

Thunder Words



March 2026, Volume 49 #3

Dedicated to the 55, 56, & 57 Thunderbird

Nebraskaland Thunderbird Club



Prez Says: I hope all our members have had a chance to enjoy the wonderful weather we have had over the last several weeks. It's hard to resist working on the T-Bird or driving it when it is so pleasant outside.

I am sad to report that we lost a founding and long-time member, **Larry Smith**. He passed away on January 29, and his funeral was held on February 10. Five Nebraskaland members drove their T-Birds in the funeral procession from the church to the burial site. They were **Rob Kinsey** (starmist blue '57), **Tom Woodman** (flame red E '57), **Jeff Brown** (peacock blue '56), **Jack Sanford** (code T gray '56), and **Martin & Mary Lou Bierman** (torch red '55). Special thanks to Rob Kinsey and Tom Woodman, who drove all the way from Lincoln to the church that frosty morning. I also want to recognize Joel Schlessinger, who gave Larry a final T-Bird ride last fall in his red '57, which Larry restored. A large photo of



them in the car was displayed at the funeral home and on the funeral leaflet cover.

Larry and **I** shared several interesting experiences through the years. The most memorable one was the evening when we removed the tappets and cam in a '57, with the engine in the car, using a special tool that was like doing keyhole surgery on the front of the engine. This month's tech article is a throwback to the one written for the October 2005 newsletter, which described the process.

Finally, don't forget about the March 8 Lincoln swap meet and the March 19 club meeting in Waverly. Bring your ideas and requests for this year's event to the March meeting.

Martin Bierman, President



www.Nebraskalandtbirds.org
<https://www.facebook.com/nebraskatbirds/>
Sponsored by [Lee Sapp Ford](#)



Next Event(s)
March 6-8, 2026
71st World of Wheels
St. Patrick's Day
March 17, 2026

2026 Meeting Dates:
 Waverly – March – May – July – Sept. – Dec.
 19 21 16 17 17
 Omaha – April - June - Aug. - Oct.
 16 18 20 15
 November Friendsgiving - TBD

Next
Business Meeting
March 19, 2026
Track Side Bar & Grill
Waverly, NE

Minutes of the Nebraskaland Thunderbird Club, January 2026

As you are aware, we did not have a business meeting in February.

President Bierman stated that **Larry Smith** passed away, and several T-Birds and Drivers attended his funeral. Below is **Larry's** obituary, thank you note, and photos at the church and cemetery:

Lawrence "**Larry**" **M. Smith**, a beloved and kind-hearted man, passed away on January 29, 2026, at the age of 86. Born on May 25, 1939, in Cedar Rapids, NE, **Larry** was raised by his parents, Matt and Mary Smith, on a farm with his 11 siblings, Francis, Delores, Agatha, William, Julianne, Rita, Anthony, John, Theresa, Lucille, and his identical twin brother, Martin "Marty". He attended country school in Primrose and graduated in 1957 with a basketball scholarship. His passion for cars began early, leading him to drag races with his Dust-Rose Thunderbird, where he often emerged victorious.

Larry studied Construction Management at the University of Nebraska at Omaha for two years and went on to become a talented homebuilder. He owned two companies, Lariat Homes and A-Z Construction, which built homes in both Omaha and Papillion, many of which were featured in the Street of Dreams. A true craftsman, he restored 13 '57 Thunderbirds, including an F Supercharger Thunderbird now displayed in a museum in Atlanta, Georgia.

In 1964, **Larry** married **Marsha**, the love of his life, whom he met after a friend introduced them. They shared 62 wonderful years together and had two children, Steve and Shelly. **Larry's** grandchildren, Amanda, Andrew, Madison, and Matthew, were the light of his later years. He enjoyed building dollhouses, life-size ferris wheels for stuffed animals, and racing small wooden cars for the Pinewood Derby. Larry went on regular excursions with the grandchildren while sharing ice cream with his little dog, Sonar.

Larry was a dedicated member of the Nebraskaland Thunderbirds, starting it in 1975, attending car shows, and winning first prizes for best restoration. He also loved polka dancing with his wife and spent weekends dancing with Ernie Kucera. In his later years, he cherished playing cards with his granddaughter, Madison, and listening to 70s music.

