



Richard Leroy Morris

January 1, 1927 - February 22, 2020

Richard LeRoy Morris passed away on February 22, 2020 surrounded by his family. Services have been postponed at this time.

Richard, more commonly known as Dick, was born on January 1, 1927 to Roy and Marie (Donaldson) Morris in Triumph, MN. Dick graduated with honors from Garfield-Webb High School in the spring of 1944 and enlisted in the Navy Aircrew Program in August of that year where he trained to be a flight radio operator. Upon discharge, he enrolled in Buena Vista College, receiving a BS in Mathematics and Science in 1950.

Richard wasn't so focused on academics, though, that he didn't notice the cute girl sitting on the steps of the library in Webb, Iowa. This turned out to be Shirley Lavonn Smith. Four years after that fateful meeting, Richard and Shirley married at the Methodist Church in Webb, IA. Shirley was also a teacher, and they soon moved to Everly, IA to accept their first teaching positions. Richard taught high school math and science in Everly for two years. They then moved to Rolfe, where he taught high school math for four years. In 1956 they moved to Spirit Lake, IA where Richard taught high school math and computer science until his retirement in 1988. He worked to develop a rigorous math curriculum and standards at SLHS that influenced faculty both locally and nationally. Because of his excellence as an educator, he was nominated and selected to attend summer courses at the University of

Northern Iowa given by the National Science Foundation to help math and science teachers strengthen their instruction. Subsequently, he was selected to attend an Academic Year Institute at UNI where he received his Master's degree in one year.

More than his commitment to math, Dick was deeply devoted to his students. He cared so much about them that even thirty years after retirement, students would approach him in the grocery store and he would remember their names and where they sat in class.

Not only did Dick serve students, he served the teachers, as well. He worked on Joanne Gruhn's successful campaign to become a state legislator. Together they wrote legislation to allow for the early retirement of teachers, which passed and was put into law. He was a strong advocate for increasing the salaries of teachers to become competitive with other professions and to allow teachers to have year-round employment.

As a result of his devotion to curriculum, students, and teachers, in 1968 Dick received the Outstanding Iowa Mathematics Teacher award from the Iowa Academy of Science. From 1972-1974 Dick was the Region III director of the Iowa Council of Teachers of Mathematics. He was head of the K-12 Mathematics Department for Spirit Lake from 1960-1988. In 1980 Dick was honored to serve as Grand Marshall of the Spirit Lake Homecoming celebration. And in 2006 he was inducted into the first annual Spirit Lake Education Hall of Achievement in honor of his role as an educator in the Spirit Lake schools.

In addition to serving the education community, Dick served the wider Spirit Lake community, as well. He was an influential member and president of East Lake Improvement Corporation, president of Spirit Lake Friends of the Library, a lifelong member of Kiwanis, serving as president of the Golden Kiwanis Club

for many years, and a member of the First Presbyterian Church, where he served as elder and deacon.

What drove Richard to serve his community so passionately, was his heart for people and his desire to make a difference in the world. In everything he did, he loved to learn and pass that knowledge on. In retirement, he loved good conversation, walking the local trails, playing cards, and traveling with Shirley. His passion for math fed his many hobbies including painting, designing, building homes, and accomplishing home projects.

He was preceded in death by Shirley, his wife of 65 years, his father, mother and son, Jeff. Dick is survived by his daughters Marga and Debby and his son Mike (Lisa), his four grandchildren Christina, Kym (Adam), Ben and Megan (Jesse), his six great-grandchildren Lauren, Nathan, Isaac, Blake, Camella and Ian, his sisters Betty Miller and Phyllis Taylor and many nieces and nephews.

He has donated his body to the Whole Body Foundation at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN to be used for the education of medical students.

