

## Claude W. Ahrens



H-R November 6, 2000

Claude Wesley Ahrens, 88, the Grinnell industrialist and philanthropist, died of heart and respiratory ailments Tuesday, Oct. 31, at Grinnell Regional Medical Center.

A memorial service is set for 10 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 18, at the Grinnell Christian Church, with the Rev. Keith Briggs of the Hinge Ministry officiating. Honorary bearers will be Don Ahrens, Ed Boch, Chuck DeLong, Randy Juhl, Lyle Muckler, Dave Palmer, Ned Postels, Wendell Sleuwenhoek, Carter Thomson and Bernard Young.

A private family burial service will be at Hazelwood Cemetery. The Smith Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements.

The son of John and Mary Bad-

uate of Grinnell High school and later attended Grinnell College.

He was married to Dorothy Hey in 1937.

Mr. Ahrens launched Ahrens Hybrid seed Corn Co. in 1940, later selling the firm to Cargill Inc. He then started Ahrens Manufacturing Co., whose signature product, the Miracle Whirl merry-go-round, set a new standard for the recreation industry.

Ahrens Manufacturing then was renamed Miracle Recreation Equipment Co. Claude Ahrens and his son, Paul, came up with other innovative designs for playground equipment, and by the time Mr. Ahrens retired from Miracle, he and his son had achieved 16 patents for the company.

Mr. Ahrens then founded Miraco in 1982. The company produces livestock-watering equipment.

In 1993, Mr. Ahrens announced that he would donate \$1.3 million toward construction of the new National Park and Recreation Association, a facility dedicated in June 1997 and designated as the Ahrens National Recreation and Park Institute.

In 1994, Claude Ahrens donated over \$4 million and 50 acres for the construction of the Ahrens/Paschall Memorial Park and Ahrens Family Center. The park was dedicated to his late son, Paul, and Paul's friend, Jim Paschal.

He built the Grinnell Athletic and Recreation Center, a \$1.2 million, 20,000-square-foot gymnasium, in 1998 as an addition to the park. This year, a third addition brought to the park three outdoor soccer fields and a golf driving range.

Mr. Ahrens established the Claude W. and Dolly Ahrens Foundation in 1992. That foundation, along with the Claude W. Ahrens Christian Trust and more personal donations, has meant millions of dollars for Grinnell-area projects and organizations, including Grinnell College, Grinnell Regional Medical Center, the Grinnell Youth Baseball/Softball Association, the Iowa Recreation and Park Association, the Poweshiek County Conservation Board and various local churches. A major contribution was instrumental in the construction of the Ahrens Medical Arts facility at Grinnell Regional and the Ahrens Fitness Center, also part of the hospital complex. Mr. Ahrens also do-

given money to the Grinnell-Newburg schools, Grinnell Community Day Care, the Iowa Cattlemen's Association, the Grinnell 2000 Foundation, the Iowa Peace Institute, the University of Iowa women's softball program, the Iowa State University men's golf program and Stewart Library.

He also established the Dolly Ahrens Scholarship Fund for Grinnell High School seniors in 1992, the year of Dolly Ahrens's death.

Mr. Ahrens is survived by three grandchildren; two great-grandchildren; and one brother, Donald of Grinnell.

He was preceded in death by his parents; his wife; his son; six sisters, Elizabeth Fanton, Esther Wray, Wilma "Billie" Nolan, Josie Dunton, Mary Muckler and Katherine Cummins; and two brothers.