



William Francis Marsh Sr.

July 16, 1936 - August 10, 2016

William Francis Marsh, age 80, passed away on August 10, 2016 while surrounded by his family at his Leelanau County home after a yearlong battle with Alzheimer's.

Bill was born on July 16, 1936 in Mt. Clemens, Michigan to William F. Marsh Sr. and Margaret W. Marsh. Years later, his family relocated to Manhasset, Long Island where Bill attended Chaminade High School. His experience at Chaminade had a formative influence on his life, and as an exceptional student athlete, he earned a football scholarship to Yale University, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in History in 1958 and marrying the love of his life, Ann Fogel.

After enrolling in law school, Bill's career plans took a dramatic turn when his father became ill shortly after purchasing a Ford dealership in Newtown, Pa, prompting him to quit his studies and take control of the dealership. "I didn't choose this business," Bill once said, "It chose me."

As he gradually learned the business, the near-bankrupt dealership began to thrive under Bill's leadership. In the early 1970's, Bill served on Ford's National Dealer Council, representing the Northeast Region. At a meeting at Ford's Dearborn Headquarters, after a chance encounter with the Ford dealer from Traverse City, his dream of living in northern Michigan was hatched.

After realizing his dream and moving his family to Traverse City in 1980, he purchased Ward Leibler Buick in March 1982 during the height of the recession and, within one year, had taken the struggling dealership from last place to first place in sales. Over the next 24 years, he expanded the company, acquiring GMC, Ford, Chrysler-Plymouth, Dodge, Jeep, Pontiac, Saturn, and Hyundai franchises becoming the largest automotive dealership group in northern Michigan.

Bill held a national reputation of being a progressive car dealership owner who was willing to try unique approaches to automotive marketing. In commenting on his legacy, a

prominent automotive industry leader said, “His education and intellect set him apart from most all of his peers. His pioneering approach to retailing was decades ahead of its time.” For example, he was early to embrace negotiation-free selling, developed the company’s Price Point used car brand based on the big box retailing model, served on General Motors’ Retail Innovation Committee in the early 90’s and earned multiple national awards as a Saturn retailer.

A lifelong boater whose love for the water drew him to Traverse City, Bill became active in offshore powerboat racing in the 1980’s, racing his “TC Express” throughout the Great Lakes and at the APBA World Championships in Key West, Florida. As President of the Grand Traverse Offshore Racing Association, he staged two nationally sanctioned offshore races on Grand Traverse Bay in 1988 and 89. He has also served as president of the St. Francis Parish Council and was a board member of NBD Bank.

Philanthropic contributions became an integral part of the company under Bill’s direction. The company became major contributors to community efforts both big and small. He helped such organizations as the Father Fred Foundation, Munson Medical Center, Grand Traverse Area Catholic Schools, Freedom Builders, Child and Family Services, St. Francis Catholic Church and the Grand Traverse Bay YMCA, and many others. He also held numerous fundraising events at the dealership for individuals who faced mounting debt due to rare medical complications. Contributions were not only financial, but he also encouraged employees to personally participate.

As a recreational boater, Bill loved cruising the northern Great Lakes. He also loved spending time his family cottage in Ontario; in fact instead of spending the winter months in the warmth of Florida or Arizona, Bill and Ann enjoyed snowmobiling with friends in the Canadian wilderness.

Bill recently remarked, “Life is good. Blessed with good health, my lifetime partner, Ann and I want for nothing that is not available to us. After 57 years she is still my best buddy and my girlfriend. We have loved every moment of raising a daughter and 4 sons and now we are rooting for our grandchildren.”

Bill is survived by his wife, Ann; sister, Mary Joan McIlvaine of Manhattan, KS; daughter, Terry Winship (Steve) of Casper, WY; sons Bill Jr. (Debbie), Jamie (Barbara), Michael (Kerry), and Dan (Pam) all of Traverse City. Bill’s legacy includes 13 grandchildren and 4 great grandchildren and one on the way.

Visitation will take place Wednesday, August 17 from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m. at St. Francis

Church in Traverse City, with a scripture service at 7 p.m. A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated on Thursday, August 18 at 11 a.m. at St. Francis Church, with visitation beginning at 10 a.m. Fr. Ken Stachnik and Fr. Joe Graff will concelebrate services.

In lieu of flowers, gifts in Bill's memory can be made to the Grand Traverse Area Catholic Schools, 123 E 11th Street, Traverse City, MI 49684 or Munson Hospice, 1105 Sixth Street, Traverse City, MI 49684.