Even in death, he continues to teach. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to Spirit Lake School Foundation, PO Box 46, Spirit Lake, IA 51360, Attn: Richard Morris Scholarship Fund

Tribute Wall

CS

“ *Kindest neighbor ever.....My deepest sympathy to the family, Cindy*

Cindy Schatz - July 13, 2020 at 11:43 AM



“ *One wonderful man..the best.*



Kathleen Shaw - March 01, 2020 at 08:34 PM

LM

“ *What a special, special teacher Mr. Morris was to those of us in his classes in the mid-sixties! He demanded our best and he helped us reach for excellence. I owe my success in college and graduate school mathematics to the foundation and discipline he taught. (I even taught mathematics for eight years before going on to other related careers.) He touched so many, many lives and we were better for his example and influence.*

*My sympathy and prayers for the entire family at this time of loss.
Linda (Weik) Moore*

Linda Moore - February 29, 2020 at 01:30 AM

BM

“ *He was one of my favorite teachers and a kind and wonderful man. RIP*



Barbara May - February 28, 2020 at 02:51 PM

RM

“ My love and sympathy to the family of Dick Morris. He was a great teacher, always friendly and helpful. Never forgot a student in the years after teaching. Always an active gentleman who our community will miss.
Reba Dodds Munson



Reba Munson - February 28, 2020 at 09:16 AM

PB

“ Paul Bakke lit a candle in memory of Richard Leroy Morris



Paul bakke - February 27, 2020 at 06:50 PM

DK

“ To Family,
I will be indebted to Mr. Morris as long as the Lord allows me to stay on earth. He was an educator who one just had to respect because he cared about you and you knew he liked you no matter what. We did not always agree politically, but that was OK because you had to respect him in his sincerity. He was a good and decent man.
Dale Kimball

Dale Kimball - February 26, 2020 at 06:44 PM

BK

“ I was lucky to have Dick as a math teacher and also little league coach for three years. Played with Jeff those three summers. Great math teacher and those three summers I learned more than just baseball. My sympathy to Marga and all the family, God Bless,

Bruce Klenken - February 26, 2020 at 12:29 PM

SR

“ *My condolences to your family during this difficult time. As a student of Mr. Morris back in those turbulent days of the '60s, he instilled the desire to work hard and study harder! His dedication and devotion to his students was an inspiration. Blessings and Peace.*

Sue Carlson Richter

Sue Carlson Richter - February 26, 2020 at 08:52 AM

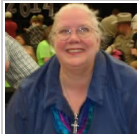
BS

“ *I was a student of Dicks in 1957 and have admired him for many years--I often visited he & Shirley when I was in the area.*

Great family,

Ben Swede

BENJAMIN M SWEDE - February 25, 2020 at 11:26 PM



“ *I was blessed to be a student in Mr. Morris' math classes. Despite math not being something I was great at, he taught me to do it well and made me feel smart. I appreciated his patience and encouragement. I see from his Obituary that he was so much more than just my math teacher. I really was blessed to even be in his company. A great man!*

Sandra (Steen) Vera

Sandra Vera - February 25, 2020 at 08:21 PM

DB

“ *My sympathy to your family.*

Dayle Brooks



Dayle Brooks - February 25, 2020 at 02:29 PM

MH

“ *Our deepest sympathy to the family. Mr. Morris was a great teacher and a grand man. He helped a lot of us SLHS students through math we just didn't understand. He will be missed.*

Mary and Terry Heidebrink - February 25, 2020 at 12:37 PM

 Dean
Wolterman

“ *Prayers and condolences for the family, Dick was a great teacher and will be missed.*



Dean Wolterman - February 25, 2020 at 12:13 PM

JN

“ *I am very sorry for the loss of Mr. Morris. My condolences and prayers to the family. He was a great math teacher and an even better person. I recall struggling with algebra and my dad said, “go talk to Dick Morris, he'll help you”. Mr. Morris was not even my math teacher at the time, but I gave it a shot and he helped me a lot. He was patient, helpful, and knew how to vary his teaching methods to help me learn. When I think back on SL teachers, there are certain ones that stand out. Mr. Morris is one of them.*