A strong Catholic, **Larry** prayed the rosary nightly with his siblings while growing up. He was deeply involved in his children's lives, whether attending Creighton basketball games for Shelly's pom-pom performances, cheering for Shelly at a Miss Omaha pageant win, or celebrating Steve's graduation from Creighton Medical School.

Larry was known for his hard-working nature and warm, welcoming presence. He was adored by all who met him, often helping others despite his own challenges in later years. His family and caregivers remember him as "the sweetest man" and a devoted husband who greeted his wife with love each morning and an infectious smile.

The family extends heartfelt gratitude to the staff at Immanuel Pathways and Legato Living at Skyline for their



excellent care, especially Chloe, Lexis, Julie, Gladys, Haley, Amber, and Amy, who loved him like family. His nickname there, "Lare Bear," reflects the affection he inspired.

Larry's final ride in a red T-bird, a car he restored for Joel Schlessinger, brought him immense joy. As he waved goodbye, he left a lasting smile. Larry is going home, but will remain forever in our hearts.

Left to cherish his memory are his wife, Marsha Smith; daughter, Shelly (Tom) Taylor, and son Steve (Sylvia) Smith. He is also survived by his grandchildren, Amanda, Andrew, Madison, and Matthew. He is survived by his sisters, Aggie Horvatich and Lou (Ron) Schram; his brothers, Bill (Sue) Smith, Marty (Mary) Smith, and Tony (Lois) Smith; and many nieces, nephews, extended family, and friends.

Thank you note from Larry's daughter, Shelly:

Dear Marty and Nebraskaland Thunderbird Club,

It was a profound honor to have you lead the processional to my father's final resting place with those beautiful thunderbirds. I cannot express the pride I felt when seeing those cars that were such a part of my childhood. Thank you for taking the time to honor this man who passionately loved the Nebraskaland Thunderbird Club since 1975.

In 1960, Dad saw a Dust Rose T-bird sitting on a used car lot on Center Street, with two four-barrel carbs and all power. He eventually found his way to the drag races, competing in the class that used the 292 engine with a two-barrel carb. He went on to purchase an original black 1957 Thunderbird from Bill Lowick at HP Smith Ford. Dad's biggest purchase came from Dallas, Texas. After 2 and a half years, Dad finished a body-off restoration of an F-Bird that was later sold to a museum in Atlanta, Georgia. Shortly after, he completed a restoration of a 1955 turquoise T-bird with an automatic transmission and a red '57 Thunderbird found in Mesa, California. He completed it in time for the International T-bird Show in Wichita, KS, where it won a gold award and was elevated to senior status. It was sold shortly after to Joel Schlessinger. His final restoration was a 1957 Coral Sand T-Bird purchased in Los Angeles. Not hard to believe some of dad's best years were spent cruising in a '57 T-Bird.

In dad's later years, we had the honor of Joel Schlessinger stopping by to give dad his final ride in the red '57 T-bird he had restored so many years ago. We are forever blessed by the Thunderbird Club and all of the members who have joined in celebrating my dad's life. I cannot imagine the joy my dad felt when he looked down upon that parade of thunderbirds. For this, I am forever grateful!

Kindly, Shelly Taylor







Joel Schlessinger's 1957, restored by Larry Smith

TECH TALK

By Martin Bierman

Y-Block Tappet Removal



One of the peculiarities of the Y-Block engine is that it uses mushroom-type solid tappets (lifters). These are impossible to remove without full engine disassembly outside the car. Several years ago, I bought a 50-year-old "antique" tool, new in its box, labeled "K.R. Wilson Tappet Tool Kit No.6500-ABC". I was struck by its ingenuity and three-part design for removing Y-Block tappets from the front of the engine, either in the car or on the stand, without opening the bottom of the engine or removing the crankshaft, rods, and pistons. I put this tool on the shelf, never thinking I would need it. Recently, club member Larry Smith bought a Dusk Rose '57 T-

Bird that had a severe miss and poor idle. On further examination, he found that the #7 tappet was barely lifting the push rod and opening the valve. He had a severely worn lobe on the camshaft, so a new camshaft and a set of lifters were needed. Now, this seemed like a job designed for the K.R. Wilson Tappet Tool Kit! Larry removed the radiator and fan shroud, intake manifold, valley pan cover, distributor, valve trains, front timing cover, and timing gears and chain. Prior to removing the cam, all the tappets were raised either by cam rotation or with a strong, small magnet,



