



Ralph Bittner

September 29, 1934 - May 9, 2009

A good man left us today, May 9, 2009. Vernon Bittner of Salem peacefully passed from this life to the next, at home, surrounded by his family. Vern's influence has been felt far and wide, and the legacy he left is great, to be carried on by his family.

Shirley Dodson Bittner, Vern's high school sweetheart and bride of 56 years, remains behind to carry on that legacy along with his sons and daughters-in-law Gary and Vonnie of Salem; Steve and Jeannie of Corvallis; and David and Traci of Roseburg. Vern's legacy includes 10 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren, whom he adored. Vern and Shirley also helped raise Tom, Richard and Jim Kinkade after their parents passed away.

Vern was born Sept. 29, 1934, in Barnes City, Iowa, the son of Arthur and Winnie Bittner. He is the brother of Carolyn King, of Monroe; Marilyn Jones, of Junction City; and Janet Koertzen, of Lodi, Calif.

After Vern's stint in the U.S. Navy, he graduated from Oregon College of Education in Monmouth, and that was his springboard to his 35 years of public service. Vern's philosophy during his education career was always, "What we do, we do for others."

He began to "do for others" as a teacher at Valsetz Elementary in Valsetz, eventually becoming the superintendent of Valsetz School District No. 62. He and his family spent 12 years in Valsetz, where Vern spent many hours in the outdoors with family and friends. The Siletz River became one of his favorite places.

In 1971, Vern and his family left Valsetz for Monroe, where he served the students, families and staff of Monroe Elementary School. Vern stayed at Monroe Elementary until 1983. He was respected and loved in Monroe, where he strengthened and improved the program. During his years in Monroe, he spent many hours searching for Native American artifacts with his father and his sons in farmers' fields throughout the Willamette Valley. He also earned his Realtor's license and for a short time worked for Town and Country Realty. In 1983, Vern and Shirley left Monroe for Oakland, where he became the superintendent of the Oakland School District through the 1985 school year. While in Oakland, Vern and Shirley attended the Oakland Church of Christ. During his two years in Oakland, Vern developed many deep, lasting relationships.

Following Vern's time in Oakland, he went on to the superintendent position at the Douglas County Education Service District from 1985 to 1995. He especially enjoyed visiting the board meetings of the 16 school districts served by the ESD. His coworkers at the ESD continue to speak highly of Vern and his influence during his time with them.

Throughout Vern's public service career, he continued his "What we do, we do for others" philosophy via his volunteer work with Rotary, Kiwanis and Lions clubs.

Vern worked with legislators at both local and state levels. He served as president of the Oregon Association of Education Service Districts, and chaired multiple statewide education committees dealing with educational finance and legislative concerns.

Upon Vern's retirement in 1995, he and Shirley moved to Eugene, where he enjoyed his grandchildren, honed his golf skills and continued his public service through membership on the Lane County ESD Board. Vern and Shirley became "The Vern and Shirley" real estate sales team with Cougill and Hansen Real Estate, continuing to develop lasting friendships.

In 1999, Vern and Shirley moved back to Benton County, where Vern continued to enjoy area golf courses, his "fitness over 50" exercise classes

and walking the bike paths around Starker Park.

Vern and Shirley moved to Salem in 2004, primarily to support the work of Salem City Church. In Salem, he had the opportunity to continue his tour of area golf courses and his annual golf trips to Palm Springs. During this time, Vern and Shirley spent many priceless hours with their great-grandchildren, enjoying the legacy of their children and grandchildren.

During the last days of Vern's battle with cancer, he was surrounded by his family, enjoying quiet, peaceful times of reminiscing, singing hymns and taking communion. He especially appreciated and enjoyed the loving support of his sister-in-law, Joyce Mills.

Vern would like all of his family and friends to know that he is at peace and he wants you, too, to enjoy the blessings and peace of following the Lord Jesus. The family looks forward to joining with Vern's friends at a celebration of life at 11 a.m. Saturday, May 16, at The River Center Church, 3000 S. Santiam Highway in Lebanon, Oregon.

The world is a much better place because of Vern Bittner.