

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Kenneth Ray Tompkins left legacy of hard work

By [Becky Neems](#)

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COLUMBIA—Mike Tompkins said his father, Kenneth Tompkins, enjoyed doing wood work and had a dry sense of humor.

"He was the friendliest guy, always cared about other people. He didn't want to offend anybody," Mike Tompkins said.

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Kenneth Ray Tompkins

"He worked pretty much until he died," he said.

Kenneth Ray Tompkins of Columbia died Monday, Oct. 8, 2012. He was 73.

He was born Jan. 15, 1939, in Fruita, Colo., to Ray and Amelda (Mock) Tompkins. He married Janice Bower on Dec. 30, 1960.

Mr. Tompkins attended McPherson College, a Brethren College in McPherson, Kan., where he majored in physics.

It was a small enough school that Mr. Tompkins was able to try things out for fun, Janice Tompkins said. During college, Mr. Tompkins made a robot that could play tic-tac-toe and a small rocket that he launched in the city park.

Janice Tompkins met Mr. Tompkins the year before he graduated. He asked her to go with him to a concert series at Wichita State University. She said he invited her because he knew he would get a free meal because they visited her parents before the show.

After they married, they settled down in Durham, Kan., where Janice Tompkins taught English. Mr. Tompkins drove about 30 miles to finish school at McPherson College.

Mr. Tompkins taught high school math in Lamar, Colo., and, in 1962, the family moved to Denver, where Mr. Tompkins earned a Bachelor of Science in electrical engineering from the

University of Colorado Boulder.

The family later moved to Phoenix for Mr. Tompkin's job at Sperry Corporation, where he designed and built on-board computers for airlines.

When they bought a house in Phoenix, the Tompkins turned their backyard into a jungle of tropical plants, Janice Tompkins said. They also had 46 squirrel monkeys, kept in a big cage outside.

Mr. Tompkins started his business of building houses in Fruita, Colo., and later moved his company, Tompkins Construction, to Columbia. Mr. Tompkins invented a formula to create a recessed double octagon ceiling to trim oak. The formula could be used to measure how the wood should be cut, Janice Tompkins said. Mike Tompkins said the technique is one the business still uses today when wood trimming.

Mike Tompkins became the manager of Tompkins Construction a few years ago, and Mr. Tompkins continued doing wood work for the company until it was too dangerous for him to work, Mike Tompkins said.

Mike Tompkins said he learned about the construction field and about entrepreneurship from his father and is now transferring that knowledge to his own son.

Mr. Tompkins is survived by his wife, Janice Tompkins, of Columbia; a son, Michael, and his wife, Deanna, of Columbia; his mother, Amelda Tompkins, of Fruita, Colo.; two brothers, David Tompkins, of Chandler, Ariz., and Saul Tompkins of Fruita, Colo.; a sister, Elaine Mason, of Fruita, Colo.; a grandson, Shaun Tompkins, and his wife Felicity, of Columbia; a granddaughter, Cassie, and her husband Chris Brubaker, of Thornton, Colo.; a great-grandson, Jackson Riley Tompkins, of Columbia; and numerous aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces and cousins.

His father, Ray Tompkins, died earlier.

Visitation will be at 10 a.m. Monday at Bethel Baptist Church, 201 E. Old Plank Road. Services will follow at 11 a.m. at the church. Interment will be in the Bethel Baptist Cemetery.

Memorial contributions can be made to Heifer International, 1 World Avenue, Little Rock, AR 72202, or Trees for Life, 3006 W. St. Louis, Wichita, KS 67203.

Condolences can be left online at www.memorialfuneralhomeandcemetery.com.