

Mr. Robert J. Deering '42 (1924-2015)

Bob was a kind and gentle man, a person who loved to work with his hands and delighted in sharing his gift of woodworking with others, especially with the 8 Graham and Kenter family children who he adopted as his grandchildren.

Born in Chicago, Bob considered himself blessed to have been a scholarship student at St. Ignatius. After service in World War II where he was injured in Germany, he returned to Chicago to work in the printing industry as job estimator. He was well regarded in his field, and we recall his pride in getting numerous job offers when his longtime employer closed shop, as well as when he helped his new employer avoid unprofitable projects by carefully analyzing the bid documents.

Bob moved to Arlington Heights in the 1950's and made a happy home in this area. He developed close friends at the Des Plaines post office where he visited to buy the perfect stamps for his collection, and at the hardware store, which supplied the tools and materials he needed for his various hobby projects. Although he paid into the "favor bank" by giving neighbors help around their houses and drives to the airport, he was still amazed at the generosity of these neighbors in his later years when they shoveled his walk, invited him to their homes for meals, and drove him to doctors' visits.

For many years, Bob was the supplier of highly crafted wood coasters, award plaques and other items to his Arlington Heights neighbors and friends. The birth of Leslie and Lou's first child in 1992, put him into hype-drive, and he made a high chair entirely out of cherry wood. Ever the perfectionist, he improved on this initial design for the first child in each of Doug and Brad's families. Subsequent projects soon followed, including a sand box with a top so the kids could play without becoming sunburned, baby cradles, and a table and chairs with an inlaid formica top for easy clean-ups. Though he never had children of his own, he maintained a child-like innocence and delight and nothing pleased him more than hearing about how much the kids liked his works of art.

But mostly, Bob loved his wife, Virginia. He loved everything about Virginia, and especially loved to travel far and wide with her. The Graham children, and Ed and Ira, always got to see his slide shows of those trips when we gathered at holidays. He spoke of purchasing extra film and sharing it (well – selling it), to the other travelers on their trips, and of making friends with those people. Some of those friendships endured for years, with other trips together or gatherings at their homes. He loved good cooking – particularly Virginia's cooking – and we always heard about her Huevos Rancheros, which she would prepare for him on the weekends before golf. To help her in the kitchen, Bob delighted in getting her new kitchen gadgets, pots, pans and cookbooks. We got to hear all about those gadgets during our Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners, as well as frequent phone conversations throughout the year. We are grateful he and she had many retirement years together before she passed.

Bob was golf's best ambassador, and for years, he played in a league with almost the same group of guys. When his game suffered as he aged, he still liked getting out there and going to the matches as well as the annual season-ending banquets. He also enjoyed an annual trip to an elementary school, where he shared stories about his time in the Army with young kids who asked lots and lots of questions. He answered them all, particularly enjoying their astonishment with his early living without a refrigerator or a telephone.

You could usually hear the Cubs play by play in the background when you were talking to Bob, and it pains us to think of him missing out on talking with us about this year's magical season. He would begin each call with a favorite expression "Hanging in there for an old guy," express his disappointment with Cubs management for a stupid move and local politicians with a crooked one, and end it with "Hug your kids for me tonight." He suffered from a wide variety of ailments, some from his war service, but never complained. We learned about his need to have regular blood treatments at Northwest Community only when the phlebotomist there celebrated her 1000th blood draws of him.

When the game of Trivial Pursuit first came out, the Graham children realized that there was really no match for Bob – he had a wealth of knowledge – some of it hard to believe at times. He was not someone you wanted to play against at a game involving useful – or even useless – information. Games would go on for hours, with Bob adding details to Trivial Pursuit answers ... or consulting the encyclopedia to correct them. His trips to the annual library book sale yielded cookbooks for all of us that he felt were just too good to let get away, and even Leslie's fancy friends were eager to hear what books he had scored each year.

We will miss many things about Bob Deering, though we are better people for having known him. He shared much with us, and we are grateful for that and for his wide variety of special gifts which enriched the lives of many.