



Governor William Grawn Milliken

March 26, 1922 - October 18, 2019

Governor William G. Milliken, the longest-serving governor and perhaps most beloved governor in his history of the state, will be remembered at a memorial and celebration of his life at the Milliken Auditorium at Northwestern Michigan College in Traverse City at 1:30 p.m. on August 15, 2020.

Speakers honoring and remembering the governor will include current Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, Bill Rustem, a senior policy advisor in both the Milliken and Snyder administrations; Captain Arlan Brower, Michigan State Police, ret., Chuck Stokes of WXYZ-TV, and journalist and longtime friend Jack Lessenberry.

The Milliken Auditorium is in the Dennon Museum Center on the college campus, and is also where a memorial for the governor's wife, pioneering feminist Helen Milliken, was held in 2013.

Admission is free and open to the public, and there should be plenty of available parking. Those attending are encouraged to arrive early and be seated to help accommodate Governor Whitmer's schedule.

William G. Milliken was born March 26, 1922 and died on Oct. 18, 2019 in Traverse City, the city of his birth. He served as governor from 1969 to 1983.

Governor Milliken was especially known for his championing the state's environment, his efforts to work with and help the city of Detroit, and successfully promoting a culture of civility and bipartisan cooperation.

The governor had previously served in the state senate and as the state's lieutenant governor. He also ran the former Milliken department stores, and flew 50 combat missions in Europe during World War II.

Broadcast and other media wishing to cover the event should contact Megan Heator, operations manager of the Dennon Museum Center: 231-995-1595

HOTEL RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FAMILY -

<https://www.bayshore-resort.com/>

<https://www.choicehotels.com/michigan/traverse-city/cambria-hotels/mi325?source=gyxt>

<https://www.park-place-hotel.com/>

FULL OBITUARY -

William G. Milliken, 97, the longest-serving and perhaps most beloved governor in Michigan history, passed away October 18, 2019 at the home he built 60 years ago in Traverse City, Michigan.

Governor Milliken, who served from 1969 until he voluntarily retired from office in 1983, left a proud legacy of environmental protection unmatched by any other governor, worked hard to bring the state's various regions together, and set an example for civility and decency that is sorely missed today.

Although he was a lifelong Republican, he was always eager to work with members of both parties, and wasn't afraid to endorse Democrats, including President Barack Obama, when he thought they were the better candidate.

Though many national figures tried to get him to run for the U.S. Senate, or even President, he had only wanted to be governor since he began a boyhood correspondence with former Michigan Gov. Chase Osborn -- and often said he was content to be the best governor he could possibly be.

William Milliken was born in Traverse City on March 26, 1922, the son of James T. Milliken and Hildegard Grawn Milliken. He enrolled at Yale University, his father's alma mater, in 1940, but temporarily left to join the U.S. Army Air Corps in World War II. Though he would later be remembered as one of the state's most mild-mannered politicians, Milliken was an authentic war hero.

He flew 50 missions as a waist gunner on a B-24 heavy bomber, something very few fliers survived. He was repeatedly wounded and received many medals, including a Silver Star, the Purple Heart and three Bronze Service Stars.

After the war, he finished his degree at Yale, and returned to Traverse City after marrying the former Helen Wallbank of Denver, who he met during the war and who had graduated from Smith College.

The future governor then built up and expanded the group of family department stores,

J.W. Milliken, Inc. He and Helen also built their home on Peninsula Drive in Traverse City where they would live for the rest of their lives.

In 1960, he beat a three-term incumbent in the Republican primary to win nomination, and then election, to the Michigan state senate, where he led a drive to revitalize and modernize the state Republican Party. He was following in the footsteps of both his father and grandfather who previously held that senate seat.

Four years later, Bill Milliken won a tough battle at the GOP state convention to win the nomination for lieutenant governor, running with incumbent George Romney, the first time the nominees ran as a unified ticket under the new Michigan state constitution.

In January 1969 George Romney resigned to become U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development in President Richard Nixon's cabinet, and William Milliken was sworn in as Michigan's 44th governor.

Milliken then won two close elections for governor in his own right in 1970 and 1974. In 1978, he easily won a third term, becoming the first - and only -- Republican gubernatorial candidate since the Great Depression to win Wayne County.

He never lost an election.

Governor Milliken was deeply committed to protecting Michigan's air, water and land. He was a firm believer in the need to revitalize Michigan's urban areas. He also was a firm believer that the state must help its largest city, and managed to get a controversial Detroit equity package through the legislature despite strong opposition from many in his own party.

He fervently supported efforts to protect the Great Lakes, and after retiring from elected office became chairman in 1983 of the Chicago-based Center for the Great Lakes. He also headed the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council along with co-chair Frank Kelley. The William G. Milliken State Park and Harbor in Detroit was named for him in 2009 as a way of honoring both his commitment to the environment --and to the City of Detroit.

Following his years in office, Governor Milliken went on to serve on numerous boards and commissions, including that of the Chrysler Corporation, Conrail, the Ford Foundation and the Police Foundation in Washington, DC, which he chaired for many years. He also campaigned for prison reform and shorter sentences for minor drug offenses, and was a strong supporter of the Michigan Women's Justice and Clemency Project.

Governor Milliken is survived by his son, William Milliken of Ann Arbor. He was predeceased in 2012 by his wife, Helen Wallbank Milliken, an outspoken fighter for women's rights, member of the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame, and co-founder of ArtTrainUSA. His daughter, Elaine Milliken, an attorney, died of cancer in 1993.

