



Laverne Melvin Gust

February 1, 1929 - August 31, 2024

Laverne M. Gust

Vern left this life with serious doubts that the next life could turn out any better. Born in Deer Park, Wisconsin in 1929, things took a bad turn when he was ten and his father died as a result of complications from surgery. His mother ultimately moved to Minneapolis to find work and sent him to live with an aunt in Glenwood City, Wisconsin. If the truest test of character is the ability to deal with adversity, he certainly proved it.

Basically raising himself since he was twelve, he realized that he would have to find his own way to college. He was his high school valedictorian, which earned him a Reader's Digest scholarship to the University of Wisconsin at River Falls. After graduating, he moved to Minneapolis and was hired by Charles W. Sexton Company, an insurance brokerage. He secretly enrolled in a night law school, as his employer had a rule against doing so.

When he finished law school, he would have had to take a cut in pay to start over as a lawyer. While the Sexton company was later sold, Vern never changed jobs throughout his career. Through a combination of serendipity and ingenuity, he was tasked with collecting an overdue premium from a small barge operator in Cassville, Wisconsin named Ray Eckstein. They were both small-town Wisconsin boys who had found their way to law school and they

quickly became lifelong friends. Eckstein's business expanded rapidly, and Vern's business increased along with it until he became one of the most prominent players in the river marine insurance industry. His clients ultimately included Pillsbury, Cargill, Continental Grain, NSP, Riverway, and a variety of other major players. His success was so great that he was made Chairman of the Worldwide Marine Group of Alexander & Alexander, which had purchased the Sexton Company and was for a time the largest insurance entity in the world.

While the living he made was impressive, what he gave back was probably more so. As a young man he joined the Minneapolis Jaycees. He then got involved with the Minneapolis Aquatennial during its glory days in the sixties and seventies. He served in many capacities, including General Festival Chairman in 1966 and President in 1972. He and the Queen of the Lakes rode in the Tournament of Roses parade during which Betty White famously mispronounced his last name "Joost" on national TV.

In the late eighties, he became President of the Minneapolis chapter of Kiwanis. Like most service organizations at the time, it was men only. He led his board in voting to change that policy. Rather than simply defying the International Organization, he flew to the headquarters to explain what they had done. Not only did they not lose their local Charter, but the international organization soon changed its Charter.

Vern served as President of the Armatage Park Association where he also coached Softball and Little League Baseball. He served on the Professional & Allocation Committees of United Way. He received the "WCCO Good Neighbor Award" and was named "Boss of the Year" by the Minneapolis Jaycees. He was on the Board of Directors of the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce, the Minneapolis Athletic Club, the National Association of Insurance Brokers, and was Vice President Hazeltine National Golf Club,

Treasurer and Secretary of the Upper Mississippi Waterway Association, President of the Propeller Club (Port of the Twin Cities), a member of the Minneapolis Club, and Treasurer of the Minneapolis Athenaeum. He taught evening Insurance Classes at the University of Minnesota more than fifty years ago but is still remembered by some of his students.

While at Hazeltine, he took on the thankless job of traffic and parking for four major championships, including the 1991 U.S. Open and 2002 PGA. Unlike the Masters where the

tournament is held every year, parking and traffic can be difficult. The story has it that as Jack Nicklaus drove away, he stopped and told a traffic cop that it was the best run tournament he had ever attended.

But the most important thing to him was his family. He married Patricia Marko on October 21, 1950. Early on they agreed that they would never fight in front of their kids. The result was they never fought in almost 74 years of marriage.

Despite a demanding work schedule and the time committed to volunteering, he never missed his children's school or sports events. He declined a promotion that would have required moving to New York because neither he nor his family wanted to leave Minnesota. He provided an example and the resources to allow his children to pursue their goals, but let them make their own decisions, the way he had to do for himself.

He was an avid skier and golfer. He loved travel and going to the theater. When in Las Vegas, he would see two and sometimes three shows a day. He loved life, loved experiencing new things, and took a great interest in everyone he met.

Vern passed on August 31, 2024, surrounded by family. He is survived by his wife Pat, his children Jim, Jolene, Bob, and Karen, six grandchildren, and five great grandchildren, all of whom will miss him very much.

Funeral services will be held on Monday, September 9, at the Lakewood Cemetery Chapel, 3600 Hennepin Avenue S. at 10 a.m., with visitation at 9. Lunch will be served following the service.

Cemetery Details

Lakewood Cemetery (Minneapolis)

3600 Hennepin Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55408

Previous Events

Visitation

SEP 9. 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM (CT)

Lakewood Memorial Chapel
3600 Hennepin Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55408

Church Service

SEP 9. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (CT)

Lakewood Memorial Chapel
3600 Hennepin Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55408

Graveside Service

SEP 9. 11:15 AM - 11:45 AM (CT)

Lakewood Cemetery (Minneapolis)
3600 Hennepin Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55408