

## RICHARD RAVITTS

Richard Ravitts, 88, of Rockford, Ill., a charter member of the Rockford Hangar of Quiet Birdmen "flew west" at 8:04 a.m. Jan. 27 in Provena Rehabilitation Center in Rockford from congestive heart failure.

He was born May 15, 1923, in Grinnell to Dr. Joseph and Marjorie Griggs Ravitts of Montezuma, where he was graduated from high school in 1940. He attended Grinnell College and the University of Iowa.

In Feb. 1942, he enlisted in the Army Air Corps. While a cadet in San Antonio, he was selected as one of 13 Americans to train with the RAF at the British Flying Training School in Ponca City, Okla. In 1944 joined the Air Transport Command, flying 4-engine C-87s and C-54s out of Miami with "The Flying Express" over the Amazon Jungle, stopping in mid-Atlantic to refuel on tiny Ascension Island (where he and his accordion were much appreciated), over the Sahara Desert to India, and sometimes over "the Hump," carrying vital supplies to China.

Coming home on leave on Jan. 10, 1944, Rick discovered Gail Schultz, who was living with his parents and teaching school. They went out dancing that night and he proposed to her after 9 hours and 45 minutes. They were married on Aug. 5, 1945.

Post-war, he flew for TWA and Eastern Airlines and later for corporations, coming to Rockford in 1953 to fly "The Totepan" for Camcar. He

took many people on their first air-plane rides. In 1960, he bought a Bell 47-G helicopter and learned to fly it, doing timber and highline surveys and personnel transport on missile bases under construction in Missouri and North Dakota, and giving lots of folks their first helicopter rides at state fairs.

In the mid-1960s, he invented, manufactured and sold wastewater pollution control equipment, and was later awarded a professional engineering license by UW-Madison in the basis of his practical experience.

He and Gail flew in their Cessna 310 on business all over the country. Rick was known for his unfailingly optimistic and generous nature. He had a distinctive bass-baritone voice and was a natural musician, playing piano, guitar and organ, and leading his jazz combo, "The Key Men."

He supported the New American Theater and enjoyed watching his children in their theatrical performances. After the show was over the question was "Did Dad stay awake?" If he had, that was a four-star review.

In his last days, one of his few remaining pleasures was playing his past repertoire on the organ.

Rick is survived by his wife, Gail, daughter Ricki of New York; son, Joseph of Aurora, Colo., daughters, Randi (Mark) Woodworth of Oak Park, Ill., and Tammy (John) Bretscher of Elgin, Ill., and five grandchildren.

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