Jeff Newell - February 25, 2020 at 11:08 AM

DV

“ *Deb and family, so very sorry for your loss.
Prayers my friend.
DeeRae and Dale*



DeeRae Vortherms - February 25, 2020 at 09:18 AM

WK

“ *Yes, we were honored to learn from this kind teacher, but it was more than just academics. Mr. Morris set standards for how respect is given to all. Thank you for sharing your father with us! We know how proud you must be of him, and he will surely be missed!*

Wayne and Diana (Doocy) Koppen - February 25, 2020 at 06:21 AM

JS

“ *He was one of the best teachers I've ever had.. High School, college or grad school. He took an active interest in every student that came in his classroom. So glad I got to see him last summer.*

Jim Seely - February 25, 2020 at 12:54 AM

DR

“ *He was a wonderful teacher and always had time and patience for his students.*



Don and Jean Reed - February 25, 2020 at 12:45 AM



“ Dick was a great man with a dedication to students that few possess. I saw him continue to help kids even after they were not exhibiting good behavior in class—he still took time to work with them if they needed the help. My dad and mom had the pleasure of calling Dick and Shirley friends. Dick was a mentor to my dad in his early years at Spirit Lake. He often tells stories about how Dick and Milbert Krishna taught him patience. I find myself using many of those lessons in my work with adolescents everyday.

Not only was Dick a great educator, he was fun to work with. After he retired (the same year I graduated), he started working at Lundstrom Furniture. I got to spend a lot of time with him there, and I enjoyed every minute of it. He had a great sense of humor. One good thing about being a teacher’s kid in a small school, was that I knew many of the teachers very personally. I got to witness them in more relaxed settings, and Dick could always make me laugh.

I last saw him about three years ago when my parents moved to Nebraska. He came to the house as we set up for the garage sale, and we talked for about an hour. He remembered where I lived, what I was up to, and wanted to know about my family.

Rest In Peace, Dick. Say hello to mom. I’m guessing she’s waiting to tease you about something.

Sean Higgins - February 24, 2020 at 11:22 PM



“ I graduated from Berkeley in Mathematics thanks to Mr Morris' contagious love for her. He was one of the best teachers I ever had. He made the world a better place.



Michael Prescott - February 24, 2020 at 07:46 PM



“ I would show up at Mr. Morris's office before school started and he would help me with algebra. Extremely patient and found ways to circumvent regular mathematical methods as my brain was wired differently. Was fun to chat with too. We had some good laughs before first bell. I'm thinking about all the people he touched and his family. Big hugs!

Steve Klein - February 24, 2020 at 07:03 PM



“ Leon Hanson lit a candle in memory of Richard Leroy Morris



leon hanson - February 24, 2020 at 06:49 PM



“ Mr. Morris was one of my favorite teachers and was just an excellent human being. Spirit Lake was lucky to have a teacher of his caliber. I saw him at the Dickinson County Nature Center 2 summers ago for the first time since high school graduation in 1975. A great memory. He will be remembered fondly and was an inspiration to many.

Mark Neustrom - February 24, 2020 at 06:27 PM



“ Mr. Morris made me love Math as a Senior at SLHS. He explained things so well, making it easy to understand. Later he was a colleague in the same school system. He was always dedicated to making the teaching profession better. My sympathy to his family.
Judy Stukey

Judy Stukey - February 24, 2020 at 05:53 PM

BA

“ *My sympathy to your family. He was a wonderful teacher, little league baseball coach and in Indian Guides with my dad and brother. Loved to play pool at the senior center and always had time to chat. He will be greatly missed.*



Beverly Atwell - February 24, 2020 at 03:30 PM

JC

“ *Jeff And Linda Christoffer lit a candle in memory of Richard Leroy Morris*



Jeff and Linda Christoffer - February 24, 2020 at 10:50 AM