Carl Johnson

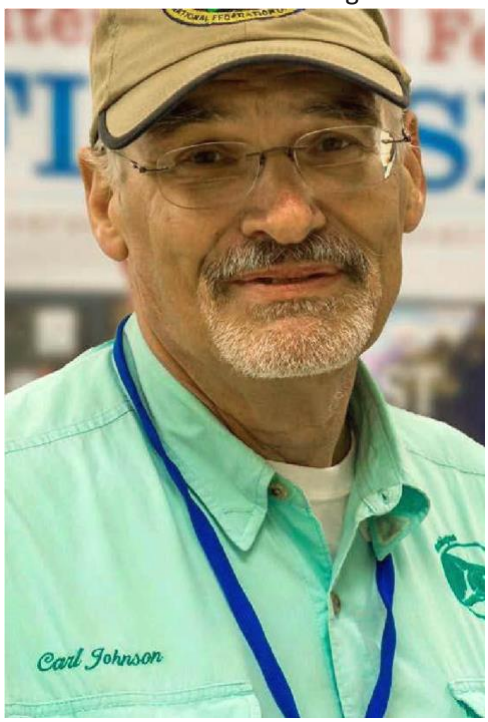
1948–2026

The Washington State Council of Fly Fishers International has lost one of the people who helped build it.

Carl Johnson, 78, died July 3, 2026, after a battle with cancer. For 15 years, Carl served the Washington Council as treasurer, vice president and, from 2006 to 2017, president. He did more than hold those offices. He did the work that made the organization function.

Carl joined the Council's leadership in 2002 as treasurer. In 2004, he became Vice President-West while continuing as treasurer. His fellow directors knew they could give Carl a job and expect it to get done.

That trust led to his election as president in 2006, succeeding Bob Shirley. One of his first major initiatives was the creation of the FFI Expo in Ellensburg. The event became an annual gathering for Washington's fly fishing community and continued through 2019. Carl had a clear view of the Council's purpose: it existed to serve its clubs and members. That sounds simple. It isn't. Organizations often lose sight of the people they were created to serve. Carl didn't.



Carl Johnson

He was also an FFI Life Member, a member of the Evergreen Fly Fishing Club and Northwest Fly Anglers, and a link between clubs that could otherwise have operated in isolation. He understood that a statewide organization is only as strong as the relationships among its members.

The recognition followed the work. The Washington Council named Carl its Fly Fisher of the Year in 2010. In 2011, FFI named him its national Fly Fisher of the Year. In 2018, he received the Don Harger Memorial Award for Council leadership.

But awards aren't the best measure of Carl's contribution. Time is.

Carl gave his time to meetings, committees, clubs, events and the unglamorous work that keeps volunteer organizations alive. He helped create systems and connect people. He understood that leadership is less about being in charge than being willing to do the work.

Fishing was the other constant. Carl fished the rivers and lakes of Washington and western Montana. Like many fly anglers, he found more than fish there. Rivers provided a place to spend time with friends, learn, compete, teach and step away from everything else. His vacation cabin in Superior, Montana, was a refuge, and after 2017 it became a home for him and his wife, Maura.

Carl's legacy is larger than the positions he held. He helped build an organization that will continue after him. He strengthened the network of clubs and volunteers that makes the Washington fly fishing community possible. And he invested in people. That is how a life of service compounds: one meeting, one volunteer, one club and one friendship at a time.

The Washington State Council extends its condolences to Maura, Carl's family and friends, and to the many members of the fly fishing community who knew him.

We will miss him. And we will continue the work he helped build.