

# IN MEMORY OF WILLIAM A. MATTKA

Presented to the Tri-County Bar Association on January 13, 2006

We submit this memorial in honor of William A. Mattka to be made a part of the records for the Circuit Court of Trempealeau County and the minutes of the Tri-County Bar Association.

William A. Mattka was born to Frederick and Gertrude Mattka on February 1, 1941, in Western Springs, Illinois. He died as a result of an automobile accident on April 2, 2004, at age 63. He was survived by his wife, June Mattka, and four stepchildren. He was proud of his stepchildren, three of whom have or are attending one of our nation's military academies.

Bill obtained his undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Wisconsin - Madison, graduating from law school in 1966. Shortly thereafter, he joined Burr Tarrant in Whitehall with the law firm of Tarrant, Lund & Sherman.

Within months of Bill joining Burr Tarrant, the then Trempealeau County District Attorney, Donald Johnson, resigned, creating a vacancy. Bill, who had already established ties to the Republican party, was appointed by Governor Warren Knowles to fill the vacancy. Bill was soon faced with a multitude of criminal cases to handle, including a murder case.

In 1968, Bill was joined by Attorney Alan Robertson and in 1972, by Attorney Frederic Berns. Bill continued to serve as District Attorney (then a part-time position) until the end of 1972. The firm practiced under the name of Tarrant, Mattka & Robertson until the death of Burr Tarrant in 1975. Thereafter,

the firm practiced as Mattka, Robertson & Berns. Attorney Allan Ohm joined the firm in 1975. In 1978, the firm of Mattka, Robertson, Berns & Ohm formed and continued as Mattka, Robertson & Ohm after Fred Berns began a solo practice in 1981. Bill maintained his practice with Alan Robertson and Allan Ohm until Bill decided to go solo in 2000. Attorney Mark Franklin was also associated with the firm from 1985 into 1993.

Bill maintained his office for his entire career across the street from the Trempealeau County Courthouse. This enabled our judges to send all sorts of characters across the street for legal assistance. The judges probably knew that Bill would try to help, whether or not the client could afford to pay any fees. For many years, Bill served as a court-appointed public defender.

Bill was interested in and active in the Republican party. This garnered his appointment as District Attorney, and later, in 1978, resulted in his nomination as the Republican candidate for Attorney General. As Bill's luck would have it, his opposition was an entrenched incumbent, Bronson LaFollette, but Bill ran a strong, albeit unsuccessful campaign against the LaFollette name.

In the 1970's, Bill served as Whitehall City Attorney. During his tenure, he was instrumental in securing grant money for expansion of the Whitehall waste treatment facility which, in turn, allowed the former Whitehall Packing Company to locate in Whitehall. With that, he was responsible, in part, for bringing in thousands of dollars in legal fees to area attorneys.

Bill, as mentioned, represented just about anyone who walked through the door of his office. He wasn't one to pay attention to the income or the time it took

to provide his services. For years, without much success, we, as Bill's partners, tried to impress upon him the importance of keeping some sort of time log, but it never worked. Bill, when finished with a file, would look through it and decide, then, the value of his services. Many a client got a very good value.

For a number of years, Bill dabbled in real estate sales and held a broker's license. He also engaged in commercial activities, for a time owning what is now the City Café in Whitehall and what is now the Oak Park Inn Motel. When owning the latter business, Bill didn't have a lot of time to devote to the motel operation, so he operated on an honor system. A guest was instructed to self-register, and if no one was around, take an available room key to let themselves in. If no one was around to check out, just leave the key, money for the room, or at least an address, if you didn't have the money.

Bill enjoyed playing tennis, the solitude of fishing (especially on the upper Michigan peninsula lake where his parents had a cabin), and, of course, he loved animals. Perhaps his true calling in life was to be a veterinarian. His office and his hobby farm north of Whitehall, before his death, became the de facto Trempealeau County animal shelter. As a legacy to Bill and through his efforts before he died, and through memorials after he died, the Trempealeau County Humane Society was able to build a shelter now located on Highway 53 between Ettrick and Blair.

Despite having no bad habits, Bill was a devoted member of the Tri-County Bar. He enjoyed the camaraderie of his fellow members and was our

leader for the Friday morning breakfast crew (no doubt, because we all knew that Bill was not one to ever be hung over).

Bill enjoyed practicing law, was competent, thorough and well prepared. He gave what our state bar motto affirms: Expert advice and service to others.

With acknowledgement to an article in last summer's Wisconsin Law Alumni magazine, The Gargoyle, by retiring Assistant Dean Ed Reisner, we wish to paraphrase an obituary, which is so fitting, to remember Bill:

Died, April 2, 2004, Bill Mattka, aged 63 years.  
Bill Mattka was not a great man as the world counts such.  
He was too generous to ever become rich, and he did not grow famous at the practice of law, simply because he had a bad habit of considering the position of the other fellow. Bill Mattka was an excellent lawyer, but a poor practitioner.  
"You cannot have both the law and the profits," he once said.  
And yet Bill Mattka always had all he needed, and perhaps that is enough. He made no pretense of loving his enemies – he had none.

Respectfully submitted,

Allan Ohm  
Alan S. Robertson  
Frederic J. Berns