The family is deeply indebted to its loyal cadre of care givers for their selfless, ongoing support, and to Hospice of Traverse City for the caring they so capably provided.

A memorial service will be held on August 6, 2020 at 2:00 pm at Interlochen's Kresge Auditorium.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests contributions be made to either the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy (www.detroitriverfront.org <<http://www.detroitriverfront.org>>) or For Love of Water/FLOW (www.flowforwater.org).

His ashes will be interred next to those of his wife and daughter in the Mackinac Island Cemetery. The family is served by Reynolds-Jonkhoff Funeral Home (www.reynolds-jonkhoff.com) in Traverse City, Michigan.

Comments



“ Governor Milliken was a consummate Gentleman! He treated all with Dignity and Respect and will remain as one of the Greatest Men to take the Oath of Office.

My fondest memory, was visiting the State Capital, where my mother was a custodian and had the responsibility of cleaning his office, the office of the supreme court justices, and a few others. As a child, I did not know of the stress involved in governing, nor the challenges he was facing, what I knew and seen was a gentle man that was caring and pleasant.

My deepest and sincerest condolences go out to the Milliken family, may you find comfort during these challenging times, knowing that your loved one was deeply admired and will be missed.

Larry Arreguin

Larry Arreguin - October 29, 2019 at 09:29 AM



“ Governor Milliken used 2 visit My church The Historic Little Rock MB Church Rev. Dr. Jim Holley Pastor quite often during his tenure.. He was very nice...friendly...couldn't even tell he was a Republican...lol.....He certainly will be missed...May He Rest In Eternal Peace!!!

Barbara Miller - October 27, 2019 at 12:01 PM



“ Over 30 years ago, I met Gov. Milliken at a gym that included an advanced program for people with disabilities. As Gov. Milliken exercised next to me, he was always so encouraging and interested in my ideas.

Years later, my husband often spoke with him in the grocery store about TC, politics and decorum.

Our thoughts and love are with his family and everyone who cared about him.

Respectfully,

Susan Odgers & Tom Mair

susan odgers - October 24, 2019 at 02:03 PM



“ My late mother, Liliya Golubovskis, was in a nursing home here in Traverse City, The Pavilions, and Governor Milliken came over to say hello.

While in a wheelchair, my late mother still had a firm handshake with one of her

hands, and as Governor Milliken shook her hand, he noted how pretty she looked; he turned to say to me, "doesn't your mother look pretty today?"

Of course, I nodded gratefully.

I noted that my late mother ran a successful retail business in Flint for 25 years.

Governor Milliken looked her directly in the eyes and sincerely said, "You know Lili, deep down we are both merchants."

The Connection with my late mother. The Milliken Charm.

We need that so much these days in our country.

God Bless Governor Milliken.

George Golubovskis
Traverse City, Michigan

George Golubovskis - October 23, 2019 at 01:58 PM



“ My first memory of Governor Milliken was meeting him as a young boy. My Mother was a long time activist in the state Democratic Party having worked for Governor Swainson and served as state party Vice-Chair. So Governor Milliken knew who she was. We were at the old Traverse City airport terminal to pick up my father when we bumped into the Governor walking (by himself) from his flight to his car. He saw my Mother and stopped to greet her, and met me as well. Despite their differences of party, he was warm and kind as if we were old friends. While it was a brief moment in time, it was a life long lesson for me, that politics shouldn't be personal. That everyone deserves respect and being kind to people means more than wins or losses. Relationships are what truly matter.

When I went to work for the State, the Governor was still governing. Having worked through many administrations since, I can honestly say that Governor Milliken was the most thoughtful, warm hearted and caring Governor I ever worked for. A fine man with an unmatched legacy of leadership and love for his State. A principled man who would always stand up for what he believed, not what was expedient. He will most certainly be missed.

Seth Phillips

Seth Phillips - October 21, 2019 at 12:40 PM



“ I could not agree more, a fine gentleman. Always deeply and genuinely friendly. He will be missed!

Mark Pachulski - October 21, 2019 at 07:46 PM



“ The obituary was most fitting a very fine gentlemen. My heartfelt prayers and condolences go to his family and friends.

Harold H. Huggins - October 22, 2019 at 02:46 PM



“ The Man that we need today....someone who reached all, and made Michigan a great State by utilized his gifts from God.

Thank You Governor Milliken and Family!

Barbara Maddox-Rose - October 23, 2019 at 02:02 PM



“ Governor Milliken was a man I had a great deal respect for. My father and him went back a long ways including high school. We even lived next door to the Governor for a number of years. I learned a great deal about certain aspects of life from his being in the public eye so much. My father would often say, "Son, keep your mouth closed and listen to him, you might just learn something." I truly enjoyed knowing his family and having them over for dinner etc. It was a great time in my life.

Many Thanks to the Milliken Family!

William A Wadsworth Jr. - November 14, 2019

william wadsworth - November 14, 2019 at 09:58 PM



“ I just found out about Gov. Milliken , so very sorry to hear. I am from New York City , and moved to Detroit 1970, before moving back to NYC years later . He was just the GREATEST EVER ! . He set the bar so high. God bless him , and for the person he was
.....ADHARRIS

ANITA D. HARRIS - May 22 at 02:51 PM