *Loving Lilies and Roses Bouquet was purchased  
for the family of John W. Payne.*



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May 23, 2023 at 02:30 AM

CA

“ *Payne family there are so many memories from just being together and country club to picking out furniture for our nursing facilities in old days to your dad introducing me to Bob Delaney to play golf with him in tournament or just for fun... loved them both. So sorry for your loss(es) sending loves, hugs and prayers for peace! Cammy Lantis*

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**Cammy** - May 23, 2023 at 02:22 AM



*Thanks so much for the memories, Cammy! Your family was such a significant part of growing up in Kearney. Miss you all.*

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**Nancy Payne** - May 23, 2023 at 09:50 PM

KT

“ *Met John when I was at Nebraska Wesleyan. Daughter Ann was my daughter in Willard Sorority and we were at a Father Daughter dance. She gave me a Norfolk Island Pine tree which I still have all these years later. I wish the two of them were still alive. Trust I'll see them again!*  
*Kathy Traudt a/k/a Trink*

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**Kathryn Traudt** - May 22, 2023 at 01:55 PM



*Thank you, Kathryn. A tree is a lovely legacy.*

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**Nancy Payne** - May 23, 2023 at 09:52 PM

RJ

“ John was a Regent in 1988-89 when I was the President of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Faculty Senate. I spoke to the Regents once a month over that academic year and also worked with John and the other Regents outside of those meetings. I saw John from time to time over the years since then and we always remembered each other and talked about those times and how we got things done including getting UNK into the NU System.

*John was a fine Regent and a man who worked hard for the University and the citizens of the State. I will miss him.*

*Robert F. Diffendal, Jr., Past President, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Faculty Senate*

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**Robert F. Diffendal, Jr.** - May 22, 2023 at 07:48 AM



*Thank you so much for your memory of dad. He loved his time on the board of Regents and all of his connections at the University.*

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**Nancy Payne** - May 23, 2023 at 09:53 PM

MK

“ We are sorry to miss John's service since we will be out of town. We'll dearly miss occasional Friday night dinners at the Kearney Country Club with John and JoDell as well as their awesome Go Big Red lower level. John served so faithfully as a University Regent. Please know that your whole family is in our thoughts and prayers.--  
-Phil, Mary Kommers and family

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**Mary S Kommers** - May 20, 2023 at 10:58 AM



*Thank you so much for the support. I know he would appreciate your comments.*

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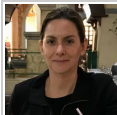
**Nancy Payne** - May 23, 2023 at 09:53 PM

KC

“ Being a first cousin to John Payne entails a host of wonderful memories. I was the country cousin near Lexington and just a couple of years older than John. John & I experienced more than one wild horseback ride on our farm. He always remembered the time we drove down our gravel road on my homemade contraption of a go-cart. Over the years our Kearney visits to the Alvie Payne family were heartfelt. I'll never forget those family holiday get-togethers and the picnics in Harmon Park. There were times we went to Kearney to simply shop and we never headed home without stopping for a chocolate malt at the Blue Bell Dairy! Attached is my photo from 2010 showing JoDell, John & my sister Marianne Conner Schlueter, on the campus of UNK, a school all of us spent some time at.



**Ken Conner** - May 19, 2023 at 03:23 PM



Hi Ken - thank you so much for sharing that photo. I've never seen it - what a treat! Dad liked having a big extended family of cousins - I have fond memories of his stories of all of you growing up.

**Nancy Payne** - May 23, 2023 at 09:55 PM

KK

“ Dear Linda, Nancy, Steve, Colby, & Family: I am so sorry to learn of your Dad and Grandad's passing. I have many fond memories of of all of the dinners with the Petersons' and the Paynes' and am so blessed to call you my family. He will be deeply missed by all who knew him. My thoughts and prayers are with you all at this time.



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**Karen Kammann** - May 19, 2023 at 08:38 AM



*Thank you, Karen. Such a wonderful, thoughtful note.*

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**Nancy Payne** - May 23, 2023 at 09:57 PM