

# Leroy Emerick truly was "Mr. Wood River"

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
February 9 2018 2:31 PM





WOOD RIVER - Leroy Emerick will be remembered in many different ways by those who loved and associated with him, but three words will always define him: "Mr. Wood River."

Wood River Mayor Cheryl Maguire said she always called Leroy either "Mr. Wood River" or "Mr. Mayor."

"The heart of Leroy and his wife, Helen, was always in Wood River," she said. "Those two attended nearly every city, community or sporting event they could. I talked to him last week and he told me, 'I am here as long as I can be here. I try to keep up with what my doctors tell me.' Leroy had the best attitude until the end."

Mayor Maguire said she is glad the visitation and funeral service will be held at the Wood River Roundhouse where she considers another one of his homes. Leroy was the City of Wood River Parks and Recreation Director for 37 years. He was also elected to the City Council and served a term as Wood River mayor. Leroy's wife, Helen preceded him in death last year. He also has four surviving children: Donna Smith, Dale, Dana and Dean Emerick, six grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Leroy was associated with the Illinois Amateur Softball Association for 65 years on many different levels and is enshrined in the ASA Hall of Fame. He was a member for over 50 years and served as president of the Wood River American Legion Post. Leroy was a member of the East Alton - Wood River Hall of Fame and a lifelong member of the First Baptist Church in Wood River.

Dana Emerick, one of his sons, said the following on Facebook: "For the next few days our family and friends will celebrate the life of my dad Leroy Emerick. After spending the day with close family my dad passed away quietly. We will mourn together and comfort each other remembering how comfortable he is as he rests in peace."

Retired Telegraph Hall of Fame sports writer Steve Porter said Leroy will definitely always be "Mr. Wood River" in his book. Many also called Leroy "Mr. Softball" for his lifetime of involvement in the sport.

"Leroy did so much for the area," Porter said. "He was a mayor, councilman, head of the rec department and involved in the city and community in just about everything. Everybody in the area knew him either through politics or sports. He did so much for softball. He was almost like the king pin of softball throughout the Riverbend area.

"If there was ever a guy tied to his community it was Leroy. He had a love affair with his community and the East Alton-Wood River Oilers. He was one of those rare

individuals who was just totally dedicated to his community. I will will remember him most as my friend and as ‘Mr. Wood River.’”



Leroy was a World War II Navy veteran, serving on the USS Orca.

Mayor Maguire said Leroy was one of the most beloved Wood River mayors ever.

“His heart was in Wood River,” she said. “He loved baseball and softball and supported kids in any way he could.”

“Leroy went on one of the Honor Flights a few years back and my husband and I were able to go to airport and welcome him home,” she said. “It was so heartwarming how all the people who came out for Leroy that day. He was that loved.”

Wood River Park and Rec Director Jason Woody said there was no doubt about the fact that Leroy Emerick will always be “Mr. Wood River.”

“He probably knew more about Wood River’s past than anyone living and still knew what was going on and was in tune with things,” Woody said. I think it is fitting the services are at the Wood River Roundhouse. Even last week when I went over to talk with him he was staying in touch with what was going on. He dedicated his entire life to the city of Wood River. In November, his wife passed away and he called me over to his house and we started talking and he handed me an envelop with a \$4,000 check for Wood River.

“He had saved this for years and felt strongly he needed to give it to the Wood River Park and Rec Department for whatever we needed. I wrote him a letter thanking him for his generosity and he called me back over the the house and he handed me another envelope of \$4,000. He said I know something good will happen with this. I told him I would work on some sort of matching grant and try do double it.”

Woody said Leroy was one of the first to contact him when the announcement was made that the Wood River Aquatic Center was not going to open this year and try to come up with some names to help and find a solution to the pool issues.

Woody said if he had one wish it would be to live up to the legacy of Leroy and his expectations.

“Leroy was a great guy and he dedicated his entire life to the City of Wood River,” Woody said. “He deeply cared about what was happening with Wood River to the end of his life.”

Visitation will be held from 3-8 p.m. Sunday at the Wood River Roundhouse, 633 N. Wood River Ave., Wood River, where services will be conducted at 10 a.m. Monday. Rev. Tomas Plogue will officiate.

