

# Skating entrepreneur Tom Collins passes away at age 88

By BARRY WILNER, AP Sports Writer Sep. 1, 2019



To call Tom Collins the father of figure skating tours might be hyperbole. Then again ...

"Tommy treated everyone like family," Michelle Kwan, the greatest skater of her generation, said Sunday after learning of Collins' death at his home in Minneapolis at age 88. "I skated for 14 years in his show, and I felt like the daughter he never had."

"Tommy would help any skater. He'd open his wallet to anyone in need. He was very special and we'll miss him dearly."

Kwan and 1988 Olympic champion Brian Boitano spoke on the phone Sunday, sharing both tears and laughs as they recalled their days on "Tommy's Tour," and Collins' role in the lives of so many figure skaters whose careers he helped prolong.

"Tom Collins death marks the end of an era, the golden age of figure skating," Boitano said. "He stood out in the business. He was a man of loyalty, vision, and tremendous generosity."

A former skater in *Holiday on Ice*, Collins organized an exhibition tour of the United States with world champion skaters in 1969. It was the forerunner of *Champions on Ice*.

Collins was inducted into the figure skating halls of fame of the United States and Canada — he was born in Canada — and in 2006 sold the U.S. rights to the show.

"We lost our hero, Tom Collins, today," the family said in a statement. "No words can explain how much love and joy he gave us. He shared his fun-loving charismatic personality with everyone he met. He will be dearly missed by all of us, his dear friends and the figure skating community."

Scott Hamilton, the 1984 Olympic champion and himself an entrepreneur in the sport — Hamilton founded *Stars on Ice* soon after he won the gold medal — called Collins "the greatest impresario of skating."

"There wasn't a champion skater since the 1970s that didn't perform in one of his shows," Hamilton said. "It was at one of his shows in Toledo, Ohio, that I saw championship skating live for the very first time in his World Champions Tour in 1970. Little did I know I would do my first

show with him in 1978, where I bombed and was so embarrassed I left without my \$50 honorarium. Every time I was able to speak publicly about Tommy, I would say that he still owes me \$50."

In addition to his role in figure skating, Collins also handled merchandising for such musical acts as the Beach Boys, Neil Diamond, John Denver, the Blues Brothers and the Cars.

Last spring, skaters and others involved with Champions on Ice held a reunion in Minneapolis to honor Collins.

"It wasn't just the skaters who showed up but the choreographers, the people who did the lighting, everyone who was part of the shows," Kwan recalled. "They all loved Tommy and he treated all of them so well.

"He would call my dad every two weeks just to talk about things. He made all of us feel like part of his family."

Hamilton, a cancer survivor who oversees many charity events, last spent time with Collins about a year ago at Hamilton's Sk8 To Eliminate Cancer show in Minneapolis. Hamilton missed the reunion earlier this year while viewing his son's school play. Collins later called him and said, "It was the greatest night of my life," and the only thing that could've made it better was if Hamilton were able to attend.

"He always called me 'Hamilton!' in a loud voice. He said. 'Hamilton! You missed it!' I loved hearing the joy in his voice for that very special night.

"I haven't cried this hard in a very long time. I will miss him every day for the rest of my life."