

# Canoe legend Verlen Kruger dies at 82

## Lansing man earned 11 world records after discovering sport at 41

### Accomplishments and awards

Paddled more than 100,000 miles

Earned 11 Guinness World Records for long-distance canoe travel, including the fastest trip the full length of the Mississippi River

Took a 3 1/2-year, 28,043-mile trip around and through North America

Was the first to paddle and portage up the entire Grand Canyon

Raced in every major canoe race in North America

Canoeed every major river in North America and most of the major rivers in the world

For information about Kruger's life and the canoes his company makes, visit [www.krugercanoes.com](http://www.krugercanoes.com).

By Chrystal Liebold  
Lansing State Journal

**Verlen Kruger** caught the "canoeing bug" at age 41, and he was never cured of it.

Over his 41-year canoeing career, the Lansing man made a name for himself as a legend in the sport - paddling more than 100,000 miles across two continents and earning 11 Guinness World Records.

He continued to paddle until last week when he was hospitalized for prostate cancer, which took his life Monday. He was 82.

"Even when he was dying, he always felt better when he was canoeing," said business partner Mark Przedwojewski, 33, who now owns Kruger's canoe-making business in Irons.

"With a guy like that, it's hard to tell him he can't paddle anymore, because that was his life for the last 40 years. He never quit paddling."

Kruger, a retired plumber who began canoeing at a time when most begin

planning their retirement, was inducted into the American Canoe Association Hall of Fame in 1997.

He competed in every major canoe race in North America and canoed along the Pacific and Atlantic coastlines.

He paddled more miles over more diverse water than any other person in the world.

"He loved being in the rivers and in the wilderness. He loved the freedom of just being out there," said daughter Nancy Norris, 57, of Farwell. "If you would have put a motor on his boat he wouldn't have liked it because he loved powering it by himself with his paddle."

Kruger was born in 1922 in Pulaski County, Ind., and grew up a sharecropper's son. The second child in a family of nine children, he quit school at 14 to help his family. He served as a tank driver and flight instructor in the military starting in 1942, where he eventually earned his high school diploma.

He opened Kruger's Canoes in the early 1990s, selling homemade canoes. He ran it himself until a year ago, when he retired and handed it over to Przedwojewski.

A family man at heart and a father of nine, Kruger's greatest joy was living on the Grand River and spending time with his family, Przedwojewski said.

A Labor Day Paddle under the Mackinac Bridge is slated to take place in honor of Kruger.

"Michigan was his favorite place on Earth, and he had a love for the Grand River," Przedwojewski said. "Despite everywhere he's been, he always said he never wanted to live anywhere else."

## **Kruger Canoes Biography**

**Happy are they who dream dreams . . .and have the courage to make them come true.**

Verlen Kruger was born and raised a sharecropper's son in Pulaski County, Indiana on June 30, 1922. The second in a family of nine children, he had to quit school at 14 to help out the struggling family in hard times. He has obtained a High School Diploma through self education.

Verlen was drafted into the Army and became a reconnaissance tank driver in World War II in 1942. Later, passing stiff requirement exams, he entered the Army Air Force Flight Training School, graduated at the top of his class as a pilot and commissioned officer. He went on to be a flight instructor for training advanced fighter pilots. Eventually he served a tour of duty flying P-51's over Korea and Japan.

After the war he settled down in the Lansing area of Michigan, married a local girl, Jenny Seavolt, and became a devout Christian with a steadfast faith in Jesus Christ. He also became a plumbing contractor and a solid family man with 9 children who have multiplied into 35 grandchildren and 13 great grandchildren.

There was no inkling of what was to come -- until, at age 41, he first discovered the canoe in the backwoods of Ontario. He had found what he was born to do. Destiny began to work its subtle magic . . .

Verlen Kruger is a canoeman extraordinaire, an explorer at heart, a photographer, author, lecturer, and a canoe designer and builder. He is a traveling man, a Voyager, who is happiest when he is moving. He had been to all 50 states before ever discovering the canoe. Since that meeting he has rediscovered all but 2 by canoe. Along the way he has broken nearly every long distance world record in the book (and a few that aren't). Kruger has already paddled a lifetime total of over 90,000 miles. That's over 20,000 miles more than anyone else in the history of the world according to the Guinness Book of Records. He not only holds the all time longest journey ever made by canoe, at 28,043 miles, but also the second longest, at 18,232 miles. On his many extended expeditions he has seen the world as no one else ever has. From a canoe, the world looks different. And it is different. A canoe is a natural vehicle in which a person can feel a living part of nature, close to all that is around him and in tune with the harmony of the environment. The canoe was Verlen's home. Where ever he went he was at home. This was where he belonged. It has become his lifestyle. A canoe can go where no other vehicle can go; Verlen has gone far beyond where any person has ever gone. He has paddled and portaged under his own power the equivalent to nearly 3 1/2 times around the world. Very few explorers in history have traveled comparable distances. These miles covered in a small canoe rival even those of Christopher Columbus in all his many voyages of discovery across oceans.

**It is true that a ship in a harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are made for . . .**