

Ike Wetzel, longtime GF labor leader, dead at 73

By Sue Eilyn Scaletta
Herald Staff Writer

Even after he retired and left the negotiating table, Ike Wetzel never lost touch with the Grand Forks labor movement, of which he was a leader.



Wetzel

"He was at our last retirees meeting just a month ago," recalled Arvin Kvasager. "He was his usual jovial self."

Wetzel died Tuesday at Good Samaritan Nursing Center in East Grand Forks. He was 73.

"We did a lot of jobs together," recalled Bill Couchigan, who negotiated for local electricians during the time Wetzel did the same thing for area carpenters. "He was very dedicated to the labor movement."

Wetzel came to Grand Forks with the Air Force base in 1956. In 1961, he laid down his tools and took up the job of business agent for Carpenters Local 2028. For the next 21 years, he devoted himself to the members' contracts, grievances, pensions and other benefits.

"I dealt across the board," he said upon retirement in 1982. "I dealt honest. It don't pay to fool around."

Isadore "Ike" Wetzel was born May 12, 1922, in Lehr, N.D., the son of Jacob and Mathilda (Barrieter) Wetzel. He grew up and went to school in Zeeland, N.D., and served in the U.S. Navy during World War II.

He started in carpentry at age 13, when he helped his father float ceilings in McIntosh County, N.D., using a plaster that depended on hog hair for binding power.

He married Phyllis Hermmerring Geiger Oct. 20, 1946, in Stockton, Calif. They returned to North Dakota in 1947.

In his years in Grand Forks, Wetzel also held board positions with assorted trades, labor and construction entities and was appointed to the state Water Commission by Gov. Alan Olson.

Wetzel was in the meeting President Reagan was attending March 30, 1981, shortly before Reagan was shot as he left the Washington hotel where the meeting was held.

Wetzel is survived by his wife; daughter, Patricia; sons, Wayne and David; granddaughters Sarah and Heather, all of Grand Forks; brother, Richard, Zeeland; and sister, Edna (Mrs. Alvin) Doerr, Aberdeen, S.D.

He was preceded in death by son, Raymond, and brothers, Ferdinand, Daniel and Paul.

■ **Services:** 2 p.m. Friday in Sharon Lutheran Church.

■ **Visitation:** 4 to 7 p.m. today, with a 5 p.m. prayer service, in Norman Funeral Home and one hour before services at the church.

■ **Burial:** Memorial Park Cemetery.