

Deceased Name: Stephen K. Lieberman dies; built success in insurance

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Stephen K. Lieberman, a longtime Minneapolis insurance executive, died Wednesday at age 69 of pancreatic cancer in a hospice in Tucson, Ariz.

A self-made businessman, he found success in selling life insurance and was a standout at Northwestern Mutual Life, the company he represented for 46 years.

"He had a huge clientele. He was one of the top producers for Northwestern Mutual nationally for years," said Gene Storms, the company's managing director, who considered Lieberman a mentor. "I did everything I could to try to copy his style. He had an impeccable reputation and distinction within the company."

Lieberman also was known within the local Jewish community. He was active in the Minneapolis Jewish Federation and at his synagogue, Temple Israel. With his wife, Carolyn, he established through the Jewish Federation a fund to support programs in Israel and human-services causes in the Twin Cities, relatives said. Born in St. Paul in 1931, Lieberman grew up in large family during hard economic times. He attended Washburn High School in Minneapolis and graduated from Duluth Central High School, excelling in basketball, baseball and football. His athletic prowess earned him a football scholarship to Carleton College in Northfield, but an injury caused him to lose the scholarship and leave college.

He joined the Army as a supply sergeant in Detroit, returning after the service to the Twin Cities, where he found his calling selling insurance. "He didn't start with much at all. He was very proud that he was able to say he was self-made," said his daughter, Nancy Neudorf of Irvine, Calif.

Lieberman's competence and intelligence revealed itself in other ways besides work, those who knew him said. "He was the person who could tell you what a word was without looking it up," Neudorf said, adding that her father "always had a book in his hand at night."

She and her brother, Tom Lieberman of Edina, said their father was a real humorist whose witty letters and cards tickled them when they were at summer camp.

"He was the master of the 'camp letter' and the master of the thank-you note," said Tom Lieberman. "He was very self-effacing and very modest."

Had he not wanted to be financially successful, Stephen Lieberman might have chosen a career as an essayist or as a comedian, his children said.

In addition to his wife and children, Lieberman is survived by his brothers, Richard and James, and sister, Jane Gerstein, of Los Angeles, and five grandchildren.

Services will be held at 11 a.m. Sunday at Temple Israel, 2324 Emerson Av. S., Minneapolis. Shiva will be at 7 p.m. Sunday and Monday at the family home, 2950 Dean Parkway, Minneapolis. Memorials to the donor's favorite charity are suggested.

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