THE NEW CAM, TAPPETS AND THE TAPPET REMOVAL TOOLS



and then clipped with the special steel clips provided in the Wilson Kit. Next, using a multi-step approach, each tappet was removed by the following technique. A special trough was placed in the cam bore and set perpendicular to the tappet to be removed. Next, the tappet was unclipped and allowed to drop to the trough. It still remained semi-vertical with its stem in the lower bore, however. Then a special clamp on a long tool was inserted in the cam bore over the tappet stem. Once the tappet was grabbed, the trough was removed from the cam bore, and the tappet stem was allowed to come free of the bore. The special tool had a trigger mechanism that allowed the tappet to be moved from a vertical to a horizontal position for removal by withdrawing the tool from the cam bore. This multi-step process was performed on each tappet, one at a time, until all were removed.

New tappets were replaced one by one, in reverse order. The trough was used to prevent the tappet from falling into the engine once it was placed in its bore. A third special tool was used to fully lift the tappet out of its bore for clipping. Once all the tappets were installed and clipped, a new camshaft was placed in position, and the front and top of the engine were reassembled. This tool eliminated the need to remove the engine and its bottom components and shortened the job considerably. I wonder how many Y-Block mechanics have attempted this in the past and have used the K.R. Wilson Tappet Tool. A special thanks to Larry Smith for letting me try this approach; I think he was pleased with the outcome.

October 2005 Thunderwords



MARTY POINTING TO THE WORN CAM LOBE

2026 Calendar of Events

- March 6-8 – 71st World of Wheels – CHI Arena & Convention Center**
March 8 – 51st Annual Rocky Mountain Manginelli Swap Meet – Sandhills Global Event Center - Lincoln
 (same location, new name – 4100 North 84th Street)
March 19 – Business Meeting – 6:00 PM – Track Side Bar & Grill – 13901 Guildford 7, Waverly, NE



Please use the attached form to submit your dues. The dues are still only \$15 per year, probably the best deal in town.

2026 Membership dues - \$15.00

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City/Town _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone Numbers: Home _____ Cell _____ Work _____

Email(s) _____

Please send this form and check for membership dues payable to Nebraskaland Thunderbird Club care of **Jeff Brown**,
 Treasure, 7225 South 103 Street, LaVista, NE 68128

Established in 1975, the **Nebraskaland Thunderbird Club** is dedicated to preserving and enjoying one of the greatest cars ever created: the **Ford Thunderbird**.

Advantages of club membership include:

- Regular driving events and monthly meetings every third Thursday
- Social functions such as picnics, shows, and the annual Christmas/Friendsgiving party
- Members with restoration and repair experience
- Assistance with parts acquisition and location
- CTCI master judge to assist with authenticity issues
- Monthly newsletter with a calendar of events and tech articles



Origins of St. Patrick's Day

St. Patrick's Day commemorates the death of St. Patrick, who is credited with bringing Christianity to Ireland in the 5th century. Born in Roman Britain around AD 385, he was kidnapped at the age of 16 and taken to Ireland as a slave. After escaping, he returned to Ireland as a missionary around AD 432, where he established churches and spread the Christian faith. St. Patrick is famously associated with the shamrock, which he used to explain the concept of the Holy Trinity.

The day of his death, March 17, became a feast day in the early 17th century and was officially recognized by the Catholic Church. Initially, it was celebrated with religious services and feasts in honor of St. Patrick.



Nebraskaland Thunderbird Club

President	Martin Bierman	- 402-289-4516
Vice President	Rob Kinsey	- 402-434-9053
Treasurer	Jeff Brown	- 402-572-1995
Secretary	Mary Lou Bierman	- 402-289-4516
CTCI Rep	Martin Bierman	- 402-289-4516
Newsletter	Jack Sanford	- 402-578-3743
Historian	Bob McGowan	- 402-334-2593
Social Media	John La Duke	- 701-330-7908
Sponsor	Lee Sapp Ford	- 402-944-3367

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Member Birthdays

March

Roger Keepers – 17

Cathy McGowan – 24

Bob Young - 24

If you want to be recognized,
please send your birthdate to
jesanford@cox.net.

