



Vernie Wells

February 28, 1926 - December 17, 2022

Vernie Wells, 96, of Oskaloosa, passed away Saturday evening, December 17, 2022, at the Mahaska Health Hospice Serenity House in Oskaloosa.

Vernon Gene Wells, the son of John “Joe” Edward and Nora Eva (Silvers) Wells, was born on February 28, 1926, at his parents’ home north of Fremont, Iowa. Vernie’s early years were difficult for the family because of the drought and depression. His grandfather lost the family farm in 1935, which resulted in a move to a small farm five miles south of Oskaloosa. Vernie was active in sports but also worked while in Oskaloosa High School. After graduating in 1944, he enlisted in the Army Air Force. He served as a Staff Sergeant in the 566th Bomber Squadron, 289th Bomber Group. He was stationed in England and participated in the Central European Theater. Vernie served as a Tail Gunner operating two 50-caliber machine guns in the tail turret of a B24 Liberator. He flew seven missions over the English Channel into Germany. He spent the last part of his service in California working at a PX, in addition to his regular army job, allowing him to save \$1500.00. In May 1946, Vernie was offered a share in a drag-line business upon his return from the military. He knew nothing about drag lines but had a down payment for the venture and was ready to learn. In January of the following year, he bought out his partner and became the sole owner of the dragline. His first jobs were in coal mines and on farms, but in the 1950s, because of a machinery update, he moved on to installing water and sewer lines and rebuilding levees. Vernie and his crew dug over 200 basements in Oskaloosa and the surrounding area and laid over one million feet of water mains and sewers from Montrose to Creston and Eldora to Pulaski in over 78 towns in southeast Iowa.

In 1954, Vernie developed his first subdivision on 9th Avenue East; in 1962, he built his first apartment house, an 8-plex on South 2nd Street. In 1965, he built the Penwell Apartments on College Avenue. These ventures were the beginnings of a career change for Vernie. He was the only bidder in 1974 for a 30-unit complex for the elderly. This was the project that put him in the apartment rental business. He needed to sell equipment to help finance the undertaking, but Englenook Apartments were soon a reality, and by 1981, Norwich Apartments were completed. Vernie knew there was a great need for clean, safe, and affordable housing for the elderly of limited means. His investment enabled many to live out their lives and comfort and dignity. In 1992, he developed 27 acres into 51 lots and

called the subdivision Golfview Estates. He remained in the apartment rental business until 2015. His vision's scope centered on helping individuals, but it grew to include the betterment of Oskaloosa. Because of his success in the apartment business, he supported the YMCA generously, the Senior Citizen's Center, Penn Central Mall, William Penn University, Mahaska Health and the Hospice Serenity House, the Oskaloosa HS Buildings Trades program, and Old White Cemetery.

While in high school, Vernie worked at the Ford Garage; it was there he became acquainted with Bill Jones. He later met Evelyn Jones, Bill's daughter, at the dance club El Shapo (admittance fee 11 cents), and they enjoyed dancing together. After the 1943 Homecoming Parade, Vernie became more acquainted with Shirley Jones, Bill's daughter, and Evelyn's younger sister. Vernie escorted her home that night, which started a beautiful relationship. After a chance meeting, resulting in a hilarious ice-skating venture at Forest Cemetery in early 1944, Vernie again escorted Shirley home. It was during this encounter they decided that they liked each other. They were only to have one formal date before Vernie was inducted into the military. Still, he enjoyed several weekends on leave at the Jones home, pampered by Shirley's mother and older sisters. Not until Shirley finished high school and Vernie had worked for a year after returning home from the service did Vernie and Shirley finally tie the knot on August 17, 1947, in Oskaloosa. Together they raised three daughters. He and Shirley enjoyed wintering in Arizona for 33 years; bird watching, meeting new people, playing Bridge, and the reprieve from Iowa's cold drew them to the area.

Vernie first credited his wife for his accomplishments; he also credited his bankers, lawyers, insurance agents, accountants, bookkeepers, and especially his workers for the faith and support they showed him. He was a member of St. James Episcopal Church, the American Legion, the Elks, the Oskaloosa Rotary Club, and Trees Forever. He enjoyed playing Bridge, bird watching, planting trees, and of course, working.

His family includes three daughters: Kristine Wells and John Waters of Des Moines, Mary and Stephen Moore of St. Louise, MO, and Leslie "Dede" Horn of Oskaloosa; his six grandchildren include Nathan Groenendyk of Hyattsville, MD, Katherine A. Groenendyk Spilo of Los Angeles, CA, Daniel Cooper Moore of South Orange, NJ, Andrew Moore of St. Louise, MO, Katherine Horn of Ottumwa, and James P. Horn of Oskaloosa; and ten great-grandchildren.

In addition to his parents, Vernie was preceded in death by his wife, Shirley, in 2020; a sister, Velma June Adams, three sisters-in-law: Eileen Suiter, Johnita Jones, and Evelyn Zach; and two brothers-in-law: Bill and Bob Jones.

Funeral Services for Vernie will be held 11 a.m., Friday, December 30, 2022, at St. James Episcopal Church, with Reverend Kevin Enge officiating. The Oskaloosa Honor Guard will present military honors. Cremation will follow the service, and his ashes will be buried in Old White Cemetery. Visitation will begin at 11 a.m., Thursday, at Langkamp Funeral

Chapel; the family will greet visitors from 3-6 p.m. Vernie loved his community, in lieu of sending flowers, please honor him by making a memorial contribution to the Mahaska Health Foundation for the Hospice Serenity House or the 52577 Scholarship Fund.

