

Widman leaves legacy as a family man and his lasting work in Riverbend

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GODFREY - Fred Edward Widman is one of those who will have contributions to the Riverbend area that will last forever.

Fred Edward Widman, 89, of Godfrey, died recently, but he leaves a legacy not only with family but a wide variety of accomplishments in development of the Riverbend region.

In 1952, he formed F.E. Widman Trucking and Excavating. As a member of Teamsters Local 525 in Alton and a member of Operating Engineers Local 520 in Granite City, one of his first accomplishments was assisting in the construction and completion of the Nike Military Missile Base above Pere Marquette Park.

Widman's trucks and equipment were instrumental in the construction and maintenance of nearly all the major highways and streets in this region. Widman was a highly generous man and gave of his time and resources to the community and projects such as the original ball fields on Stamper Lane. He heavily contributed and worked closely with Dr. Gordon F. Moore in the development of Gordon Moore Park. Still today, after 65 years his legacy lives on through Widman Construction Company Inc. of Godfrey.

Widman and Gordon F. Moore were great friends, his grandson, Travis said.

Travis Widman has followed his grandfather's and father's footsteps in the family business. He said his grandfather was very proud of his company's accomplishments through the region.

"It been a long time since he did a lot of those things looking back on everything we are very proud," Travis said. "My grandfather's biggest impact was the development of Homer Adams Parkway. Homer Adams was a developer at the time and they developed

a very close relationship. My grandfather was primarily in the trucking business in the beginning and started to get in the excavating business with Homer Adams.

"My grandfather was involved in all the clearing involved in the development along Homer Adams Parkway, including the mall and there used to be a Blockbuster and Woody's Chicken out there. His biggest accomplishment was not all the buildings, but he did all the site work and clearing for the roadways. He also did a lot of grading for the buildings and parking lots. He put in a lot of storm sewers and utilities in that area specifically."

Travis Widman said his grandfather was a very giving man.

"He donated his time and some of his equipment operators to the park," Travis said. "Gordon Moore Park meant a lot to him. He believed in the community. Back in his day, things were a lot different in terms of relationships. Now with social media and e-mail, people don't have as many close individual relationships. Most everything back in his era was built on personal and valued relationships. Trust, integrity and honesty were some of the things that meant the most from him. He had a very trusting relationship with Gordon Moore and many others."

Later in life, Widman developed a strong relationship with his family, including his grandkids and great-grandkids.

"He was a tremendous storyteller and had a contagious laugh," Travis Widman said. "He was a kid at heart and his grandchildren and great-grandchildren brought him a lot of joy. He had such charisma and he enjoyed being around his grand kids."

Since 1959, Widman was a member of the Mid-West Truckers Association in Springfield, Illinois, and served on the executive board and as its past president. He was a long-time Mason-Shriner Scottish Rite of Masonic Lodge 341. He was also a charter member and past president of the Gateway Piasa's Motorhome Club. He was also a past member of the Tri-County Antique Club, The American Legion, The Alton Motorboat Club, the Southern Illinois Builders Association, and the Associated General Contractors of America. He had a passion for antique cars, tractors and motorcycles. He enjoyed traveling abroad, and throughout the U.S. especially in his motor-home. He was an avid hunter.

Widman and his second wife, Linda, were married for 20-plus years. Widman was married to his former wife, Ruth, for 42 years, and they remained friends. The two raised their children together. As Widman grew older, he softened and his time with family was what he valued most, Travis said.

“My grandfather was strong in faith,” Travis said. “When I got involved in the business, I relied heavily on his wisdom and conversations. Even though he was retired, he was always interested in what was going on and he stayed cognizant of what the company was doing.

“If you took the time to get to know him and know the real guy, he had that presence about him that made him a good natural leader. My grandfather was as honest as they come. I don’t know if I will ever meet anyone more honest than him. He was a terrible bluffer and when he was in a room people swarmed to him because he had that charisma.

"My grandfather had a firm handshake and always looked you in the eye. He always had something good and funny to say. You always wanted to work hard for him and make him proud. Even though my grandfather was not always around, I would always and I even now I think to myself, ‘I bet my grandpa and dad would be proud of this.’”