Events

AUG **Visitation** 03:00PM - 08:00PM

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St. Francis Catholic Church
1025 S. Union, Traverse City, MI, US, 49684

AUG **Rosary** 07:00PM

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St. Francis Catholic Church
1025 S. Union, Traverse City, MI, US, 49684

AUG **Funeral Mass** 11:00AM

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St. Francis Catholic Church
1025 S. Union, Traverse City, MI, US, 49684

Comments



“ I first me Bill as a youngster in 1968 at Wah-Wash-Kesh Lake. One of the greatest men that I have ever met. His amazing professional accomplishments are legendary. His greatest accomplishments were the wonderful children that he and Ann raised. The best neighbours that anyone could ask for. Our most sincere and and heartfelt condolences to the family, sorry but I just heard about Bill's passing. I can only say that I am such a better person for having known him and I will always consider it an honor and a privilege to have had him as a friend.
God bless you and rest well Buddy - and save me a bass at Wolf Lake.
Ken, Bev Webb and family.

Ken webb - September 25, 2016 at 09:58 PM



“ I am sorry to hear of Bill's passing. He was a good cottage neighbour who clearly appreciated nature at its best here on Lake Wahwashkesh. Bill reminded me of my Dad who passed away this past year. He also was deeply involved in the car business working as an executive for The Ford Motor Company in Dealer development. Like Bill he also was a consummate gentleman.

BRAD TOPPING - August 19, 2016 at 05:52 PM



“ To the entire Bill Marsh Sr. Family: Much comfort, strength, peace and hope in all the days to come. What a celebration of life and legacy he has given and now will continue on with all of you. What joy he brought to many in this community and beyond. May Father God's Face shine upon you all.

Pete & Chris Torrey

Pete Torrey - August 16, 2016 at 05:22 PM



“ Great friend and boater
you will be missed
Gordon & Sally Winstanley

gordon Winstanley - August 16, 2016 at 08:56 AM



“ My memory of Bill will be he was always smiling and full of energy.
Truly an amazing Man who touch the lives of many.
Will be sadly missed,
Cathy & Dave Sommerfield



Dave Sommerfield - August 16, 2016 at 07:06 AM



“ Truly a remarkable man. From the time I started doing business with Bill at the Saturn store and quick lube, and through all the years of enjoying a great business relationship,
he was always concerned with "what could he do for me". What a great business, and life lesson that was.

To Jamie, Bill, and all,

I have been truly Blessed to have know Bill Marsh

God Bless you all , now and always.

Jerry Rose

Jerry Rose - August 15, 2016 at 10:33 AM



“ So sorry to hear the news of Bill's passing. A great man. Our prayers are with the family.

Tom & Luann Nemitz - August 15, 2016 at 12:21 AM



“ Bill and Ann gave us Jamie. Jamie and Barb gave us Rob. Rob and Shayna were married August 24, 2012. Thank you for helping to start this love!

Donna Dawson - August 14, 2016 at 08:48 PM



“ Charlotte and I had been on several Buick trips with Bill and Ann and found them to be good companions and great company. Further we have a Traverse area connection which deepened the association. All of us, who have been in the auto business, treasure our reputations and Bill's, and his family's, was above reproach.

Steve and Charlotte Qua, Buick - Cleveland, Ohio

Stephen M Qua - August 14, 2016 at 10:28 AM



“ Bill was a class act, a true gentleman and a faithful friend. We will always remember the good times. He will be painfully missed. Bill & Gwen Stireman

Bill Stireman - August 14, 2016 at 07:05 AM



“ I was always grateful for Bill's support back in the mid-70's when I was starting my career at Ford calling on dealers in the Philadelphia District. His enthusiasm was contagious. He was always a true gentleman, and a pleasure to work with.

Ted Schuster, Troy Michigan

Ted Schuster - August 13, 2016 at 07:38 PM



“ I will always remember Bill's wonderful smile. I looked forward to his and Ann's trip to SoCal. We shared great meals and memories. He was so kind to our son, Brian and his family when they visited Michigan. On one occasion Mark, my husband shared the organic oranges and lemons he grows. A few weeks later the Marsh wine arrived, such a nice surprise!

The Marsh Family and Bill will be remembered in our prayers and thoughts. May God comfort each of you in your grief.

With love, Mark and Chris Kellerman

Chris - August 13, 2016 at 05:07 PM



“ A really super guy who lived a life to be proud of. I knew him when I used to sell advertising to him, 1981 on. Always a gentleman, always told the truth. Blessings on his fine family as they suffer his loss.

Lynn Fifer - August 12, 2016 at 02:06 PM



“ Marsh family,

So sorry to hear of your loss.

Ralph Hall - August 12, 2016 at 07:07 AM