Cemetery Details

Old White Cemetery

Oskaloosa, IA

Previous Events

Visitation

DEC 29. 11:00 AM (CT)

Langkamp Funeral Chapel & Crematory
2116 N 3rd St
Oskaloosa, IA 52577
(641) 672-2181
langkampfuneralchapel@gmail.com
<https://www.langkampfuneralchapel.com>

The family will greet visitors from 3-6 p.m., Thursday evening.

Funeral Service

DEC 30. 11:00 AM (CT)

St. James Episcopal Church
207 South 3rd ST
Oskaloosa, IA 52577

Tribute Wall



“ Vernie Wells

October 05, 2023 at 11:57 PM



“ Prayers of comfort for the three daughters of Vernie. I grew up with Mary until Jr High started and we moved away. I remember having a sleep over with several girls at the Well's home and how nice Mary's folks were. We were so noisy far late into the night and yet they put us with us!! Girls, I know it's hard to lose your parents, no matter their age or distance between you. Please know that I will have all of you in my prayers. You were blessed to have him as your dad.



Dee Dee Fenton McCoy - December 30, 2022 at 05:12 AM



“ Our sincerest sympathy to you Dede and your family. Your Dad was indeed a blessing to Oskaloosa. He certainly had a heart for those who were in need!! It was always so good to see him at almost all of the Legion events. He lived life to the fullest, that's for sure.

Don and Carol Houk - December 29, 2022 at 01:52 PM



“ 8 files added to the album LifeTributes



Langkamp Funeral Chapel & Crematory - December 28, 2022 at 04:41 PM



“ 70 files added to the album LifeTributes



Langkamp Funeral Chapel & Crematory - December 27, 2022 at 05:50 PM

AB

“ I grew up a “farm” neighbor to Vernie and Shirley and enjoyed many wonderful conversations through the years. Vernie was a weekly attender of “Thankful Thursdays” in The Alley of which I was an organizer, riding his bike to attend each week and he helped to support The Alley by sponsoring a historical sign. We shared an interest in history and I enjoyed many conversations with Vernie in his retirement regarding the history of Oskaloosa and of his growing up years. Many Blessings to DeDe and the rest of the family for the loss of a great man. He will be greatly missed!

Ann Thorp Brouwer - December 27, 2022 at 03:59 AM

CD

“ Dede and family, so sorry for your loss. I remember being so impressed with his apartment building on 2nd street, it was so modern! May your memories be a blessing to you.

Connie Douglas - December 24, 2022 at 06:25 PM

TS

“ My condolences to his family. He was a great man. I sure enjoyed visiting with him. He was so willing to share his knowledge and memories of history. I will miss him stopping by my house when he was out riding his bike. Rest In Peace, Vernie!

Tim Sparks - December 23, 2022 at 07:29 AM

DB

“ *Dean And Barbara Bone lit a candle in memory of Vernie Wells*



Dean and Barbara Bone - December 22, 2022 at 11:26 AM

DC

“ *Delores J Cundiff lit a candle in memory of Vernie Wells*



Delores J Cundiff - December 21, 2022 at 07:06 PM

JR

“ *Jon Roorda sent a virtual gift in memory of Vernie Wells*



Jon Roorda - December 21, 2022 at 04:27 PM

JS

“ *My thoughts and prayers are with Dede, Kristine and Mary. Your father was incredible, and I always remember him smiling at every family gathering at your grandmother's house. God's grace and peace be yours.*

Jon Stout - December 21, 2022 at 09:45 AM

JD

“ *JOE DURIAN lit a candle in memory of Vernie Wells*



JOE DURIAN - December 20, 2022 at 01:42 PM

JD

A GOOD MAN HELPED THE LEGION A LOT

JOE DURIAN - December 20, 2022 at 01:44 PM

D?

“ Diana Shadduck. 🇺🇸 lit a candle in memory of Vernie Wells



Diana Shadduck. us - December 20, 2022 at 08:56 AM

JF

“ Jeff & Jill Ferguson lit a candle in memory of Vernie Wells



Jeff & Jill Ferguson - December 20, 2022 at 06:52 AM

SG

“ You were such a blessing to see every day when I delivered your mail. Prayers of peace to the entire family.

Shelly Glandon - December 19, 2022 at 08:56 PM

DM

“ What an awesome and generous soul. Oskaloosa was so lucky to have a City Father like our Vernie. Thank you Mr. Wells for your love, generosity, kind words and giving many people an opportunity to rise above their present situation. You will never be forgotten and the good people of Oskaloosa will always think of you with warmest remembrance . Good Bye friend. You have a whole slue of people waiting for you to celebrate your arrival.

Dyanne McKeag - December 19, 2022 at 06:15 PM

DW

“ Debbie & Tom Walling lit a candle in memory of Vernie Wells



Debbie & Tom Walling - December 19, 2022 at 05:09 PM

GB

“ So sorry of his Bernie's death

Georgia binns - December 19, 2022 at 04:50 PM

CV

“ *Cliff And Leilani VandeWall lit a candle in memory of Vernie Wells*



Cliff and Leilani VandeWall - December 19, 2022 at 04:10 PM