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Richard Alden Whitney

Jul 10, 2006

Decorated World War II Army Veteran

March 1, 1920 — July 1, 2006

MONTROSE — Richard Alden Whitney died July 1, 2006 at the VA Medical Center in Grand Junction, Colo. He was born March 1, 1920 in Wayne, Neb., to Florence and Adolph (Yarolimek) Whitney. When Dick was 2 years old, the family moved to California where Adolph, after much struggle, became a successful dairyman.

Dick worked on the dairy with his older sisters, Mary and Mildred, while growing up. He delivered milk to neighborhood homes before and after school. He graduated from high school at the age of 16, being the only boy in his class.

At age 18 or 19 he started college at Cal Poly University in San Luis Obispo, Calif., studying dairy husbandry and management.

In 1941 he enlisted in the United States Army and was shipped to the Philippines as a medic and also served in an anti-aircraft gun crew. When the Japanese attacked, he was with the American forces which retreated to the Bataan peninsula where they held out from mid-December to mid-April. His crew took guns across to Corregidor Island, an action for which he was given a bronze star and recommended for a silver star. All American forces surrendered after another month of fighting. He then spent the next three and a half years as a prisoner of war at camps in the Philippines and Japan.

Shortly after his liberation and return to the U.S., Dick met Betty Mullen, and a few months later they were married. He went back to Cal Poly where he nearly finished his degree, and his son, Jim, was born. The family moved to Chino for Dick to help with the family dairy. Since Dick was a local boy hero, he was the first person allowed to buy one of the new cars coming off the —

assembly lines which had been recently converted from military equipment manufacture. Soon after, about a quarter mile away from the old family farm, Dick began building his own dairy where the family lived for the next six years and Barbara and Terri were born.

Around New Year's Day in 1956, the family moved to western Colorado, one of the coldest, snowiest winters the family had ever experienced in Montrose. Welcome to Colorado, indeed! That summer they moved to a small house on property that was to become the "Whitney Dairy". Four years later they moved to the current brick house with the blue spruce trees in front. Soon after, Wendy was born.

Dick built the dairy into one of the most successful operations in western Colorado. He was instrumental in establishing the Western Colorado Milk Producers Association, the first modern milk marketing co-op encompassing, at one time, nearly all of the dairies in western Colorado. In addition to his dairy and farm work, Dick served on many boards and committees, including the Riverside PTA, Montrose library, Montrose National Bank, Montrose Memorial Hospital, Colorado Farm Bureau. His business management acumen and insistence on financial discipline allowed the hospital to prosper when other small town hospitals were failing. During his board member terms the Colorado Farm Bureau insurance business flourished and became one of the earliest companies to convert their outdated in-house-staffed computer systems to ones managed by up-to-date, more efficient, computer service companies.

Dick loved his politics and was a delegate to the 1984 Republican National Convention, later attending the Reagan inaugurals with wife Betty. He was later appointed to and served for several years on the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service. He considered accepting the position of managing conservation services for the western U.S. He finally turned it down when it became clear he would have to spend much of his time in Washington, D.C., away from family and his beautiful mountain west home.

Dick proved that a man and his family could rise from hardscrabble beginnings during the Great Depression and be successful through hard work and strict dedication to detail, guided by belief and a scrupulous dedication to honesty in all parts of life. He believed in unquestioning service to country and community and family. He lived his beliefs all his life, literally up to the moments before his death. Even then, when he was too weak to get the words out, he was still trying to give guidance to those around him, to ease their burdens after he died.

Survivors include children: Jim Whitney, of Minnetonka, Minn., Barbara Whitney, of Reno, Nev., Terri Waddell, of Maggie Valley, N.C., Wendy O'Brien, of Durango, granddaughters: Erica Wilsey, Andrea Snyder, and Diana Snyder, of Reno, Katie Waddell, of Montrose, Melissa Waddell, of Maggie Valley, Meghan O'Brien, of Durango, grandson, Collyn O'Brien, of Durango, great-granddaughter, Mikayla Wilsey and great-grandson, Jamie Wilsey, of Reno.

Dick was preceded in death by his beloved wife, Betty; his parents, Adolph and Florence Whitney; sisters, Mary and Mildred, and cherished granddaughter Jenny.

At his request, cremation has already taken place. A memorial service will be held 3 p.m. on Thursday, July 13 at Montrose United Methodist Church, S. First Street and Park Avenue.

The family asks that, in lieu of flowers, memorial contributions be made in Memory of Dick Whitney to VA Medical Center DAV Fund, 2121 North Ave, Grand Junction, CO 81501.

Arrangements are being handled under the direction and care of the Crippin Funeral Home & Crematory, 802 E. Main, in Montrose, (970) 249-2121.

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