

Berkshire's Lifetime of Achievement Honored by Bar

**By Lorraine Boyd
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It's hard to imagine an attorney in the state of Nebraska that didn't cross paths with Bob Berkshire during his 55 years in practice.

His achievements were far-reaching and encompassed more than just the legal profession. More on that in a moment.

Today, on what would have been Bob's 84th birthday, he is receiving the Omaha Bar Association's Lifetime Achievement Award, its most prestigious award.

A Lifetime of Achievement

Two years ago, he was honored by the Nebraska State Bar Foundation, for whom he served as president for two years, and was presented their most prestigious recognition, the Foundation Award.

He was also honored with the Nebraska State Bar Association's George H. Turner Award for his "unusual efforts dedicated to furthering public understanding of the legal system, the administration of justice and confidence in the legal system."

But did you know that Bob played on Benson High School's state tournament basketball team, the one that beat Norfolk 6-4 in one of the lowest scoring games in history?

Receiving that trifecta of awards is rare, if not unparalleled.

We know that he served his bar associations tirelessly, just as he did his clients at his law firm of Berkshire and Burmeister. He loved the law, and sought to give back by serving as a state liaison to the American Bar Association for the Corporate Laws committee. He led the Nebraska legislative committee that eventually passed the Model Business Corporation Act in 1976.

We know he treasured his family. He invited his son Rick and daughter Laurie to join him in the law firm. Bob remained a model of civility and friendliness throughout his 82 years, before his passing on February 9, 2011. "I never met anyone who didn't like him," his son Rick said. "He was a nice guy" – perhaps the highest praise of all.

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He treasured his time with his family – his wife of 57 years, Joanne; children Janet, Leslie, Rick, and Laurie Meyers; and six grandchildren – so much so that the whole clan took vacations together nearly every year, to places from the Galapagos Islands to the Mediterranean to Hawaii and Mexico.

He took two of his grandchildren on a biking adventure in England, one of his 20 bike trips – where bikes were the principal mode of transportation – through such enticing scenery as that of Napa Valley, Italy, France, Germany and Scotland.

He and Joanne delighted in being able to share their good fortune by setting up and funding an endowed athletic football scholarship at UNL in honor of Dave Noble UNL '23 (Joanne's father), who was an All

American fullback who scored three of the four touchdowns in Nebraska's two wins over the Four Horseman of Notre Dame, which also constituted their only two losses.

He also set up an endowment fund with the Nebraska State Bar Foundation to award funds to the bar for continuing legal education. Then he created a fund with the UNL College of Law to award professorships and scholarships to the Law College.

He loved his alma mater and his community, spending countless hours volunteering his time in various organizations. He served 12 years on the Westside Community Schools Board of Education and was a member of the Downtown Omaha Kiwanis Club. He was a board member of the Nebraska Alumni Foundation, the University of Nebraska N Club Alumni, the Nebraska Law School Alumni Association, and the University of Nebraska Foundation Charitable Gift Fund.

He loved his God, serving as a member of the Board of Elders of Dundee Presbyterian Church.

He loved his country, serving in the United States Marine Corps Reserve from 1950 to 1972, retiring at the rank of Colonel.

But did you know that Bob played on Benson High School's state tournament basketball team, the one that beat Norfolk 6-4 in one of the lowest scoring games in history? Or that he was the second-leading scorer – with one point! Nobody is sure if that was what won him a place in the Benson High School Hall of Fame. He remained good friends with opponent Doyle Busskohl.

Bob also set the state record in high hurdles in 1946 – a record that stood for 19 years, until his son Rick broke it! Now that sounds more like a Hall of Fame ticket.

Whether it was work or charity or just fun, Bob was not only “personable and enjoyable,” but also “very industrious, well organized, smart, and ... got a lot of things done,” his longtime friend Dean Kratz recalled.

Kratz should know; their friendship goes back to the '50s, when both men were at the University of Nebraska, where both participated in, and excelled at, track.

The Lifetime Achievement Award is not bestowed every year; the fact that the Omaha Bar chose to bestow it on Robert Berkshire on this year's Law Day, with its theme of justice, is especially fitting. As Berkshire was quoted as saying in 2010, “The NSB Foundation exists to serve Nebraska citizens and its legal profession with innovative and creative programs to improve the administration of justice and fulfill the American vision of equal justice for all.”

Happy Birthday, Bob.