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Article published Friday, May 11, 2007
RICHARD MICHALAK, 1924-2007

Lawyer also did stints as prosecutor in 4 cities

Richard Michalak, 82, a lawyer in practice for more than 50 years who went to his downtown Toledo office daily until last month and who was a former prosecutor for Toledo, Sylvania, Walbridge, and Northwood, died Monday in the Hospice of Northwest Ohio, South Detroit Avenue, from complications of lung problems.

Mr. Michalak of Sylvania Township was admitted to the hospital on April 7 after collapsing, unable to catch his breath, in the Spitzer Building, his son Rick said. He was in practice there with his son Alan.

Practicing law was his passion, son Rick said. "He was at that age that he didn't have to take cases he didn't want to take, but he really liked helping people," his son said.

And so Mr. Michalak went to the office every day.

"He liked doing estates and wills where he could help people [so that] there wouldn't be a problem later in life," his son said.

He might have handled a client's adoption, an auto accident claim, a father's estate, or the dissolution of a business, said J. Ronald Bowman, a retired judge of the Lucas County Common Pleas Court and a longtime friend.

"He was the epitome of what used to be called a family lawyer, a general practitioner," Judge Bowman said. "You could go to the bank on his professional word or representation."

His son Rick said: "Honesty was the big thing he always taught us."

Mr. Michalak was a city of Toledo assistant law director for several years, beginning in 1966. He was also a former prosecutor for Toledo, Sylvania, Walbridge, and Northwood.

He ran unsuccessfully in 1975 for a Toledo Municipal Court judgeship.

Mr. Michalak grew up on St. John Avenue in North Toledo and was a graduate of Central Catholic High School. He was among the first Eagle Scouts in Toledo and was a longtime supporter of the Boys Scouts of America.

His father, Frank, urged him to further his education and become the first in the family with a college diploma, son Rick said.

Mr. Michalak received a bachelor of social science degree in 1946 from John Carroll University. He worked as an insurance adjuster while going to the University of Detroit law school, where he received his law degree in 1951.

He liked to attend annual conventions of a national group of Polish-American doctors

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and lawyers. He taught himself stained glass art and made ornaments for his grandchildren, for family members' weddings, and for the workers at his favorite downtown restaurants as Christmas and Easter gifts .

His son characterized him as very dignified - though not stuffy - and down-to-earth.

Judge Bowman said: "He was a true gentleman."

Mr. Michalak bowled until his late 60s, and "he was one of Toledo's best," Judge Bowman said. "He was a scratch bowler. That's the big boys, not me."

Mr. Michalak was a longtime member of Heather Downs Country Club, where he was a former board member and hall-of-fame inductee. He enjoyed the competition of golf, which he played until about two years ago, son Rick said.

His first wife, Julia, died in 1964.

Surviving are his wife, Beverly, whom he married in 1966; sons Richard II, Alan, and Dr. Dale Michalak; daughter, Elizabeth Michalak; seven grandchildren, and two step-granddaughters.

Services will begin at 10 a.m. today in Gesu Church, where he was a longtime member. Arrangements are by the Thomas I. Wisniewski Funeral Home. The family suggests tributes to the Camp Miakonda 90th birthday fund at the Erie Shores Council of Boy Scouts of America and the Ronald McDonald House.

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