

Gerald Stevens dies at 59

■ He was of Grand Forks mattress factory family

By Stephen J. Lee
Herald Staff Writer

One of the principals of Grand Forks' mattress factory died in his sleep Saturday at his Minnesota lake home.

Gerald "Jerry" F. Stevens, 59, 3209 Chestnut St., died Saturday, Aug. 5, 2000, at Island Lake, Minn.

He was part of a key business family in Grand Forks.

After graduating from Central High School in 1959, Jerry Stevens, like his brothers, went to work in Stevens Mattress and Upholstering Co., started in 1928 by his father, Lowell H. "Steve" Stevens.

"Sweeping the floors, janitor work, just like all of us," said Steve Stevens' son and Jerry Stevens' brother, Lowell Stevens, who recently retired as a partner in what now is called Stevens Mattress Mfg. Inc.

Company's beginnings

Jerry Stevens' father, Lowell "Steve" Stevens, a descendent of Robert Fulton, the inventor of the steam engine, came to Grand Forks in the 1920s to make mattresses.

In 1959, when Jerry joined the business, the factory had about five employees; now there are 35 to 40, making more than 50,000 mattresses a year, which are sold in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Manitoba.

The four sons of Lowell H. "Steve" Stevens, Lowell, David, Gerald and Richard, incorporated in 1968 when their father retired.

David died in 1982; Lowell recently retired; only Richard is still involved at the plant.

"But it looks like I will have to go back to work again for a while," Lowell said.

Jerry will be greatly missed by his family and his family's company, Lowell Stevens said.

Jerry's mechanical ability

"He took care of some of the production management and mostly repaired and kept the machinery going. What he brought was his mechanical ability to keep things running. There wasn't anything he couldn't fix, it seemed like," Lowell Stevens said.

In 1997, the company made a key expansion into the retail sales end of the business.

"When the flood came and we saw all those mattresses out on the berms, we couldn't go without getting into the sales part," Lowell Ste-



Stevens

vens said.

Both retail outlets that had sold Stevens' Restonic mattresses never reopened after the flood.

Enjoyed lake home

About 30 years ago, Jerry Stevens bought a place on Island Lake near Lengby, Minn.

That was his main hobby.

"He was always interested in going to the lake, where he built a cottage, about 1970, and worked on it until the day he died," Lowell Stevens said. "He just enjoyed being out there."

And that's where he died.

"He went out there Friday night, felt tired and went to bed early and he never woke up," Lowell Stevens said. "He died from a heart attack. He didn't seem sick, but I guess he was."

Two of Jerry's children — John and Brian — are involved in the company.

Family information

Gerald Francis Stevens was born Dec. 18, 1940, the son of Lowell H. and Mary Catherine (Rose) Stevens in Grand Forks.

He married Judith A. Pauling on Oct. 19, 1966, in St. Mary's Catholic Church.

He is survived by his wife; a daughter, Kathleen Stevens, Apple Valley, Minn.; sons, John and Brian, Grand Forks; sisters, Marjorie (Bernard) Vanyo, Fargo, Jane (Larry) Pecka, Wyndmere, N.D., Susan (James) Surrent, Moore, Okla., Vickie (Rod) Angen, Grand Forks; brothers, Lowell, Grand Forks, and Richard, Fargo; sister-in-law, Margaret (Randy) Dozhier, Grand Forks; and two grandchildren.

He was preceded in death by an infant son, Danny, his parents, and a brother, David.

Services, visitation, burial

■ **Services:** 10:30 a.m. Wednesday, St. Mary's Catholic Church, 216 Belmont.

■ **Visitation:** 5 to 7 p.m. Tuesday, with a 7 p.m. prayer service in Gregory J. Norman Funeral Chapel, South Washington St.

■ **Burial:** Calvary Cemetery/Memorial Park.

■ **Memorials:** Third Street Clinic and Altru Cancer Center.

